

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Loreto College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Cavan County Cavan
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	61070P

Date of Inspection: 01-02-2017



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.

The board of management 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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	01-02-2017
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 teachers of English

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Loreto College Cavan is a voluntary secondary school for girls, under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Current enrolment is 700.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching in the lessons observed ranged from very good to adequate; overall, the quality was good, and teachers displayed competence and commitment.
- Group work and worksheets featured in most lessons; where they led to deep engagement with the intended learning, they were highly effective, but they were not always appropriate.
- The standard of students' written work was generally very good, although they tended not to voice their opinions and responses in the course of lessons.
- The English department has established effective assessment practices to support and develop students' learning; not all aspects of assessment for junior cycle are in place.
- Subject department planning is well developed and reflective, and capable of supporting curriculum change and changes in practice where necessary.
- While subject provision is generally good, the basis for class formation in junior cycle requires reappraisal.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The English department should work collectively to develop teaching approaches and materials that will increase students' opportunities to develop both their critical thinking skills and their confidence in expressing personal responses.
- Teachers should engage in the subject learning and assessment review meetings that are integral to the junior-cycle English specification.
- Mixed-ability class groups for English should be retained at least to the end of second year.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Eight lessons were observed during the evaluation, covering all years, levels and programmes offered, and including all teachers with a substantial involvement in English. The quality of teaching in these lessons ranged from very good to adequate; overall, the quality was good.
- Teachers displayed competence and commitment in their work to provide supportive and relevant learning experiences for students. They were very open to recommendations and suggestions about how teaching and learning practices could be further improved.
- Overall, lessons were well planned. Materials and resources were prepared to guide students through classroom tasks and to develop their understanding of the lesson topic. Worksheets on the studied texts were most effective where they created opportunities for students to engage with key concepts and to develop their critical analysis skills. At times, worksheets led students to focus more on 'filling in the sheet' than on engaging critically with the text itself.
- Pair and group work featured in most lessons observed, and was used in a variety of ways. Transition year students, for example, worked in pairs and small groups to rehearse and perform short scenes from a play, while first-year students reviewed and responded to each other's written work. In these and other instances, learning was truly a shared enterprise, and the pair and group approach was essential. Teachers should not, however, feel obliged to use this approach for all classroom activities; for example, where the learning intention is for students to formulate and articulate a personal response, some quiet individual thinking and writing time is more appropriate.
- Teachers consistently modelled the use of extensive vocabulary and sophisticated language, skilfully introducing and explaining both subject-specific and more general vocabulary in the course of classroom discussion. Many students demonstrated a very good command of language, more in their writing than in speaking in class. Greater opportunities for students to use talk and discussion as a means of developing and articulating their responses to texts and topics should be considered.
- The English department has established effective assessment practices to support and develop students' learning. Regular and substantial assignments are set for homework, and students receive affirmation of their efforts, often accompanied by constructive suggestions for improvement. There is a commendable emphasis on students also producing written work in class, and this is monitored and guided carefully. The practice of self-assessment, observed in one junior-cycle lesson, is worth developing and reinforcing as it fosters students' sense of responsibility for their work.
- The English department has facilitated in-class oral communication tasks and the creation of collections of written work as part of the English specification for Junior Cycle. Third-year students are therefore in a position to complete the related Assessment Task. However, subject learning and assessment review meetings have not been held, reportedly as a consequence of industrial action. Teachers should engage in these meetings 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

- Timetable provision for English is very good. The school timetable is currently based on class periods of less than forty minutes, and Department regulations require a minimum forty-

minute lesson length from September 2017. School management is preparing to make the necessary changes. Heretofore, six lessons of English have been provided in sixth year; however, five forty-minute lessons in fifth and sixth year will more than meet the recommended level of provision.

- First-year students are taught English in their mixed-ability base class groups in first year. On the basis of end-of-year class tests, students are placed in banded ability class groups for English at the beginning of second year. There is no sound educational reason for this practice in the context of this school, and it runs counter to the educational principles that underpin the new English subject specification for junior cycle. It is therefore strongly recommended that this practice cease, and that mixed-ability class groups continue at least to the end of second year. The formation of a discrete ordinary level group may be warranted in third year, and is appropriate in fifth and sixth year.
- Nine teachers, all appropriately qualified, currently teach English. Three teachers with very substantial English timetables teach the subject to all years. The practice of rotating the teaching of higher and ordinary level class groups, where applicable, extends teachers' experience and expertise, and should therefore be developed and embedded in the English department.
- Teachers of English have their own well-equipped base classrooms, almost all developed as stimulating learning environments with an emphasis on the display of students' work. These displays were used commendably to encourage students to draft and edit their writing to bring it to the standard required. Although the school has no library, class libraries have been developed.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The English department maintains and updates yearly a comprehensive subject department plan. Regular department meetings are held and discussions and decisions are recorded. Subject department co-ordination is very competently undertaken in a voluntary capacity. Rotation of this role should be considered in the interests of developing capacity within the department.
- The current junior cycle year plans incorporate the relevant learning outcomes for each strand. Teachers have had limited engagement with centrally delivered training for junior cycle, and should therefore ensure that they are availing of the many online resources available to support junior cycle implementation.
- Individual planning is of a very high standard.

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

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management is delighted that the English Department's work and successful engagement with the J.C.P.A. English Curriculum has been recognised.

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 English Department is working collectively to develop teaching approaches and materials that will increase the students' opportunities to develop their critical skills and confidence in expressing their personal responses.

Mixed-ability class groups for English will be retained until the end of second year.

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;