Subject Inspection of English
REPORT

St Joseph’s Secondary School
Navan, County Meath
Roll number: 64360Q

Date of inspection: 7 March 2013
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ENGLISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>6, 7 March 2013</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed was very good with some very effective and some exemplary practice noted.
- A rich and stimulating learning environment was evident in each classroom that was visited.
- Teachers are developing students’ literacy through practical and focused strategies.
- The school library is a dynamic and well used resource.
- Teachers are engaging in reflection and self-evaluation as part of their subject planning activities.
- Individual planning and preparation for all lessons was very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should encourage students to reflect on their learning at the end of each lesson.
- Assessment criteria should be shared with students at all levels.
- Common end-of-term and end-of-year exams should be set for each year group where practicable.
INTRODUCTION
St Joseph’s Secondary School, Navan, is a voluntary secondary school for girls with a current enrolment of 630. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme as well as the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• The overall quality of teaching and learning observed in the eight lessons visited was very good with some very effective and some exemplary practice noted.
• In all lessons, teachers stated the planned learning outcome or objective. This is good practice. Teachers should consider developing this practice further to focus on skills development and also to reflect on the stated objective at the end of the lesson.
• Effective questioning strategies were used to allow the teacher to assess learning and to introduce practical differentiation with all students being challenged.
• Active learning methodologies, including group and pair work, were used very effectively in most lessons. In these lessons, a variety of learning styles and abilities were catered for and students participated well and engaged with the assigned tasks.
• In one senior cycle lesson, groups of students presented their own work using a variety of media while the teacher facilitated questioning and discussion based on the presentations. This is highly commended.
• A wide range of resources, including video and audio clips, was very effectively deployed by teachers in most lessons.
• The classroom environment in all lessons observed provided an excellent aid to learning. Displays of students’ work reflect the hard work and commitment of the English teachers to their subject.
• Classroom atmosphere was universally positive. Students contributed well to discussions and responded willingly to questions. In some lessons, students were encouraged to pose their own questions relevant to the topic under discussion. This is commended.
• A wide range of assessment methods is in use. Teachers have introduced assessment for learning (AfL) techniques and, in some cases, are actively involving students in self-assessment. This is commended. It is recommended that assessment criteria be shared with students at all levels.
• Teachers are developing students’ literacy as an integral part of normal teaching practices. In one lesson, students were encouraged to respond to oral questions using full sentences; in another, students maintained a dedicated vocabulary and spellings notebook. These good practices should feed in to the whole-school literacy strategy as it is developed.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT
• Curricular provision for the subject is good. All classes, except first year, have the optimal number of timetabled lessons. In TY, in addition to the three timetabled lessons, a double period is dedicated to drama. The school is planning to increase the provision
for first-year students so that they have daily contact with the subject; it is recommended that this change should be implemented as soon as is practicable.

- Students are encouraged to study the subject at the highest appropriate level and higher-level uptake is generally good.

- All first-year classes are organised in mixed ability groups. Second and third year classes comprise mixed-ability class groups with an additional small class group for students who have been identified as needing additional assistance. The school is committed to providing for the best possible outcomes for all students.

- Co-curricular and extracurricular activities are provided for students, particularly in the area of theatre trips and practical drama. The school’s theatre is a wonderful resource in this regard.

- A vibrant and well-used library is available for all students every day at lunch-time. It is staffed by a librarian who is assisted by a team of senior cycle students. The high level of usage reflects the interest and enthusiasm of the students for reading and English.

- Common end-of-term and end-of-year examinations are set for some class groups. This good practice can facilitate the development of effective student profiling and progress tracking. It is recommended that common end-of-term and end-of-year examinations be set for each year group where practicable.

**Planning and Preparation**

- The English department comprises a committed and hardworking team of teachers all of whom have subject-specific qualifications. All teachers rotate between higher-level and ordinary-level classes and, in most cases, teach both senior and junior cycle classes. This good practice supports teachers’ skills development and provides a platform for sharing ideas and resources at all levels.

- Teachers attend continuing professional development (CPD) events where available, and are fully supported in this by management. INOTE, the Irish National Organisation of Teachers of English, could provide additional CPD opportunities and membership should be considered.

- The comprehensive subject department plan emphasises oral literacy through the development of listening and speaking skills. This is commendable. It is recommended that oral literacy should be integrated into teachers’ schemes of work along with suitable methods of assessment.

- The range of reflective commentary recorded in the department folder is commendable. It reflects the high level of self-evaluation that currently takes place. The analysis of state examination results should be built on in the future so that year-on-year trends can be identified.

- Teachers have developed and acquired a wide range of resources related to their subject over the years. Sharing of these resources is facilitated by a strong sense of collegiality. It is recommended that the good practice of sharing resources be built on so that the full range of teaching resources, including electronic resources, is readily available to all teachers.

- The TY plan reflects an energetic and innovative approach to Transition Year English which is in keeping with the underlying principles of the programme.
Individual planning and preparation for all lessons was very good. In many of the individual schemes of work observed, curriculum content is explicitly linked with specific learning outcomes, teaching methodologies, resources and assessment methods. It is recommended that these elements be considered in the further development of the department subject plan.

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 of Management wishes to acknowledge the effectiveness and competency of the English Department and the fact that the Report affirms the good practice happening in St. Joseph’s. The Board is particularly pleased by the following:

“The overall quality of teaching and learning in the eight lessons visited was very good with some very effective and some exemplary practice noted.” “Classroom atmosphere was universally positive.” “A wide range of assessment methods is in use.” “Students are encouraged to study the subject at the highest appropriate level…” The Board was also happy to note that the good work carried out in our School Library was praised by the Inspector.

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 Board of Management welcomes the recommendations of the inspection. The recommendation that First Years should have 5 periods of English will be implemented this September.