

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Saint Patrick's Comprehensive School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Shannon County Clare
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	81007U

Date of Inspection: 16-01-2020



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

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. Teaching, learning 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 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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	14-01-2020 & 16-01-2020
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 six lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Saint Patrick's Comprehensive School is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 560 students. It operates under the joint trusteeship of the Bishop of Killaloe and the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The school offers students an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA), and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme in addition to the Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate programmes.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- Positive relationships and high expectations for behaviour were evident in lessons.
- Teaching of a high standard was observed while improvement is needed in some areas of learning.
- The school library is a very valuable support for reading and literacy.
- Whole-school support and provision are good; approaches to the formation of some English classes require revision.
- *Bealach*, a comprehensive School Improvement Plan, publishes a detailed needs analysis and actions planned for improvement.
- Planning and preparation are good with evidence of significant recent work; aspects of collective planning and assessment now need to be developed.

Recommendations

- The subject department should trial and review teaching strategies that support student collaborative learning; subsequently, the design of inclusive tasks that align with identified learning intentions should be an area for focus.
- The school should revise its practice of forming some smaller English classes, in line with Circular 14/2017.
- Plans for junior cycle year groups should be adjusted with a focus on developing units of learning that are led by the associated learning outcomes, and that link with both formative and summative assessment tasks and with specific agreed opportunities for extended writing.
- Plans for senior cycle year groups should prioritise collaboratively planned text selections, schemes, and assessments.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Overall, teaching was of a high standard. Positive relationships and high expectations for behaviour were evident in lessons. Teachers were well prepared, have strong subject knowledge, and there is appropriate evidence of planning for an integrated approach to the teaching of language and literature.
- The overall quality of learning observed was satisfactory and there are now opportunities to improve student talk and collaborative learning.
- Opportunities exist for the continued improvement of student learning by planning for tasks that incorporate student collaboration. Effective examples of peer learning were seen where the teacher gave clear guidance regarding roles and where peer tutoring was complemented by effective teacher circulation. However, in many instances, students did not collaborate with others or engaged in superficial considerations. Greater opportunities for group-work and exploratory talk should be prioritised. To support this, collaborative skills and roles should be taught explicitly to develop student participation in lessons.
- Questioning was used effectively by teachers to evaluate students' comprehension. In the most skilful instances, additional responses were elicited from the students facilitating deeper engagement with lesson content. In many instances, asking students to comment on the responses of others would have further optimised the effectiveness of questioning as a means of engaging and assessing all students.
- Digital learning technology (DLT) was used well in some lessons and could have further supported learning in others. Teachers use DLT to share subject material and classwork with students, particularly students with special educational needs (SEN). In doing so they ensure students' access to the curriculum and learning opportunities.
- Learning scaffolds such as graphic organisers, sentence starters and teacher modelling were a feature of lessons that most effectively supported students. For example, students in an LCA lesson observed a video exemplar of an interview that was also modelled by the teacher and then practised by students. Such developmental demonstration supports student skill development very effectively and is worthy of increased usage. Of particular benefit would be the further use of display technology to support teachers in modelling the annotation of studied texts.
- Appropriate differentiation was seen in some lessons, but not all. Differentiation by task or product was the most prominent approach seen; for example, students in a poetry lessons were encouraged to choose the depth of analysis in their own work. In a minority of lessons, few students experienced success and it is recommended that teachers explore how they may differentiate content and activities more meaningfully in order to ensure that all students experience success as learners.
- In the lessons observed, the school's aim that learning in lessons would be communicated clearly was realised through the use of learning intentions. However, in a number of lessons, there was a lack of alignment between learning intentions shared with students at the outset and the formative or summative assessments utilised at later points in the lessons. In such instances, the task that students engaged should have been adjusted to ensure it explicitly developed the lesson's focus. Teachers should plan for lessons activities that assess formatively how well students are achieving the intended learning.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good provision and whole-school support for English. Teachers are provided with well-resourced base classrooms where displays support subject-specific learning. The school library is a notable space that positively supports personal reading. The employment of a school librarian and the commitment to student access are very positive student supports.
- Timetable design seeks to provide a rich and strategic allocation for English lessons in all year groups with five periods of English provided for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate year groups. However, the school must revise its practice of forming some smaller English classes, as such deployment is not in accordance with Circular 14/2017. Such groupings can constrict the subject specification's expectation that the English classroom is a place of 'classroom talk' where all students have a wide and varied experience of texts that stimulate, engage, inspire and challenge them. The school should explore alternative approaches such as team teaching.
- Commendably, the English department revised its calendar of assessment to incorporate the substitution of Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) for in-house assessments at particular points in students' second and third-year studies prior to the issue of Circular 79/2018. This change supports the manageability of assessment for teachers and avoids over-assessment of students.
- A comprehensive School Improvement Plan, *Bealach*, publishes a detailed needs analysis and actions planned for improvement.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning and preparation are good with evidence of significant recent work. Structures including the roles of departmental chair and secretary indicate a focus on effective planning; this has been supported by the recent development of an online platform enabling the sharing of resources between staff and with students.
- Subject Learning and Review (SLAR) meetings are held and contribute to a collaborative understanding of standards and moderation. Building on this, teaching and learning should now be prioritised at department meetings through the formalised sharing of good practices and methodologies among teachers. During those meetings, the English department should also select a single priority area from *Bealach*, the school's teaching and learning plan, as the focus of their collaborative practice and review.
- The scheme of work for junior cycle is indicative of reflective redrafting. Significant planning has also been undertaken regarding policies, procedures, and the development of templates for reflections on practice. To further this good work, the first-year scheme should be adjusted to address only the appropriate subset of learning outcomes identified in the Specification for Junior Cycle English. The English subject plan should be adjusted with a focus on developing units of learning that are led by the associated learning outcomes, and that link with both formative and summative assessment tasks and with specific agreed opportunities for extended writing.
- At senior cycle, a common scheme of work and assessment should be prioritised and developed collaboratively. Teachers should plan collaboratively around texts to facilitate the movement of students between levels or class groups and to facilitate any necessary teacher substitution.
- Reflective practice is a notable priority for the English department. An analysis of certificate examination results and a contextualising matrix incorporating factors such as homework, participation, parental involvement, and SEN has been developed.

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

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 welcomes the report which highlights the positive relationships and high expectations for behaviour in lessons. The Board is gratified to see that the commitment to planning and preparation in classes, reflection and strategic planning at a whole school as well as subject level is recognised and commended. Teaching and learning are central to our school, the report finding that 'teaching is of a high standard' is indicative of the commitment of staff and management to the delivery of quality teaching and learning experiences for our students. The commitment to 'teaching of a high standard' is matched by the commitment to constantly review and reflect on what is working well, identify areas for improvement and determine ways to deliver on those improvements.

School Library: unfortunately, we have had to temporarily close our school library in order to convert it to three large classrooms required to ensure social distancing protocols are maintained. The school is determined to reinstate the library as soon as current restrictions are lifted. The timetabled 'library class' has been reimagined as an on-line book club to continue to promote reading and literacy by the English Department.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Smaller English classes: We have reviewed the practice of forming some smaller English classes and revisited both Circular 14/2017, the Guidelines for Post-Primary school: Supporting Students with Special Education Needs in Mainstream Schools (2017) and Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs: Post-Primary Guidelines (2007).

St. Patrick's Comprehensive School provides mixed ability English classes in Junior Certificate. Students are encouraged to pursue higher level, decisions on levels are left until the completion of E8A Level Confirmation Forms. The majority of students pursue Higher Level English at Junior Cert and two thirds of students pursue Higher Level English at Leaving Certificate. In line with both Circular 14/2017 and the guidelines, we also review students' passports, STEN results and our own diagnostic WRAT testing to identify students who may require additional support. Resources were traditionally assigned to students by accommodating them in one class. Team Teaching was assigned in 3rd year 2019/20. The school is committed to reviewing the data on the student cohort each year and deploying its resources through "team-teaching, small group teaching and, where necessary, individualised teaching to address specific learning needs" Circular 14/2017, section 15.

- **1st years 2020/21** - we assigned resources to facilitate team teaching, however in line with current COVID guidelines we have split the class (two groups of 12 instead of one group of 24 with 2 teachers). The resources will continue to be assigned to facilitate team teaching for the future.
- **2nd years 2020/21** – we assigned team teaching resources for 2nd year as well this year – currently being deployed to support L2LP students.
- **3rd years 2020/21** - it was decided in the interests of wellbeing not to adjust the formation of classes in 3rd year thereby eliminating the smaller classes; it was felt students had enough disruption and that continuity was preferable as they completed their Junior Cycle programme.

Subject planning:

- **Junior Cycle** - Subject plan revised to identify targeted learning outcomes and to ensure greater correlation between identified learning outcomes and the methods of assessment.

- **Senior Cycle** - coordinated text selection for 5th year 2020/21. Both higher level classes are fully coordinated while the ordinary level classes will cover 2 of the higher-level texts. Poetry at higher level will cover the common higher and ordinary level poems.

Bealach— Teaching and Learning priority area: Active learning methodologies to facilitate and encourage student collaborative learning.

- Planning for 2020/21 will include reflection on the experiences of 2019/20 and adapting strategies designed to encourage student collaborative learning within the context of COVID-19.

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 of 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;