

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

Crana College
Buncrana, County Donegal
Roll number: 71140Q

Date of inspection: 24 March 2015



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	23, 24 March 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with the deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during ten class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in most of lessons observed was good or very good.
- A focus on subject specific skills including creative writing, planning, drafting and editing was evident in many students' work.
- Very good formative assessment practice was seen in some lessons where students were encouraged to evaluate and improve their own work.
- Provision for English is very good in all curricular programmes and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning is actively promoted.
- Procedures for identifying students with additional educational needs are very good.
- Teachers have a very positive attitude to the development of English in the school and a thoughtful and reflective approach to subject planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prior learning and knowledge should be exploited to encourage student engagement and lessons should be planned to achieve a balance between teacher-led instruction and student tasks.
 - Lesson tasks should be carefully structured and differentiated to facilitate the achievement of the learning outcomes for all students.
 - In the interests of developing the potential of all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed-ability class groups throughout the junior cycle.
 - A review of the English department's homework and assessment policies should be undertaken.
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INTRODUCTION

Crana College is administered by the Donegal Education and Training Board. Enrolment has increased over the past decade and currently stands at 267 girls and 249 boys. The following programmes are offered: Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme, an optional Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed was good or very good.
- Teachers were very open to feedback during the evaluation and welcomed any recommendations that were made; this was of particular note where teachers were observed in more than one lesson.
- Lesson objectives were clearly communicated to students in all lessons. Best practice was seen where these were expressed in terms of student learning and were revisited to assess attainment. This practice should be extended to all lessons.
- A focus on subject specific skills including creative writing, planning, drafting and editing was evident in many students' work and some very well structured folders and developmental portfolios were seen.
- Active learning methodologies including group and pair work were used in some lessons. In some instances, further scaffolding was needed to support the learning and engagement of all students. Lesson tasks should be carefully structured and differentiated to facilitate the achievement of the learning outcomes.
- In some lessons, teacher-talk was dominant and opportunities for students to contribute to the development of the topic were not always optimised. In other lessons, very good student contributions were facilitated through carefully planned and structured activities. Prior learning and knowledge should be exploited to encourage student engagement and lessons should be planned to achieve a balance between teacher-led instruction and student tasks.
- Very good formative assessment practice was seen in some lessons where students were encouraged to evaluate and improve their own work. Assessment for learning (AfL) practices should be adopted by all teachers.
- Homework was assigned in all classes. However, students' journals did not reflect a consistent approach to the recording of homework. A review of the English department's homework policy should be undertaken with a view to agreeing and implementing best practice.
- Classroom management was good and learning activities were well organised. In some lessons, short starter tasks facilitated early engagement of students very effectively.
- Interpersonal relations in the classroom were good and interactions between students and teachers were respectful and good humoured.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for English is very good in all curricular programmes and the use of ICT in teaching and learning is actively promoted.
- Teachers share good practice formally at timetabled meetings and informally through regular professional conversations. Teaching materials are shared on the school server.
- Most teachers have their own classrooms and have established very attractive and stimulating learning environments which include subject-specific posters, displays of students' work and storage of students' folders. While acknowledging the space challenges facing school management, it would be worthwhile exploring how all teachers could provide similar resources for their students.
- Timetabling of English is very good and facilitates rotation of teachers across subject levels and programmes.
- Procedures for identifying students with additional educational needs are very good and include communications with primary schools, testing and teacher observation. Withdrawal from Irish where the student has an exemption, or from another subject of the student's choice, is used to provide support. There is close co-operation between the special education and English departments.
- First-year students are taught in mixed-ability groups. Discrete higher-level and combined higher-level and ordinary-level classes are formed at the start of second year. Commendably, all students are encouraged to take the subject at the highest appropriate level. However, in the interests of developing the potential of all students, teachers should consider maintaining mixed-ability class groups throughout the junior cycle.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The very comprehensive subject plan clearly identifies the learning outcomes, methodologies and assessment strategies for students in each year and term of their course. The new junior cycle programme learning outcomes have been used very effectively. Regular subject department meetings are appropriately documented.
- A challenging and balanced TY programme is in its second year. Commendably, assessment strategies and success criteria are clearly defined.
- The school has engaged strongly with literacy development and many possible strategies are listed in the subject folder. It would be worthwhile for the English department to select and implement a subset of these strategies with a view to evaluating their efficacy.
- Teachers have included useful reflective commentary in their schemes of work. The full benefit of this very good practice will be realised when the planning cycle is revisited for the coming academic year.
- The subject coordinator facilitates the management of the English department very effectively and has led the development of very good subject planning practices over a number of years.
- Teachers keep records of student attainment and develop profiles of achievement. Regular reports are issued to parents and, commendably, provide opportunities for personalised formative commentary.

- State examination results are analysed and observations are recorded in the subject folder. This very good practice could be further developed by examining each student's attainment relative to their achievement goals and performance throughout their time in the school. It is notable that very few students take the subject at foundation level and overall attainment trends are positive.
- Teachers are very hardworking and committed to improving outcomes for all students. A very positive attitude to the development of English in the school is evidenced by the thoughtful and reflective approach to subject planning.

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. 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management and English teachers of Crana College welcome the positive tone of this report as it captures the professionalism and dedication of the English Department. It acknowledges that teaching and learning is of a high standard, that assessment practices are appropriate and that students with additional needs are properly catered for. It furthermore recognises the whole school support for the English department and that ICT is integrated into classroom teaching.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The English teachers will analyse the Inspector's findings over the coming months and ensure that all recommendations are implemented. The findings and recommendations of this report are a valuable source of information and will inform subject planning in all areas of the school's Curriculum.