An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: History
Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Vincent's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	St Mary's Road Cork
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	62590A
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	18/09/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	12/12/2024

What is a 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(s) 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.

Included in this subject inspection report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>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.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) or Bí Cineálta (2024) and this policy is reviewed annually.
2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	18/09/2024
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including focus groups	• Observation of teaching and learning during four lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

St. Vincent's Secondary School is an all-girls voluntary secondary under the trusteeship of the Religious Sisters of Charity. At the time of the evaluation, the school had an enrolment of 255 students. The school offered the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE), and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school participated in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good overall.
- In almost all lessons group activities were very effectively designed to link prior and new learning.
- Specific attention had been paid by teachers to providing opportunities for students to advance their knowledge of history by engaging in the use of primary and secondary source material, both visual and written.
- Whole school support for History was very good.
- The school undertook a range of activities to support students' knowledge of and interest in History separate to classroom-based activities.
- Overall, the quality of planning and preparation was very good.

Recommendations

- In a small number of lessons, some further planning of approaches to student questioning was necessary. This should be achieved by developing a common approach, across the department, to the use of questioning to assess student progress.
- Though learning intentions were used in all lessons observed, there was a necessity for an improvement in their deployment during lessons. The History department should establish a procedure for the sharing and display of learning intentions at the beginning, during and close of every lesson.
- The role of subject co-ordinator, as outlined in school documentation, was wide-ranging and comprehensive. This role should be rotated frequently between the members of the department, and delegation of some of these duties should be made possible.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good overall. In almost all lessons a clear rapport between teachers and students enhanced the enjoyment of History lessons for students.

- In almost all lessons group activities were very effectively designed to link prior and new learning. Where this linking was most successful, prior learning was retrieved at the beginning of lessons. This allowed teachers to explicitly build on students' current knowledge. In a particularly strong example, students were asked to consider current events side by side with the history they had encountered in previous lessons, in order to consider what had changed. This very good approach led to stimulating learning and thought-provoking interrogation of primary sources.

- Students' knowledge of History was evident, particularly in senior lessons. Specific attention had been paid by teachers to providing opportunities for students to advance their knowledge of history by engaging in the use of primary and secondary source material, both visual and written. There was also evidence of student research in TY, and of progress made by senior cycle students in their work on the Leaving Certificate Research Study Report. These were important opportunities to recognise the self-motivated work done by students and represented very effective practice. Working as historians do was crucial in building the ability of students to manage and share their learning with their teachers and with each other.

- The structure of lessons was of very good quality overall, particularly when students were working in pairs. Activities for pairs and groups were the default in lessons, and the familiarity of students with the process of think/pair/share, for example, was very clear. However, in a small number of lessons, some further planning of approaches to student questioning was necessary. This should be achieved by developing a common approach, across the department, to the use of questioning to assess student progress. In a few instances there was an over-reliance on closed questioning, while in other lessons there was better use of a variety of questioning techniques. The potential existed for the further formal sharing of good practice between the members of the department. This would improve lesson structure, and benefit students' engagement.

- In all lessons learning intentions were shared as the lesson began. In most lessons they were returned to as the lesson closed, and in a small number they were on display throughout the lesson. Therefore, though learning intentions were used in all lessons observed, there was a necessity for an improvement in their deployment during lessons. The History department should establish a procedure for the sharing and display of learning intentions at the beginning, during, and close, of every lesson.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support for History was very good.

- At the time of the evaluation the time allocation for junior and senior cycle History met requirements. TY students had two hours of History a week, with two modules changing mid-year. Teachers were well deployed across the timetable, though further rotation of the teaching of senior cycle history may be possible.

- The learning environment in which History teaching and learning took place varied from room to room. In some cases, the mix of some student work and subject-specific posters and displays was indicative of an understanding of the value of teaching and learning in a subject specific space, particularly for students who are new to the school. However, this very good practice should be replicated elsewhere as there was a need for further support for students in some of the rooms in which they were learning.

- The role of subject co-ordinator as outlined in school documentation was wide-ranging and comprehensive. It covered planning, arranging meetings, subject learning and assessment review (SLAR) meeting responsibilities, mentoring, competitions, examination preparation and reporting on student achievement. This role should be rotated frequently between the members of the department, and delegation of some of these duties should be made possible.

- The school undertook a range of activities to support students' knowledge of and interest in history, separate to classroom-based activities. History literacy and awareness were promoted through visits to historical sites in both Cork city and county which supported students' engagement with local history. Students in TY completed models or written reports on their locality. This was highly commendable.

- The department had access to digital devices which were shared across the school, as well as in two computer rooms. TY students used tablets to support their research. In focus groups students spoke of the support they derived from the use of digital technology. In particular, they highlighted its capacity to illuminate the exploration of key personalities, issues and events.

3. Planning and preparation

- Overall, the quality of planning and preparation was very good. Subject plans were comprehensive and thorough, particularly for senior cycle lessons.

- Junior cycle planning was good overall. Nonetheless student preparation for Junior Cycle classroom-based assessments (CBAs) should be further developed in plans. To familiarise students with the process for completing CBAs, elements of the process should be introduced in advance. The place of reflection was on occasion referred to in planning, but in lessons little reflection on student learning or in student learning took place. The process of reflection should become part of teaching and learning. Display, another important element of the assessment, was discussed by students in the focus group. They spoke of the display of their work as a further acknowledgement of its value. The department should explore providing a place for students' work to go on display as a guide to students who are yet to complete such research tasks.

- A very effective Transition Year programme had been designed. One of the most obvious strengths of the programme was how it connected students' learning from junior cycle with senior cycle History. The programme included student-led projects that promoted active learning and discovery learning. Activities undertaken in TY outside the classroom fostered an engagement with the subject that some focus group attendees found important for the further study of History at Leaving Certificate.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

For the students of St Vincent's Secondary School about their learning in History
Date of inspection:
18/09/2024

What kind of inspection did your school have?

A subject inspection was completed in your school. The inspector observed lessons and spoke with the principal and teachers. The inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning in History.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good overall.
- Teachers and students used primary and secondary sources during lessons.
- The school undertook a range of activities to support students outside including visits to historical sites.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in History?

- Teachers should develop a common approach to the use of questioning to assess student progress, across the department.
- The History department should establish a shared procedure for the sharing and display of learning intentions at the beginning, during and close of every lesson.

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.

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 quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective