

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

**Subject Inspection of English**  
**REPORT**

**Athy College**  
**Athy, County Kildare**  
**Roll number: 70650L**

**Date of inspection: 12 January 2011**



**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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	11 and 12 January, 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion with principal</li><li>• Discussions with teachers including English as an additional language (EAL) coordinator</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</li><li>• Feedback to principal</li></ul>

**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

- The quality of teaching and learning was very high and the level of support and commitment given by English teachers to their students is highly commended.
- There was very good student participation, and independent learning opportunities were provided.
- While the key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening were fostered, the skill of speaking could be further developed.
- Students were frequently assigned work and that work was very well corrected.
- There is very good provision of English lessons and very good provision of teaching and learning resources. The benefits of the many continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities provided for staff were evident in the classroom.
- The quality of collaborative planning for English is excellent and the department is proactive, reflective and self evaluative. A wide range of texts is taught during each year and a wide range of Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and other reading initiatives is provided for students.

As a means of building on strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The learning outcomes for lessons should be outlined at the start of lessons and used towards the end of each lesson to summarise the lesson.
  - A more even distribution of English lessons across the week is recommended in the case of some years.
  - English teachers should teach some common texts for the first term of first year until class groups are finalised.
  - The Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) targets should be more specific, measurable and timebound.
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## INTRODUCTION

- Athy College is a co-educational, second-level school, under the auspices of County Kildare Vocational Education Committee (VEC), and has an enrolment of 259 students. The school is involved in the DEIS initiative. It offers the JCSP, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, post-leaving certificate courses and the traditional Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. The English inspection took place over two days and the teaching of all six English teachers was observed. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

- A very high standard of teaching and learning was in evidence.
- A wide range of active teaching methods was used with frequent opportunities provided for student participation and independent and cooperative learning. Lessons were interesting and enjoyable.
- Teachers were inclusive of all and frequently checked students' understanding in the course of lessons.
- The pace of lessons was appropriate and clear instructions were given to students. While there was a good structure to lessons, it is recommended that the learning outcomes be introduced at the start of the lesson and explicitly checked again at the end.
- There was evidence of continuity of learning and of making links with students' lives.
- A commendable model of team teaching is in use.
- Questioning strategies were very good, including higher-order questions that elicited personal responses.
- On the whole, students were courteous and interested in their lessons. Challenging behaviour was very well managed.
- Key words and student projects were displayed and dictionaries were well used; all supported learning very well.
- There was an appropriate focus on eliciting students' personal responses to texts and an emphasis on identifying key moments in texts.
- ICT was used in some lessons and its more widespread use to further enhance teaching and learning should be explored.
- The board was very well used, for example to record students' contributions, for mind maps, and for the assignment of homework.
- The four key skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening were fostered in lessons, with speaking being the skill that should be further developed.
- Students' copies were maintained to a good standard and standards could be further improved if students were required to use hardback or manuscript copies for their work. Students' copies were well corrected; good formative feedback was given, and there was evidence of written work being frequently assigned including longer pieces of writing. Other good assessment for learning strategies such as peer assessment and a focus on students being required to correct their own mistakes were also in evidence.
- The common marking policy developed among English teachers is excellent and ensures consistency of practice.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- There is good provision of English lessons in all years although there are some third-year class groups and one LCA class group that do not have an even distribution of lessons across the week. A more even distribution of lessons in these cases is therefore recommended.
- Management and English teachers give much thought to the best manner of placing students in class groups, and review students placement on a regular basis. The AH2 test for incoming first years should be reviewed and replaced with a more up-to-date test.
- The aim, as identified in the DEIS plan, to decrease the number of students taking foundation level, is to be encouraged as this number is high at present.
- Provision of resources for teaching and learning is excellent and classrooms were stimulating learning environments.
- The level of support and commitment shown by English teachers for their subject and students is excellent. They are involved in operating the library and hosting book clubs and a range of other initiatives and activities.
- The school's resource allocation is currently used to keep classes smaller and for team teaching. Withdrawal is used for EAL students and there was evidence that the work done in these lessons reinforces the work of the mainstream English teachers.
- Management is proactive in providing many CPD opportunities for staff and the benefits of this can be seen in the high quality teaching and learning observed.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of planning for English is excellent and the evidence reviewed indicates a very collaborative, proactive and reflective team of English teachers. Self evaluation is evident in the manner in which teachers review their work, plan new strategies for the year and analyse examination results. English teachers should now introduce some degree of commonality for the first term of first year until class groups are finalised.
- Resources are shared manually and electronically; so too are teaching methods. The school participates in and benefits from the 'key skills' project run by the NCCA.
- All genres are taught each year and at least one novel is taught in each year of junior cycle. This and the very wide range of JCSP and other literacy and reading initiatives in the school are highly commended.
- A range of targets in relation to literacy has been identified in the DEIS plan. Some of these targets need to be more specific, measurable and time bound. The school shows very good practice in reassessing students and in using the results of this in planning for improvements.

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

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