

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	C.B.S. Thurles
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Rossa St Thurles Co. Tipperary
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	65450W

Date of Inspection: 9 March 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	8-9 March 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 and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

CBS Thurles is a voluntary secondary school for boys, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). In recent years, the school's enrolment has increased considerably, from 420 to 700. The curricular programmes offered by the school include the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Effective practices noted in classrooms included good quality questioning, promotion of pair work, and utilisation of information and communications technology (ICT) as a teaching and learning tool.
- The quality of teaching observed was good or very good in almost all lessons, with some exemplary practices noted; there was scope for development in differentiation practices.
- The quality of learning ranged from very good to satisfactory; there was scope for development in formative assessment practices.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for the subject is very good.
- At the time of the inspection, the teachers of English had not accessed training for the new junior cycle specification since 2014 and were not implementing the school-based assessment aspects of the specification.
- While some very good examples of individual lesson planning were observed, the quality of teachers' collective planning for the subject is satisfactory at present.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should agree and implement a wider range of in-class strategies to support differentiation and formative assessment practices.
- With regard to junior cycle planning and course delivery, the lens of the learning outcomes should be used to structure the teaching of prescribed texts; the framing of in-class, homework, and in-house examinations; and associated scheme improvements.
- Teachers should implement all aspects of school-based assessment associated with the junior cycle English specification, including Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) and subject learning and review (SLAR) meetings.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- Students are respectful, affirmed by teachers, engaged in their learning, and are being supported by teachers' strong subject-specialist knowledge.
- Teaching practices in the lessons observed were generally of a good or very good standard.
- Effective questioning approaches observed included guiding the viewing of a film sequence, eliciting predictions based on text titles, and linking new concepts to prior learning or experiences. However, the integration of a more questioning role for students in the study of poetry was needed in a few lessons. Activities requiring students to make meaning of unseen texts using comprehension strategies such as mnemonics and to discuss the effects of poetic techniques on reader/listeners' personal and critical responses are recommended.
- There was generally good integration of pair work opportunities for collaborative learning.
- Where technology was used in lessons, it was a significant support to students' enjoyment, motivation, and engagement. For example, two different teacher PowerPoint presentations used written questions or images on slides to activate students' thinking about key aspects of a text, eliciting rather than presenting information to students. Practices observed in individual classrooms such as emailing notes and/or homework tasks to students, enabling students to see peer feedback to tasks, and contextualising the settings of studied texts are also highly commended.
- In the team teaching lesson observed, the support teacher had been given a very good briefing as to her role in interacting with specific students with special educational needs (SEN) and in making observational records for feedback to the SEN department. This differentiated approach to in-class support for students was very good practice.
- Inadequate planning for differentiated resources and/or tasks to support learners of all abilities was noted in a few instances. While expertise in relation to differentiation exists within the department, it needs to be shared and developed by all teachers. Differentiation should become a standing item at departmental discussions and a focus for future peer observation work.
- The quality of learning observed ranged from very good to satisfactory. In a few junior cycle lessons, student learning was only satisfactory due to teachers' unfamiliarity with key planning concepts of the specification, leading to overly-narrow learning intentions being pursued.
- Where learning was good or very good, teachers were sharing specific learning intentions with students at the outset of lessons, and were using them to check students' mastery and areas of difficulty during and toward the end of lessons, to guide the framing of purposeful homework tasks and to guide planning for the next lesson. The NCCA resource *Focus on Learning* would be a useful support to consistently developing such practices.
- Effective written formative feedback was being provided by teachers on senior cycle student assignments, guided by the criteria for assessment for LC English. A few teachers were leading students to examine exemplars of other students' work and engage in peer assessment; this practice should be more widely adopted within the department. To support the development of students' writing in junior cycle, the process of draft/redraft should be introduced from first year onward, teachers should agree and/or negotiate success criteria with students for the

writing of substantial assignments and then use those criteria when providing feedback for improvement.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of subject provision and of whole-school support for English is very good.
- Planning was ongoing during the evaluation for the 2017/18 school year, to change the school's periods of thirty and thirty-five minutes to forty minutes to meet junior cycle implementation requirements. This move to longer periods should enable more effective planning and deeper learning for students.
- Students' learning experiences are being enriched by a range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities organised through teacher volunteerism.
- The subject is well supported by the attractive school library and by allocation of base classrooms to almost all teachers of English. A number of those classrooms have been developed as very stimulating learning environments for English. Some seating layouts consciously seek to promote greater classroom talk and collaborative learning, and this is highly commended.
- The school is involved in progressive initiatives such as *Droichead* and e-Learning.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The teachers of English meet on a number of occasions during the year, supported by senior management. They share resources using a common server, rotate the role of subject co-ordinator, and have had an initial peer observation experience. These strengths will support the transformation of the current satisfactory level of departmental planning into a reflection of the combined department's subject knowledge and pedagogical competence.
- The department has compiled a substantial subject department plan, minutes of meetings, analyses of state examination results for the subject and outline schemes of work. Capturing teachers' reflections and self-evaluation observations within the departmental plan would aid action planning for the subject.
- To further support the development of junior cycle subject schemes, three recommendations are offered. First, schemes should be planned in relation to the learning outcomes specifically indicated for first year in the specification. Second, the time being allocated to prescribed specification texts and assessments modes should be mapped out strategically in terms of the weeks available in each term. Third, the texts prescribed by the specification should be approached, in planning and assessment, as vehicles for teaching the learning outcomes.
- It is advised that the TY scheme also be reviewed, to ensure that it builds on the skills and knowledge that students will have developed from the junior cycle specification in English and from their work with iPads from first year onward.
- Teachers have undertaken oral communication tasks with third-year class groups and have facilitated the development of collections of students' texts. They have not conducted CBAs and have not held SLAR meetings to agree descriptors for students' achievements. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. It is recommended that CBAs and SLARs be implemented, so that students can benefit from the full range of learning experiences as outlined in the specification.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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.

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;