Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

St Vincent’s Secondary School
Seatown Place, Dundalk, County Louth
Roll number: 63900R

Date of inspection: 12 April 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>12 April 2011</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good in most lessons.
- Students are encouraged to achieve.
- There is a lack of differentiation at each end of the ability spectrum.
- The quality of written assessment feedback is good in some cases but is an area for development in others.
- Whole-school support is very good in a number of areas but the library is not used optimally.
- Planning lacks cohesion.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should consistently develop and implement assessment for learning practice.
- Differentiation should be practised in content, methods and assessment so that all students achieve their full potential.
- The library should be open at times that would facilitate independent learning.
- A common programme of work should be developed and implemented for each year group so that every student’s experience of English is of high quality.
INTRODUCTION

St Vincent’s Secondary School is an all-girls voluntary secondary school and has a current enrolment of 889. It provides English in the Junior Certificate (JC), the Leaving Certificate (LC), and the Transition Year (TY) programmes and English and Communications in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The optional TY is very popular. Currently four class groups are enrolled.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in most lessons observed.
- Lesson planning and preparation is good. Especially commendable were: the quality of written plans presented in some lessons; learning intentions written on the board in a small number of cases and very good student-centred planning in the sixth-year LCA lesson.
- Creative use of resources was observed in a number of lessons and the diversity of students’ learning styles was an appropriate focus. In some lessons, there was good evidence of scaffolding learning. The board was used well for recording students’ evidence-based views.
- Methods were generally very good and designed to promote learning in the vast majority of lessons. Group work was well organised. In only one instance, methods used had no learning focus. All aspects of teaching must be reviewed in this case.
- There was a lack of differentiation in content, methods and assessment at each end of the ability spectrum in lessons observed.
- Questioning strategy was used to varying effect. In some but not all lessons there was a good balance between lower and higher-order questions. Good practice should be shared.
- Team teaching or co-operative teaching was used well in some instances.
- In an examination class, students were taught valuable techniques.
- In one lesson there was evidence of the integration of language and literature; this practice should be replicated in all lessons.
- Good practice was observed in lessons where students were asked to articulate personal responses. The TY public speaking lesson is commended in this regard.
- Uptake of higher-level, senior-cycle English is good. In the junior cycle, uptake was below what might be expected in three of the last four years. It is positive that this trend was reversed upwards in 2010. There is evidence that some ordinary-level students may be capable of higher level. The department should examine baseline data to determine if any pattern emerges that would inform future planning.
- Classroom management was very good in all lessons and student learning was sympathetically supported by teachers.
- Many classrooms visited had very little by way of public displays of students’ work, books, dictionaries, or visual stimuli. While teachers are not classroom based, this should not be an insurmountable barrier. The potential of classrooms should be fully exploited to create a stimulating learning environment.
• Students receive oral feedback on learning during lessons; the quality is generally good. Assessment for learning (AfL) is an area for development: there was variation in the quality of written assessment feedback from teachers in copybooks and folders. Summative assessment is practised through class and in-house tests. TY assessment commendably includes a variety of modes.

• In a minority of cases, there were far too many short and undemanding comprehension exercises in folders and copybooks examined. These exercises are not likely to develop literacy skills. The English department should undertake a review of written assignments in the context of developing literacy in all class groups.

• Attention to vocabulary development, as practised in some lessons, is commended. There was a specific focus on oral literacy in the TY debate that involved two class groups.

• In one instance, students were not engaged in any form of meaningful written work and this urgently needs review.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• A good range of programmes meets students’ needs. Timetabling allocation is very good. There is good access to resources. The library is a good facility and currently under development. However, it is not used optimally since it is not available for students outside lesson times. To encourage research and independent learning, it is strongly recommended that the library remain open at times suited to student personal use.

• The school has a homework policy and there are some good features including the roles of teachers and parents. It is reported that the school plans to develop an AfL policy. This is timely as it is an area for development. Given the potential of the student journal for communication with parents, it should be a requirement for LCA students to have one. The standard reporting procedures are in place for informing parents of students’ progress.

• There is a very strong core group of teachers with regular subject content. However, the current team of thirteen is too large. The school intends to develop a smaller team which is commended.

• A pattern exists where teachers are deployed predominantly to teach one level or in one range of programmes. This approach does not develop capacity within the team. All teachers should be deployed across all programmes and levels to deepen and enrich their teaching experience.

• There is a very good level of teacher engagement with professional development and this is commended. Whole-school staff development is good. Department meetings should be formally used to share good practice.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• There was a notable lack of consistency and a lack of unity in planning despite the existence of common templates. The consequence is that an individual student’s experience of English varies in the degree of content and challenge experienced. Individual teachers may co-operate at their own discretion. Cohesive, unified planning is strongly recommended.
• There is lack of challenge in the quality of texts chosen in some instances. The number of
texts studied in the junior cycle is reductive. Text choice is in need of review.
• There should be planning for literacy development.
• Planning for resources is good.
• In all but one instance, good records of assessment and attendance were made available to
the inspector. It is commendable that accurate profiling of students took place.

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.

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.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management
**Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board acknowledges the main findings of the Inspectorate and are particularly pleased that the Inspectorate found that students are encouraged to achieve and that the quality of teaching and learning observed was very good.

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

A common programme of work has been developed and implemented for each year group. Recommended reading lists have been developed for each year group and the texts studied at junior cycle have been reviewed. 75% of all Junior Certificate students took the Higher Level paper in 2011 which is 5% above the national average. 85% of those students studying Higher Level achieved a grade A, B or C. The percentage of students taking Higher Level will be reviewed annually to encourage more students to take the Higher Level paper.

The school is currently developing an assessment policy and has requested in-service training for all staff from the professional development service for teachers on assessment for learning practices.

The opening hours of the school library have been extended to include lunch hour and from 8.30 am each morning.