

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

Subject Inspection in English

DRAFT REPORT FOR FACTUAL VERIFICATION

School name	St Gerald's College
School address	Newport Road Castlebar Co. Mayo
Roll number	64580H

Date of Inspection: 13 December 2016

Date of issue of report: 08-02-2017



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12 and 13 December 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, subject co-ordinator and teachers of English• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to deputy principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Gerald's College is a boys-only voluntary secondary school located in Castlebar. The school operates under the trusteeship of Le Chéile Trust and its current enrolment is 578. It offers Junior Cycle and Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year, and the established Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good, with some examples of very good practice.
- The overall quality of learning in the majority of lessons observed was good; in some lessons, opportunities for students to participate in challenging learning activities were not sufficiently developed.
- Examples of very good formative feedback were seen during the inspection, however, assessment practices are inconsistent across junior cycle and senior cycle, and not all aspects of junior cycle assessment have yet been adopted.
- English is very well supported by school management and subject provision is generally good.
- The English department has engaged in reflective practice of a very high quality including extensive analysis of examination results and insightful student surveys.
- Comprehensive schemes of work have been developed at senior cycle and junior cycle; the learning outcomes approach associated with the new junior cycle specification has yet to be fully integrated into junior cycle work plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Lessons should be planned to provide opportunities for students to engage in challenging and supportive learning activities.
- A homework and assessment policy to support assessment for learning and planning for improvement should be developed and adopted by English teachers.
- Subject provision and planning for TY should be reviewed to ensure that there is adequate provision for remediation and skills development.
- The English department should further develop its junior cycle plan to incorporate the learning outcomes approach required in the new junior cycle English specification and to reference the full range of assessment practices.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching in the lessons observed was good with some examples of very good practice. Very effective practice was noted where lessons were carefully structured, questioning was developmental, and learning activities were planned and managed to engage students, to develop skills and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- The overall quality of learning in the lessons observed was good. In many of the lessons observed, teachers provided students with opportunities to learn through well-structured and purposeful pair or group work. Feedback from the groups and the consequent sharing of learning was well managed. In some lessons, there was scope to increase the range of active and collaborative learning activities. All lessons should be planned to provide opportunities for students to engage in challenging and supportive learning activities.
- Lessons were very well prepared. A wide range of resources was used to support learning.
- The classroom atmosphere was supportive and some very thoughtful responses to questions contributed to the learning as a whole.
- Students complete homework assignments on a regular basis and examples of very good formative feedback were seen, particularly at senior cycle. However, assessment practices are inconsistent across junior cycle and senior cycle, and not all aspects of junior cycle assessment have yet been adopted. It is recommended that an assessment policy that supports students to take responsibility for their own learning is developed. This policy could refer to the very useful rubrics and success criteria that have already been developed by members of the English department. Strategies to support students in using formative feedback as a learning resource and the development of a "portfolio" approach to skills development, in line with the junior cycle specification, could also be included.
- Teachers have prepared students for the oral Classroom Based Assessment (CBA) and have initiated the collection of students' texts in line with the new English specification for junior cycle. However, subject learning and assessment review meetings have not been held. The reason for this was reported to be industrial action. Teachers should engage in these meetings on completion of the CBAs 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

- English is very well supported by school management and subject provision is generally good.
- Timetable provision for English is good in both junior and senior cycle; concurrent timetabling is the norm from third year onwards.
- Students are encouraged, at both junior and senior cycle, to take the subject at the highest appropriate level with a significant majority taking the subject at higher level. At junior cycle, English is taught in mixed-ability class groups and learning support is provided through withdrawal from Irish if students have exemptions or from other non-core subjects. At senior cycle, higher-level and ordinary-level class group formation is based on junior cycle performance, students' preference and teachers' professional advice.
- TY students have two timetabled English lessons each week. In discussion with the English teachers it emerged that the delivery of these weekly lessons can be impacted by other TY activities. Subject provision and planning for TY should be reviewed to ensure that there is adequate provision for remediation and skills development.

- The teachers of English, all of whom are subject specialists, generally rotate between years and levels thus giving them a varied experience of teaching and opportunities for skills development. Students benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities including theatre visits and participation in competitions.
- The subject is very well supported and resourced. All teachers have their own base classrooms which have been developed as stimulating learning environments for English. Seating arrangements that would more readily facilitate active learning methodologies could be considered.
- The school encourages reading through a number of whole-school initiatives and all teachers contribute to literacy development.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning is of a good standard. A subject plan and schemes of work that reflect a collaborative and collegial approach to the choosing of texts, end-of-term summative assessments and the preparation of resources and materials were examined during the inspection.
- The junior cycle plan and schemes of work have yet to be updated to reflect the learning outcomes approach required by the new junior cycle specification. This should be done as soon as practicable.
- The English department has engaged in reflective practice of a very high quality including extensive analysis of examination results and insightful student surveys.

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 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 of the school's provision in each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> 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 <i>outstanding</i> 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	<i>Good</i> 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	<i>Satisfactory</i> 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	<i>Fair</i> 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	<i>Weak</i> 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;

SCHOOL CONTACT INFORMATION

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CEO of VEC If relevant		*Email	
School patron/trustee	Le Chéile Trust	*Email	eilis@lecheiletrust.ie
Current chairperson of parents' assoc.	TBC	*Email	
Current chairperson of student council (post-primary only)	Enda Mulchrone	*Email	endamulchrone@geralds.ie

The email addresses above will be used to send a copy of the final report to those named. You are now asked to:

1. check that those named are the current holders of these positions and amend where necessary
2. ensure that the owner of the address is aware that the email address is being used for this purpose
3. check that the email addresses are accurate.