Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

St Fintan’s High School
Sutton, Dublin 13
Roll number: 60370W

Date of inspection: 13 December 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching was good in most lessons observed and the majority of teachers experienced in teaching the subject showed significant strengths.

- The Irish department shows particular strengths in the use of information and communication technology resources (ICT) for teaching and the integration of ICT in teaching the subject is being developed.

- Assessment work as evident in students’ copy books was of good quality.

- Provision for the subject is low in the junior cycle.

- It is a very positive development that students will have access to the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate examination with effect from 2013.

- The setting of priorities in planning work by the Irish department for the current year 2011/12 is commended.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The opportunity for all the teachers to observe each other’s teaching practice would be a good step in promoting professional development.

- Identifying appropriate learning targets for the level of proficiency of the learners is an area for development. In certain instances the targets were overly demanding, in other instances the targets were insufficiently challenging.

- It is recommended that attention focus on encouraging a higher proportion of students to study the subject at higher level Leaving Certificate in light of the high proportion who attempt higher level in the Junior Certificate examination.
INTRODUCTION

St Fintan’s High School is a voluntary secondary school for boys with a current-year 2011/12 enrolment of 674 students. The programmes offered by the school are the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and the Transition Year which is a compulsory programme. The team of five at the time of the subject inspection included a substitute teacher of Irish and one other who was completing the post-graduate diploma in education (PGDE).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching was good in the most lessons observed and the majority of teachers experienced in teaching the subject demonstrated significant strengths. Learning was productive in those lessons. In other instances teaching methods were being learned and developed.

- It would be beneficial that teachers would have the opportunity to observe their colleagues teaching practice, particularly in the case of newly appointed teachers. It would be worthwhile to organise visits to each other’s classes in the course of the year in the interests of furthering professional development.

- Very effective use was made of ICT as a resource that inspired the students’ imagination and desire to participate owing to the excellent quality of the images shown of their own area. There was evidence in the same lesson of particular skills in integrating grammar into teaching in a manner that the learners found enjoyable. In another case an ICT segment was used that was overly challenging for the language capacity of the learners.

- The quality of assessment in students’ copy books was good and in the case of Leaving Certificate students in particular there was evidence of good advice and direction to students on how to improve in the written teacher comments.

- There is a need to develop differentiation so that students of different capacities are appropriately challenged. The setting of appropriate learning targets for the level of students’ capacities is an area for development. There were highly capable students who needed further challenge but in other cases the content and aim of the lesson were overly demanding.

- The target language predominated in lessons and in certain instances the communication between teacher and students was effortless. The next step needed here was to enrich the store of vocabulary beyond what the students possessed.

- Handouts were prepared in many instances that helped the learners. It is recommended that the handouts highlight appropriately a store of vocabulary at different levels and that vocabulary be wholly accurate. In case of doubt colleagues should be consulted.

- In the clear majority of lessons a good learning atmosphere obtained and students and teachers showed a mutual respect.

- The high proportion of students that take higher level in the Junior Certificate examination indicate that good targets are set for students in the subject. It is recommended that the significant falloff at higher level in the Leaving Certificate be reviewed with a view to improving that situation.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabled provision for the subject in the senior cycle is good and very good in the case of Transition Year. Junior cycle provision is low however, particularly in view of the demands of the Junior Certificate Irish higher level syllabus. It is recommended that the possibilities to augment junior cycle provision be reviewed.

- It is a very welcome development that the optional oral examination is being introduced this year into second year by the Irish department and that these students will have the opportunity to take the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate Irish examination 2013.

- The arrangements for the subject regarding concurrent timetabling and an even distribution of lessons across the week are good. The double class arrangement in sixth year and the consequent absence of a lesson on one other day of the week would be worth reviewing and recommending an alternative to management.

- Management is fully supportive of the teachers’ professional development in the subject and department members have a very high attendance record at events organised by the second level support service for Irish.

- One of the teachers is particularly skilled in the use of ICT resources to support teaching and the effect was evident in the lively participation by students in the lesson that these resources encouraged.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- It is a positive that the Irish department has identified planning priorities for the current year 2011/12. The main aim is to create a complete subject plan and effect improvements. The use of a common template for the various years’ plans is recommended.

- Attention should be paid to identifying specific learning outcomes from one year to another under each of the four language skills. The current plan should be developed through laying out a fuller programme of work with a more measured timeframe.

- The Irish department is engaged in the planning of suitable ICT resources for use in lessons in keeping with the whole-school focus on the greater integration of ICT into teaching and learning.

- The aims of the Transition Year subject plan are too close to a preparatory course for the Leaving Certificate. It would be better to aim at giving students a different experience of learning Irish in this year. It would be positive to promote co-curricular activities such as participating in debating competitions, making an Irish language radio programme or short video or inviting a guest speaker to the school who is identified with Irish.

- The European Language Portfolio would be worth consulting for direction on identifying learning outcomes appropriate to the capacities of the students and considering the language passport for Transition Year in the interests of developing a responsibility for learning among the students.

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.

*Published June 2012*
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 wishes to thank the inspectorate for the courteous and professional manner in which the inspection was conducted. The Board welcomes the positive findings in the report particularly in relation to the good quality of teaching and learning in the subject, the very effective use of ICT and the quality of assessment.

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

St Fintan’s High School plans to develop the use of peer observation across all subject departments in the coming year.
Since the inspection the Transition Year Irish programme has been reviewed and revised with the intention of introducing a more stimulating and interesting course next year.