

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Coláiste na Sceilge
Caherciveen, County Kerry
Roll number: 76068N

Date of inspection: 28 March 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	28 March 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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- A very good standard of teaching and learning was observed overall.
- A consistent focus on the explicit teaching of oral language skills and collaborative learning skills was evident in teachers' practice.
- Writing was explicitly taught in a number of lessons using a writing process approach.
- Teacher base classrooms incorporated learning environments of a very high quality.
- The development of students' literacy skills finds expression in the whole-school environment through the work of a core literacy team.
- English teachers have displayed considerable commitment to their own professional development and this is reflected in their classroom practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The school should further support the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) through the purchase of blinds for some classrooms.
 - The current focus on the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies should be continued and expanded.
 - As a means of further enhancing formative assessment expertise, formal discussion should be organised, based around a selection of first-year work.
 - Subject planning should place a particular emphasis on the design of a new first-year course in the context of imminent curricular developments.
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INTRODUCTION

Coláiste na Sceilge is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 507 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate programme, the Leaving Certificate (Established) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. In addition, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme is offered to students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- A very good standard of teaching and learning was observed overall. This included numerous examples of teaching and learning of a very high quality. In particular, the involvement of English teachers in a significant programme of professional development through the Instructional Leadership Programme and Kerry Education and Training Board (ETB) is becoming embedded in teachers' practice and students' learning. A consistent focus on the explicit teaching of oral language skills and collaborative learning skills was evident in this regard.
- Lessons were universally well-prepared and had a clear structure. Objectives were set out at the beginning of lessons in all cases, supporting students' awareness of their own learning. In many instances students' learning about their learning formed a very worthwhile element in teachers' practice as objectives were consistently referenced and formed an integrated element in the development of lessons.
- The effective use of ICT was a regular feature of teachers' lessons. It is recommended that the school should further support this aspect of teachers' practice through the purchase of blinds for some classrooms. This has already been advanced in the case of one room and it is positive to note the school is involved in a wider review of the use of, and requirements for, technology in the classroom that is being undertaken by Kerry ETB. The department has also advanced the use of a virtual learning platform. This is a very positive development. A worthwhile area for exploration by the English department, with the support of the school, is the use of visualisers to enhance learning in English lessons.
- Pair work and group work were consistent features in teachers' lessons. Teachers' expertise in constructing their lessons and incorporating these activities effectively to support the development of students' skills was evident and, in a number of instances, suggested a high degree of expertise. There was a very good balance between teacher and student talk in lessons overall.
- Reading and writing activities featured prominently in English lessons. The department has decided to focus on the explicit teaching of a comprehension strategy as part of its development this year. This is very worthwhile and it is recommended that this focus should be continued and expanded with regard to incoming first-year students. Writing was explicitly taught in a number of lessons using a writing process approach. In all instances this worked well. The effective modelling of note-making was observed in one lesson and this practice, of making the writing process clearer to students, is something which may be worth further exploration, albeit in the context of already strong practice in the teaching of writing. As a further development of this focus on writing, it is suggested that the display of different drafts of material written by students could be considered. The addition of a writing collection as an element in the assessment of writing, and as a motivational tool, in some year groups could also usefully be explored.

- Teacher base classrooms incorporated learning environments of a very high quality. The sense created in teachers' base classrooms is of committed professionals who communicate a love of, and interest in, their subject.
- Written homework was regularly assigned and monitored. Regular teacher feedback on students' work was also evident. Teachers have explored the possibility of formalising an approach to the discussion of assessment which already occurs informally within the department. It is recommended that, as a means of further enhancing formative assessment expertise, a formal discussion as part of subject-department meetings should be initiated, potentially based around a number of pieces of student work in first year. This discussion could be focussed on what advice, guidance or teaching might be undertaken to improve the quality of the work in question.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a strong focus on developing students' literacy skills and this finds further expression in the whole-school environment through the work of a core literacy team that is co-ordinated by a literacy link teacher. The team has placed an appropriate and worthwhile emphasis on the development of new approaches to students' vocabulary throughout the school community. A school-wide focus on vocabulary development is very worthwhile, alongside a specific focus on the fostering of word-consciousness within the English department. The adoption of a thesaurus, in hardcopy or electronic form, as part of students' classroom equipment could be worth considering in this context.
- A particular feature of the school is the attractive and exciting library that has been developed. The emphasis placed on the use of the library and on inculcating a love of reading by English teachers is very evident through the wide array of activities undertaken in the library including, book displays, first-year visits, visiting writers and an exciting World Book Day.
- English teachers have shown considerable commitment to their own professional development in the last number of years. This has included members of the department devoting significant time to participation in the instructional leadership programme and postgraduate work in the area of education. In addition, links and attendance at continuing professional development (CPD) sessions are evident in much of the good practice pursued by teachers in their classrooms.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The work of the English department is co-ordinated very effectively. Regular subject departmental meetings take place. It is positive to note that these include discussions that are focused on teachers' practice and the sharing of good ideas. A comprehensive subject plan has been prepared which includes common schemes of work. As part of the department's preparation for upcoming curricular developments, it is recommended that a focus on developing the scheme of work for first year should now come to the fore. This should include an appropriate focus on incorporating valid approaches to assessment as part of the scheme, which are linked to the 'first-year bridge' delineated in the new junior cycle specification.

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.

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