

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Our Lady's College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Presentation Road Galway
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	68285C

Date of Inspection: 26-04-2017



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. Learning, teaching 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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	25 and 26 April 2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Our Lady's College is a girls-only voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of CEIST, located in the centre of Galway city. The school opened in 2016 with an enrolment of 363 students following an amalgamation of the Presentation Secondary School and Meán Scoil Mhuire. At the time of the evaluation, the school was operating on two campuses. The curriculum includes the junior cycle programme, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate (LC) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). A Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) level four programme is offered as an alternative to the traditional LC in senior cycle.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good, with some examples of very good practice.
- The overall quality of learning in the lessons observed was good; in most lessons, students were fully engaged, however, in a small number of lessons, students were not fully challenged and learning activities were not sufficiently developed.
- Examples of very good assessment practices were seen during the inspection, however, not all the aspects of assessment required for English in the junior cycle had been implemented at the time of the evaluation.
- English is very well supported by school management and subject provision is good.
- Teachers have developed a collaborative and collegial approach to planning.
- The learning outcomes approach associated with the new junior cycle specification has been integrated into the subject plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All lessons should be planned to provide opportunities for students to engage in challenging and active learning activities.
- To complement and support the current TY programme, a portfolio approach to task assignment and assessment should be implemented.
- The subject department should build on the good planning practices that are currently in place and create an action plan that reflects teachers' vision for their subject in the school.
- Teachers should implement the full range of assessment practices that are integral to the new junior cycle English specification.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good with some examples of very good practice.
- Lessons were well planned and a variety of resources was used to support teaching and learning.
- Good differentiated questioning techniques were observed where probing questions helped students to develop their own learning and ensured that all students could experience success.
- The overall quality of learning in the lessons observed was good.
- Students were encouraged to consider and understand their own learning styles in some lessons. This very positive learning experience contributed to the overall development of students as independent learners.
- In one of the lessons observed, junior cycle students' demonstrated creative writing, presentation and oral skills of a very high level while classmates engaged in well-structured and productive peer assessment tasks. The very positive learning atmosphere and outcomes engendered by these activities is commended.
- In a small number of lessons, there was scope to develop the students' learning experiences further through an increased range of active, collaborative and reflective learning activities. All lessons should be planned to provide opportunities for students to engage in challenging and supportive learning activities.
- The overall quality of assessment was good.
- Students are assigned homework assignments on a regular basis and examples of very good formative feedback were seen. Strategies to support students in using formative feedback as a learning resource should be considered.
- At the time of the evaluation, students were preparing for completion of the junior cycle English assessment task. Students had completed the tasks set for the first Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA1) and the second Classroom-Based Assessment (CBA2) in English and teachers had provided formative feedback on their work. However, the full range of assessment practices had not been implemented. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. It is recommended that teachers implement the full range of assessment practices that are integral to the new junior cycle English specification in order to build a common understanding of the quality of student learning and to quality assure the assessment of students' work as outlined in the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- English is very well supported by school management and subject provision is good.
- The challenges presented by the dual-location campus at the time of the evaluation were significant. The school should plan to ensure that the time allocated to teaching and learning is not unduly impacted by the logistics of managing the two locations.
- Timetable provision for English is good in both junior and senior cycle. Concurrent timetabling is the norm from second year onwards.
- Students are encouraged, at both junior and senior cycle, to take the subject at the highest appropriate level. English is taught in mixed-ability class groups in first year, while higher and

ordinary level groups are formed at the start of second year. In keeping with the approaches which are integral to the new junior cycle English programme, the English department should consider continuing mixed-ability teaching for the full duration of the junior cycle.

- Learning support is provided through withdrawal from Irish, if students have exemptions, or from other non-core subjects. A separate stream is also formed to provide for students with mild to moderate special educational needs.
- In line with good practice, both learners' and teachers' perspectives are taken into account when forming senior cycle higher-level and ordinary-level class groups.
- The TY programme provides for a range of learning experiences both within the regular timetable and through participation in school-organised activities. Students engage in tasks associated with each academic module and there are end-of-year examinations in core subjects. To complement and support the current TY programme, it is recommended that a portfolio approach to task assignment and assessment with a focus on skills development and remediation be implemented.
- The teachers of English, all of whom are subject specialists, generally teach a variety of years and levels. This approach supports a varied experience of teaching with consequent opportunities for teachers' skills development.
- Students benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities including theatre visits and participation in competitions.
- English is well supported and resourced. All teachers have well-equipped classrooms and have put in place seating arrangements that readily facilitate students' oral development and active learning methodologies.
- The school encourages reading through a number of whole-school initiatives many of which have been maintained and developed by teachers over a number of years. A well-stocked library contributes to the positive uptake of reading for pleasure within the school. All teachers contribute to literacy development.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning is of a good standard.
- Commendably, teachers have developed a collaborative and collegial approach to planning.
- The learning outcomes approach associated with the new junior cycle specification has been integrated into the subject plan.
- Further development of the subject department should include the creation of an action plan that reflects teachers' vision for their subject in the school.
- The school has developed an extensive set of student-specific assessment data which is being used, in conjunction with certificate examination outcomes, to plan for each student to achieve their potential.

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. 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

Following the oral feedback from the English Inspector on the 26th April 2017, many of the recommendations have been already implemented by the English Department and approved by the Board of Management.

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 recommendation by the Inspector in relation to Transition Year Programme has already been implemented.
- The subject planning has continued and an action plan that reflects the English Teachers vision of their subject in the school has been included.
- Following analysis of the Junior Certificate 2017 results, the English Department was happy with the outcome. All Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) had been completed and submitted on time.
- Planning in the future will ensure that students are provided with further challenging active learning activities.

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 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 <i>very good</i> 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;