Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

St. Fintina’s Post-Primary School
Longwood, Enfield, County Meath
Roll number: 71970L

Date of inspection: 10 October 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good.
• There was very good use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning.
• The well-planned development of the lessons afforded students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning.
• The range of methodologies employed supported the development of the students’ literacy skills.
• There is good whole-school support for History.
• The history department proactively supports the development of the teaching and study of History in the school.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Management and the history department should continue to explore initiatives to promote the uptake of History among senior cycle students.
• Within the constraints of the weekly timetable, a more even distribution of history lesson periods than has occurred for a number of class groups is recommended.
• The subject department plan should be further developed.
INTRODUCTION

St. Fintina’s Post-Primary school is a voluntary, co-educational secondary school under the patronage of County Meath Vocational Educational Committee (VEC). The school has a current enrolment of 208 students and provides the Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The school does not provide a Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good overall. The positive learning atmosphere during the lessons was underpinned by the good relationship between the teachers and their students, the variety of methodologies employed to meet the students’ learning needs, and the engagement of the students. The praiseworthy practice of displaying students’ work and subject materials on the walls of the classroom to encourage the students’ interest in History also added to the learning atmosphere.

- The students were informed of the lesson topic and the objectives of the lesson at the outset. This good practice provided the students with a clear understanding of the purpose of the lesson.

- There was very good use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning. PowerPoint presentations supported students’ learning, particularly when teachers’ interacted with their students during the presentations or, as occurred in one lesson by setting the students a worksheet assignment that they were required to complete while viewing the presentation. In two lessons observed the students were also able to use their laptops to view the presentation. During one of the lessons the students typed notes relating to points of information when directed by the teacher, which they electronically saved, and in the other lesson they subsequently completed a set task using their laptops.

- The teachers frequently afforded the students the opportunity to contribute to the development of the lesson and to demonstrate their learning. Among the laudable examples of the students’ contributions were a role play activity and the development of PowerPoint presentations. The latter included the making of a PowerPoint presentation by two students to their class group on an aspect of their lesson topic and, in another instance, the informative PowerPoint presentation that was used to revise the lesson topic was the work of some members of the class.

- The development of the students’ literacy skills was supported by the range of teaching and learning methodologies employed. For example, emphasis was placed on key words that were relevant to the lesson topic; the teacher interaction that was used as an ongoing learning activity during the course of the lessons required the students to listen attentively and to be responsive, and the set assignments supported the development of the students’ writing skills. There was some scope to make greater use of higher order questions and to include opportunities for selected students to read aloud to their peers.

- The teachers are well informed about their students’ progress. The teachers effectively assess their students’ progress through classroom observation and interaction, the correction of homework assignments, the results of class tests and the students’ performance in the formal school and certificate examinations.

- Homework was assigned in all lessons and supported students in consolidating their knowledge of the topic studied. The homework assignments are regularly corrected.
There is however, some scope for a more widespread use of a constructive feedback comment as part of the teachers’ good work in this regard.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- History is a core subject for junior cycle students and is offered as an elective subject to Leaving Certificate students. Currently, there is no senior cycle history class group owing to an insufficient uptake of the subject by students. It is recommended that management in conjunction with the history department continue to identify initiatives to address this situation.

- The timetabled allocation of three history periods per week for junior cycle students is supportive of the subject. It is noted in the case of some class groups however, that the majority of their lesson periods are timetabled for afternoon time slots and attention is drawn to the timetabling of History for four class groups in the last period on Friday. It is recommended that within the constraints of the timetable a more even distribution of the history lesson periods be provided next year.

- History is well resourced. The teachers have their own base classrooms that are equipped with information and communication technology (ICT) as standard features and they have a bank of supplementary subject materials and an electronic folder for sharing resources at their disposal.

- The four members of the history department are deployed to teach History and the teachers remain with the first-year class group to which they are assigned until the students sit their Junior Certificate History examination. These good practices enable the teachers to actively support History. Moreover, management is fully supportive of the teachers’ professional development.

- Management evaluates the students’ performances in the certificate examinations and requests an annual report from all subject departments on the students’ results and areas for subject improvement in subsequent years.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The history department is a proactive forum as evidenced by the subject department plan, the recorded minutes of the department’s termly meetings, the rotation of the position of subject convenor among the members of the history team and the organisation of projects, co-curricular outings and the support given to students to participate in extracurricular activities such as the “Young Meath Historian Competition”.

- The subject department plan reflects the commendable collaboration of the history teachers and should continue to be developed. The ongoing development of the plan should include the documentation of a literacy and numeracy policy, the agreed responsibilities of the subject convenor, and further elaboration of the sections relating to the planning for students with special needs, the future development plan for History and the analysis of the history students achievements in the certificate examinations.

- There was careful preparation for the lessons observed. The prior planning involved the choice of a definite lesson topic, the preparation and selection of a range of resources, and the integration into the structure of the lesson of the teaching and learning methodologies to be employed.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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 of management welcomes the overall positive feedback on the quality of teaching and learning, in history in St Fintina’s Post Primary School. The report accurately reflects the great work of the history department in the school.

The board would like to thank the inspector for the professional manner in which the evaluation was undertaken.

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

The school will offer History as one of the optional subjects at senior cycle in the coming year.

The management will aim to have a more balanced distribution of history lesson periods throughout the timetable henceforth.

The subject department has further developed the history subject plan since the inspection.