

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Fintan's High School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Dublin Road Sutton Dublin 13
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60370W

Date of Inspection: 23-10-2019



**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 History 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 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

Date of inspection	21-23 October 2019
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 seven lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to the senior management and history team

School context

Saint Fintan's High School, Sutton, is a boys' voluntary Catholic secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school offers the Junior Cycle, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), and the established Leaving Certificate. It currently caters for 706 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall; in some instances there was an over-reliance on teacher-led instruction and whole-class oral questioning.
- Overall, students' responses in most lessons demonstrated a good range of appropriate knowledge and subject-specific skills; an affirming learning environment was apparent in all lessons.
- Very good-quality written feedback was evident on students' assignments where directional feedback on areas for improvement was provided; there is scope to enhance this very good practice to encourage more learner autonomy.
- The quality of subject provision and whole school support is very good. Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD).
- The quality of teachers' collaborative practice is good overall, with good-quality schemes of work in place.

Recommendations

- To appropriately challenge all learners, the history department should plan for the further integration of student-centred, differentiated approaches in lessons.
- More variation of questioning strategies that actively engage and challenge students to think critically should be incorporated into lessons.
- The history department should further develop strategies that engage students in using feedback to facilitate them in taking more ownership of their learning.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall. While some effective practice was noted, there was scope to enhance the depth of students' learning in the majority of lessons through the use of more student-centred, differentiated teaching approaches.
- Very good rapport was evident between teachers and students with respectful interactions observed. Students were encouraged to ask and answer questions, and an affirming learning environment was apparent in all lessons. Overall, students' responses in most lessons demonstrated a good range of appropriate knowledge and subject-specific skills.
- In most lessons, relevant learning intentions were appropriately shared with students. Good practice was noted where these were presented as what students should be able to know, do or understand by the end of the lesson. The use of teaching approaches which enable students to actively reflect on, apply and consolidate their learning, such as those identified as part of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, should be further incorporated into lessons.
- Lessons were well prepared and a good range of additional resources was available to support student engagement. However, in the majority of lessons students were not given sufficient time to engage in a meaningful way with these resources before feedback was taken or they were moved on to the next task. To optimise students' learning and to promote historical enquiry, more time is needed to allow students to engage with these resources.
- In most lessons observed, information and communications technology (ICT) was employed appropriately to communicate lesson content. Effective practice was noted when video clips were accompanied by pre-identified questions to maximise students' engagement and develop critical thinking skills. Good use of electronic devices was noted in the TY lesson to facilitate engagement with primary sources such as the census.
- In a few lessons students demonstrated high levels of interest and participation in learning through involvement in collaborative tasks. For example, students discussed and created a mind map on the impact of the explorations. In these instances clear guidance was provided on the roles and expectations of each group, with sufficient time provided for students to engage in a meaningful way with the activity. The use of this type of learning approach should be extended.
- In the majority of lessons observed, a more didactic approach to learning was observed with an over-reliance on teacher-led instruction and whole-class questioning. Consequently, students in these lessons had a more passive learning experience. In these instances, teachers should be mindful of the balance between teacher and student input, and plan for the incorporation of more student-centred approaches.
- Appropriate differentiation was evident through the use of oral questioning, and one-to-one support provided to students where needed in lessons. However, for the most part, students experienced the same learning and assessment activities regardless of ability. It is recommended that teachers further integrate the use of differentiated methodologies to provide greater challenge, particularly for more-able students.

- The overall quality of assessment was good in the lessons observed. The main method of assessment utilised during lessons was whole-class oral questioning by the teacher. In some lessons, effective use was made of directed questions and questioning that probed students' understanding of the relevant material and prompted them to describe and discuss the period of history being studied in more detail.
- In a majority of lessons observed the questioning style did not challenge all students sufficiently. Questions tended to be lower-order, requiring very brief answers, with teachers then expanding on the answer themselves. To foster deeper historical understanding, questioning approaches should be broadened to incorporate a variety of question styles such as the greater use of open-ended questions, increased wait-time, and peer discussion.
- It was evident from reviewing students' copybooks that homework is assigned regularly and student progress is monitored in all lessons. In the majority of lessons observed, examples of very good quality feedback were evident on students' assignments. Directional feedback on areas for improvement was provided. The history department should further develop strategies that engage students in using this feedback to facilitate them in taking more ownership of their learning.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support for History is very good. History is a core subject in junior cycle. At senior cycle History is offered on a modular basis in TY, and as an optional Leaving Certificate subject. Student uptake of History at senior cycle is very good.
- Senior management actively promotes a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. The history team is very committed to the on-going development of the subject and a very good level of engagement with CPD is evident.
- The use of ICT in teaching and learning is actively promoted and supported by senior management. All classrooms are well equipped with ICT facilities and a set of electronic devices are available for students to use during lessons.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of teachers' collaborative practice is good overall. The history department has collated a shared folder of electronic resources which supports a collaborative approach to teaching and assessment. It is good practice that the position of coordinator rotates regularly.
- Department meetings are held regularly, both formally and informally, and minutes of meetings are documented. To further promote a shared focus, the decisions and actions arising from these meetings should also be recorded and reviewed.
- A very interesting plan has been prepared for TY with a good emphasis on local history. To ensure this module provides opportunities for all students to be challenged appropriately, a set of overarching differentiated learning outcomes should be incorporated into the plan and used to support the development of learning tasks for each lesson.
- The history department conducts an annual analysis and review of certificate examination results. To benefit from this good practice, the department should develop specific actions,

with agreed teaching and learning approaches and timeframes for review, to support improvements and include these in their planning documentation.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, both deputy principals and the 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 positive findings in the inspection report. The Board is pleased that the good collaborative practice of teachers, the very good rapport between teachers and students, the good quality schemes of work and the very good quality feedback on assignments were recognised in the report. The very good level of engagement with CPD on the part of the history team is acknowledged, as is the active support by senior management for the use of ICT in teaching and learning.

The observation that an affirming learning environment was apparent in all lessons is very encouraging and a testament to the dedication and skills of the history team in promoting their subject at all levels.

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

The history department will plan to further integrate differentiated approaches during lessons to enhance the wide range of learning supports already in use by teachers.

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;