

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of English
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Mercy College
Beaumont, Dublin 9
Roll number: 60870T**

Date of inspection: 12 November 2014



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	11, 12 November 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• 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 teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed was good, with some instances of very good practice. In a small number of lessons, practice was also observed that was in need of development.
- In recent years, higher level uptake has increased and students' attainment has improved.
- Teachers have a strong commitment to reflective practice and self-evaluation.
- Timetabling and provision for English is generally very good with almost all classes having daily contact with the subject.
- Teachers analyse student attainment in the Leaving Certificate examination within a holistic framework that establishes a context for each student.
- Peer observation is supported by senior management and is practiced by members of the English department

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To support students' attainment and engagement, classroom tasks should be carefully structured and differentiated.
 - To further develop assessment for learning (AfL) practices, a strategy to support students' engagement with developmental feedback should be implemented.
 - In the interests of developing the potential of all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed-ability class groups throughout the junior cycle.
 - The English department should adopt an assessment and record keeping strategy which will allow for the tracking of each student's progress and will support planning for the improvement of learner outcomes.
-

INTRODUCTION

Our Lady of Mercy College, Beaumont is an all-girls voluntary secondary school, under the trusteeship of CEIST, with a current enrolment of 435 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes and an optional Transition Year (TY).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed was good with some instances of very good practice. In a small number of lessons, practice was also observed that was in need of development.
- Lessons had clear aims and these were communicated to students at the outset. Best practice was seen where the lesson was structured around planned learning outcomes which were revisited to evaluate the learning that had taken place. This practice should be extended to all lessons.
- A range of active learning methodologies was observed including pair and group work. Students clearly enjoyed these learning experiences and in many lessons completed tasks successfully. In some lessons, however, students would have benefited from a scaffolded approach with specific instructions and modelling of answers. To support attainment and engagement, classroom tasks should be carefully structured and differentiated.
- Plenary sessions were used to good effect in some lessons to share feedback, while at the same time developing students' oral and listening skills. To maximise the benefit from feedback, explicit strategies to support active listening could be implemented.
- Most classroom activities were focused on consolidating and extending students' learning. In some lessons, however, opportunities to develop skills and deepen understanding were not fully exploited. Opportunities for deep learning should be identified and used during lessons to facilitate all students' progress and to challenge and extend learners.
- In some lessons, a very good range of resources was used including video clips, interactive resources from the internet and photographs.
- In many lessons, attention was paid to literacy development and, commendably, there was a particular focus on oracy. In some lessons, however, pre-teaching of both subject-specific and topical vocabulary would have enabled greater participation by students.
- A wide range of written work was seen in copybooks, including some instances of very well presented work. Formative feedback was used to complement corrections in some instances. To further develop AfL practices, students should be given specific information about how to improve and a strategy to support engagement with developmental feedback should be implemented.
- Targeted interventions in recent years have led to an increase in higher level uptake and improvements in attainment, particularly at senior cycle.
- An attractive and stimulating learning atmosphere has been established and many displays of students' work were seen in classrooms. Good relationships between students and teachers were evident and students were generally cooperative.
- Teachers have a strong commitment to reflective practice and self-evaluation. This is highly commended.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabling and provision for English is generally very good with almost all classes having daily contact with the subject. The school is committed to extending provision for first-year students from four to five weekly lessons.
- First-year students are taught in mixed-ability groups. Higher-level and ordinary-level classes are formed mid-way through second year. In the interests of developing the potential of all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed-ability class groups throughout the junior cycle.
- Common assessments are held for each year and level at Christmas and at the end of the school year. To further develop this very good practice, a moderation strategy to ensure consistency of standards and to support student profiling could be implemented.
- English teachers facilitate a wide range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities to extend students' learning experiences. A very well-organised school library is also used as an additional teaching resource.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject plan has a clear emphasis on learning outcomes with reference to curricular requirements. Commendably, areas for development are identified and action plans have been established for each year.
- Teachers' schemes of work consolidate the learning outcomes approach and provide for reflection and self-evaluation. It is very good practice that students' evaluations of their own learning are also used to identify areas for change and improvement.
- The TY programme has a strong emphasis on the development of students' skills. A very well thought-out "literacy leader" module involves TY students working with first-year class groups. The TY assessment strategy could be further enhanced by sharing the criteria for the successful completion of the programme with students during induction.
- Teachers analyse student attainment in the Leaving Certificate examination within a holistic framework: students' first-year standardised test scores and attainment in other subjects are used to establish a context for each student. It is commendable that the outcomes of this analysis are used to inform subject planning and teachers' schemes of work.
- A consistent approach to the recording of assessments and homework was not in evidence and, in some instances, record-keeping is minimal. The English department should adopt an assessment and record keeping strategy which will allow for the tracking of each student's progress and will support planning for the improvement of learner outcomes.
- Peer observation is supported by senior management and is practiced by members of the English department. This very good practice will support the sharing of pedagogical expertise, subject-specific knowledge, experience and wisdom among all members of the department.
- Teachers meet regularly both formally and informally to discuss issues relevant to teaching and learning. Resources are shared on a collegial basis and e-mail is used to

keep colleagues up-to-date. Further sharing of resources could be facilitated by using a shared folder on the school computer system.

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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.