An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: English
Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St. Joseph's CBS Nenagh
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Summerhill Nenagh Co Tipperary
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	65370B
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	08-11-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	10/01/2024

What is a subject inspection?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in English under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) and this policy is reviewed annually.
2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the Procedures) since the previous report to the board.
3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Subject inspection

Dates of inspection	7 and 8 November 2023
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key teachers • Interaction with students, including a focus group	• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff

School context

Saint Joseph's CBS Nenagh is an all-boys voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). Current enrolment stands at 663 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle including the Junior Cycle Level 2 Learning Programme, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. One of the supports for students is a special class for students with mild general learning disabilities sanctioned by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- All teachers were prepared for their lessons, were enthusiastic in their delivery, and were setting high expectations for learners.
- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good and the quality of assessment practice was satisfactory.
- Some very good individual practices were noted in creating effective learner experiences, in the development of students' writing, and some very good learner outcomes were noted.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for English was good.
- Two key context factors that were relevant to the stage of development of the subject plans presented were that the subject department team is stabilising after a period of significant staff turnover and that the whole-school timetable changed to one-hour lessons in late August 2023.
- A satisfactory level of collective/collaborative planning and practice was evident at the time of the evaluation; there is strong capacity for improvement on this into the future.

Recommendations

- Aspects of the learner experience were in need of improvement in some lessons. Greater attention to clarity in the design of learning intentions and learning sequences and more focussed development of students' vocabulary, listening and speaking skills needs to be delivered consistently by the teachers of English.
- Assessment task design was an area for improvement. Teachers should implement the relevant advice provided in the body of this report.
- Plans for junior cycle English need to be improved. Teachers should revise the plan for first year in line with the twenty-two learning outcomes specified for the year; should plan strategically in relation to the time and class contact points now allocated to the subject since the move to one-hour lessons, and should move away from intensive, academic study of prescribed junior cycle texts to treat them as vehicles for teaching the learning outcomes.

- To date, meetings of the English department have focussed on logistical items. A collaborative self-review approach, focussed on action planning for ongoing improvement, needs to be developed, as outlined in the inspectorate resource *Looking at English*.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good and the quality of assessment practice was satisfactory.
- All teachers were prepared for their lessons, were enthusiastic in their delivery, were integrating digital resources into lessons to support learning, and were setting high expectations for learners.
- Respectful engagement was modelled by teachers and encouraged in students. In the best lessons, students had sufficient opportunity to voice their opinions and to share their learning and were confident to do.
- Where very good learner outcomes were evident, students were using genre-specific terminology with understanding and were confident sharing evidence-based or personal responses to texts. Where learner outcomes needed to be improved, a more explicit focus on developing students' vocabulary, listening and speaking skills was needed. Greater clarity in the design of learning intentions was needed to communicate to students where their subject-specific skills were being developed as part of their study of a text or genre.
- Valuable practices utilised to support learner experience included teachers' activation of students' prior knowledge and linking new learning with local contexts. Learning was also enhanced where teachers used still and moving digital images to support comprehension, to generate group composition of dramatic scenarios, or allocated parts to students to read dramatic extracts in character. Meaningful tasks were assigned to pairs or groups in some lessons, providing students with good experiences of exploratory talk. This was an area for development in other lessons.
- In some instances, disjointed learning sequences were delivered. The learning experience would have been more effective if sufficient time for activities where the most valuable learning was to take place was to be ring fenced in lesson planning, requiring a reduction in introductory teacher inputs.
- Student focus group participants spoke of how they valued opportunities to work in pairs or groups, opportunities to make meaning of texts themselves, and of co-curricular activities that support their learning of English. Areas they identified where practice impacts on their learning of English included insufficient preparation for their classroom-based assessments and too many drafts being required of the same essay.
- Some very good individual practices were noted in the development of students' writing, including the use of writing frames and teacher modelling of a writing task using technology, calling on students' suggestions to collaboratively draft a text. Moreover, students in one lesson were tasked with discussing exemplars of a personal essay in groups, leading them to identify elements to integrate in their own writing. Furthermore, two senior cycle English groups have regular access to digital devices to support their drafting and redrafting. The department should share these ideas so that they can become part of collective practice.
- To support students of differing abilities, inclusive practices were utilised such as good integration of visual images and digital resources to support concept development, the use of graphic organisers in some lessons to support meaning making by students, and teachers moving around the room during task phases, to give differentiated support.
- Effective assessment practices noted include the sharing of learning intentions with students to help them take ownership of their learning, some good questioning, the co-creation of success criteria in a few lessons, and the use of success criteria to give feedback on written work in a few instances.

- Three further developments in assessment practice are recommended. First, the department is advised to incorporate a broader range of assessment modes to enable students to demonstrate their learning, particularly at junior cycle level. Second, during meetings of teachers of English of the same year group, the sharing of samples of students' work as part of professional conversations around feedback styles and achievement levels is encouraged. Third, the department should collectively review recent state examination instruments and marking schemes, to ensure that the tasks set are informed by evolving trends requiring students to apply and connect their learning to unexpected purpose, genre or audience contexts

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- Subject provision and whole school support was good overall.
- At the time of the evaluation, first, second and TY students were in mixed ability class groups, with setting into levels for the third, fifth and sixth years.
- The deployment of a small core group of teachers to deliver almost all English instruction was very good, enabling collective planning.
- Commendably, the teachers of English have been engaging in ongoing continuing professional development, particularly in relation to Leaving Certificate English.
- There were good links between the English department and the special educational needs department, with referral systems established and team teaching introduced in 2023. Further whole-school support for students with English as an additional language needs to be developed. It is also advised that whole school in-class literacy strategies be developed, given the increasing range of special educational needs being encountered in junior cycle students, as reported by teachers.
- School management recognised that the re-establishment of a school library is a priority for the promotion of personal reading and a quiet space for student wellbeing activities.
- Teachers organise co-curricular activities to support students' learning of English, including participation in debating competitions, trips to the local public library, Book in the Bag initiatives, and the production of a TY E-Zine. It is encouraged that the school seek to further develop students' writing skills through creative writing workshops.

3. Planning and preparation

- A satisfactory level of collective/collaborative planning and practice was evident at the time of the evaluation; there is strong capacity for improvement on this into the future.
- After a period of flux caused by significant staff turnover, the English team is stabilising.
- A change to one-hour lessons in the overall school timetable was introduced in late August 2023. This is a key context factor that subject planning needs to adjust to.
- The teachers of English are hardworking and plans were available for all class groups. Planning for senior cycle English tended to be more advanced. Plans for junior cycle English need to be improved. Teachers should revise the plan for first year in line with the twenty-two learning outcomes specified for the year; should plan strategically in relation to the time and class contact points now allocated to the subject since the move to one-hour classes, and should move away from intensive, academic study of prescribed junior cycle texts to treat them as vehicles for teaching the learning outcomes.
- To date, meetings of the English department have focussed on logistical items. A collaborative self-review approach, focussed on action planning for ongoing improvement, needs to be developed, as outlined in *Looking at English*.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board would like to clarify that a comprehensive review and planning process was undertaken throughout the 2022/2023 school year regarding the timetable change to one-hour classes. The amended timetable was then implemented in late August — at the outset of the 2023/2024 school year. All subject departments were fully engaged in the process and time was available for planning for the changes. The phrase 'introduced in late August' is misleading and not reflective of the work required by staff to implement this type of whole-school change

The Board would also like to clarify that digital devices are available for students throughout the school

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The learner experience is always at the forefront of all school-based undertakings — the English department are working to enhance this, through a more consistent approach going forward.

Assessment practices are constantly reviewed and the advice of the inspectorate will be taken on board as part of this process

The English department have begun reviewing their Junior Cycle plans based on advice given

The advice of the inspectorate will be utilised in subject planning meetings going forward

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	*Very good* applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is *outstanding* and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	*Good* applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	*Satisfactory* applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	*Fair* applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	*Weak* applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;