

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in English

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Portumna Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	St. Brigid's Road Portumna County Galway
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	914130

Date of Inspection: 15-10-2019



**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 and 15 October 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussions with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eight lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Portumna Community School is a co-educational post-primary school, drawing students from an extensive hinterland that is predominantly rural. It operates under the co-trusteeship of the Catholic Bishop of Clonfert and the Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board. Between June and October 2019, a new senior management team took up office, after the retirement of a long-established senior management team. The current student enrolment is 442. A wide range of programmes is on offer, including Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year, and all Leaving Certificate programmes.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- Teachers' relationships with students are respectful and affirming; the teachers voluntarily organise a range of co-curricular activities to support students' subject learning, and they are committed to ongoing improvement.
- The teachers of English re-established the English department at the start of the current school year, following a period of staff turnover over the previous two years, during which time there had been a lapse in subject department co-ordination.
- The overall quality of learning and teaching is good, with evidence of some very good practices in some lessons and satisfactory practices in a small number of lessons; a broader range of assessment practices needs to be utilised in everyday lessons.
- Overall whole-school support is good.
- The overall quality of individual teacher planning and preparation and of teacher collaboration is good.
- Meetings of the subject department have tended to focus on logistical matters to date and formal collaborative planning is underdeveloped.

Recommendations

- The department should agree a collective approach to developing the collection of texts and incorporate a broader range of assessment practices into everyday lessons, to support the development of students' key skills and to encourage greater independent learning.
- Subject departments meetings should be guided by a teaching, learning and assessment-centred approach in their preparation, facilitation and targeted outcomes.
- Over time, the teachers of English need to develop formal collective plans that prioritise the key needs of learners and the learning outcomes for the subject with carefully designed assessments, interweaving the teaching of texts into those plans, rather than the current practice of primarily planning through prescribed texts and textbooks.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, with evidence of some very good practices in some lessons and also satisfactory practices in a small number of lessons.
- Good teacher preparation and classroom management practices were noted. Teachers explicitly shared the learning intentions for the lesson with students at the outset. Where best practice was noted, the teacher returned to the learning intentions during and before the end of the lesson to check students' key learning.
- Positive teacher-student relationships were noted in all instances. Student learning was supported by the use of digital clips in some classes and by guiding students to use graphic organisers to retrieve or organise information. In some instances, the learner experience needed to be more varied; this could be achieved by using concrete objects to support learning, more regular use of audio/visual clips, greater balance between teacher and student voice, and more varied homework tasks.
- Responses to questions in classes and samples of written homework reviewed indicated that students have a good grasp of character and plot of studied texts. To develop even higher learner outcomes, questions could be set before students listen to or read a new text to develop their comprehension skills. Also, students should be directed to look for and use evidence from their studied texts in responding to higher-order questions, and homework should be strongly connected to in-class work.
- Differentiated support was provided through careful pairing of students to work together on particular tasks, through the selection of some texts to meet students' interests and needs, and through teacher support during task phases. Integrating co-operative learning approaches such as "jigsaw" from time to time would help meet the needs of all learners in mixed-ability class groups. Furthermore, the department should consider the resources it provides to meet different learning needs in the study of prescribed texts. For example, timelines of key moments in the text, storyboards, writing frames for character profiles, assignments linked to key moments, audiobooks and weblinks could be provided to students. Having resources of this type would enable teachers to engage in more targeted work with particular groups within classes, as necessary.
- Instances of some very good written teacher formative feedback were noted in copies in some lessons, with specific points of affirmation and specific points for development. In other instances, feedback had been provided on a formal assessment but not on copybooks to date, and this needs to be addressed. The use of a visualiser to review completed homework assignments from time to time and to support in-class discussion of the strengths and areas for development in a piece of student writing is also advised.
- Some good assessment practices by individual teachers were noted during the inspection: good questioning that activated students' prior knowledge of current affairs or of other texts, very good utilisation of wait time, and asking students to compose their own questions mid-way through a studied text. These practices enhanced students' critical thinking and the quality of classroom discussions.
- Other aspects of assessment practice are in need of improvement in lessons. For example, agreeing a department-wide approach to developing the collection of texts would enable the communication of the same expectations by all teachers, irrespective of staff changes during a cycle. The department is also encouraged to extend the range of activities and tasks

that contribute to assessment grades. Oral communication tasks, students' maintenance and development of their individual collections of texts, and book reviews on texts read for pleasure could be included as additional areas to include in assessment and reporting.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-subject provision and whole-school support is good overall. All teachers have their own base rooms, with some vibrant classroom displays of subject-specific learning materials and student work noted. Teacher deployment for the subject is good, enabling subject planning by the small core group of teachers timetabled to deliver almost all English instruction.
- Timetable provision is good for Transition Year (TY) and for senior cycle. At four classes per week, current provision for junior cycle English meets the minimum specification requirement.
- In 2019/20, junior cycle classes from first to third year and in TY are mixed-ability, with level-specific classes organised for fifth and sixth year. The new senior management team will be leading a curriculum review in the coming weeks. One of the factors to be considered in that review will be creating setting arrangements from next year onward, for level-specific classes for third year English. Analysis of trends in student assessment data should be used to support this process.
- The re-establishment of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme this year, to meet the needs of a small cohort who benefit from a more applied approach to senior cycle study, is highly commended.
- The teachers of English voluntarily organise a range of co-curricular activities to support students' subject learning, including linking in with a local "Shorelines" Arts Festival. In many instances, it is TY students who benefit from those activities. The department is encouraged to seek to link those activities with junior cycle learning where possible.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of individual teacher planning and preparation and of teacher collaboration is good; formal collaborative planning is underdeveloped.
- Since reuniting as a department in late August 2019, the teachers of English have updated a plan describing departmental practices and general curriculum content, have met formally on a few occasions and more often informally. Most significantly, the department has embraced the concept of rotating subject department co-ordination as a new practice, to share leadership of the subject, and this is commended.
- To date, meetings of the subject department have tended to focus on logistical matters. A teaching, learning and assessment-centred approach now needs to guide preparation for, facilitation of, and outcomes from subject department meetings. If individual teachers of English can also share examples of where they have expertise with each other, then that will further support learners across the school.
- The teachers of English plan diligently as individuals for their class groups. However, the plans for class groups in the same year can vary substantially, resulting in a missed opportunity for reducing individual teacher preparation time, for developing common learning materials for students, and for planning well-designed common assessments. It is

advised that the teachers of English collaboratively review their existing individual planning documents, along with other relevant exemplars, to agree a common planning format.

- To develop collective subject department planning practices, the department should focus on identifying the key needs of learners for a particular year and on engaging more deeply with the learning outcomes of the specification, to ensure that planning is student and curriculum led, rather than being largely textbook led, as at present for junior cycle in particular. The department needs to review state examination instruments collectively, to study assessment trends, and use them to guide their own assessment planning for in-class, homework and house examinations.

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 findings from the report are applicable to all subject departments and will be circulated in the hope of a whole school response to improve and develop every subject, particularly in the areas of teaching, learning, common assessment practices and planning.

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

- NGRT Literacy testing has been introduced for all 1st Year students to respond to the literacy needs of the cohort
- Subject department meetings are now more focussed on the teaching, learning and assessment needs of the department, limited to the SSE and teaching/learning working groups in the school.
- Common assessment introduced for 1st Years Summer 2020.
- Future planning will prioritise the key needs of the student and the curriculum rather than on the prescribed texts.

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;