

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

St Mary's College
Knockbeg, County Carlow
Roll number: 61130H

Date of inspection: 29 April 2013



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	29 April 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of the history teaching and learning evaluated was good.
- Lessons were characterised by good teacher-student rapport.
- While the range of methodologies utilised enhanced student learning, there was an imbalance between teacher led and independent learning activities for students in a minority of lessons.
- A good range of assessment modes is used to monitor students' progress.
- There is very good whole-school provision for the teaching and study of History.
- The good collaborative work of the history teachers supports the development of History in the school.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More widespread use should be made of the data projector in supporting student learning.
 - It is recommended that the allocation of a disproportionate amount of lesson time to directed reading be avoided.
 - The teachers' annual schemes of the coursework should be based on an agreed common template and included in the subject plan.
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INTRODUCTION

St. Mary's College is a diocesan secondary school for boys with a current enrolment of 366 students. The curricular programmes provided include the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). TY is optional for students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons evaluated. A minority of the lessons however, consisted of teacher-led activities. The development of these lessons could have been strengthened by the inclusion of a wider range of active learning methodologies involving independent tasks for students notwithstanding the enhancement of student learning achieved.
- Classroom management was uniformly good. The positive classroom atmosphere was underpinned by the mutually respectful relationship between the teachers and their students. Lessons were characterised by good teacher-student rapport.
- Lessons commenced with students being informed of the lesson topic and the intended learning objectives. In one lesson, the particular focus on the lesson topic and the learning objectives were encapsulated in two enquiry based questions that were highlighted on the board. The recapping on the learning objectives before the lesson concluded was sometimes overlooked or was restricted by the lesson time available. It is recommended that ring-fenced time be allocated to this activity.
- The teachers interacted well with their students to support learning during the lessons. For example, the teachers' use of targeted questions to individual students and global questions to the class helped to increase students' understanding and knowledge of the lesson topic. The potential of questioning to prompt discussion should however, be developed further.
- There was good use of visual resources such as the data projector and the board to enhance students' learning in a number of lessons. These resources facilitated the students' introduction to new lesson material, the revision of prior learning, classroom interaction and note taking. It is recommended however, that more widespread use be made of the data projector.
- The active learning methodologies that were observed included written tasks and reading. In a minority of lessons, the students were engaged in directed reading from a handout for a disproportionate amount of time. Although the activity was augmented by the teachers' interaction with students, it restricted the scope to include additional active learning methodologies in the lessons. This resulted in an imbalance between teacher-led and independent learning activities for students during the lessons. It is recommended, therefore, that such lengthy periods of reading be avoided.
- Homework is set regularly. The good practice of individual teachers of providing written, formative feedback comments on students' written assignments should become more strongly established in the history department.
- Students settled quickly into the study of their lesson topic and contributed to the study of the subject through their responsiveness to their teachers' questions and willing engagement in all classroom activities. The sample of students' copybooks and journals that were reviewed reflected their good application to their history coursework.

- A good range of assessment modes is used by the teachers to monitor students' progress. These include continuous assessment of students' progress which includes appraisal of students' attainment in the formal school and certificate examinations and class tests. There is strong uptake of higher-level History at both Junior and Leaving Certificate.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good curricular provision for History. Junior cycle and TY students study History as a core subject in their respective programmes and Leaving Certificate students can study History as an optional subject choice.
- The weekly timetabled allocation and distribution of history lesson periods provide good support for the subject. Junior cycle students have three single lesson periods for History per week; TY students have two single history periods and Leaving Certificate history students have five periods comprising three single and one double period.
- The subject is well resourced with the history teachers having their own base classrooms equipped with information and communication technology (ICT), a bank of supplementary resources and access to a learning management system, that enables the teachers to store and share computerised resources.
- The history teachers are all deployed to teach the subject and where feasible, continuity is maintained with the class group to which the teacher is initially assigned.
- School management actively encourages the development of teaching and learning by providing relevant continuing professional development (CPD) training for the teaching staff and facilitating the attendance of teachers at in-service training for their subject specialism.
- Management reviews subject department plans annually prior to meeting with the members of each subject department and analyses students' attainment in the certificate examinations to inform subject department planning and to establish comparisons with national norms.
- Formal school examinations are organised twice yearly before the Christmas and summer holidays commence and there are established procedures for informing parents of their son's progress. These include school reports that are based on class tests and continuous assessment, which are sent to parents at Halloween and Easter.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The good collaborative work of the history teachers in maintaining the development of History is evidenced by their rotation of the duties of subject co-ordinator, formal termly meetings, the subject department plan and their frequent informal meetings. The attention given to the implementation of the recommendations arising from a previous history subject inspection is also noted.
- The subject plan is an informative document that outlines for example, the relevant aims, objectives, course content, teaching methodologies, planning for students with special educational needs, assessment and homework procedures. The development of the plan is ongoing and in this context it is recommended that the teachers' annual schemes of the coursework be based on an agreed common template and included in the subject plan.

- The history teachers, as already mentioned, review students' attainment in History in the certificate examinations. Besides monitoring students' progress, the teachers' assessment and analysis of students' attainment also enable them to evaluate classroom pedagogy. With regard to the latter, details of the teachers' reflections on students' attainment in the Junior and Leaving Certificate History examinations should also be included in the department's plan.
 - All lessons observed had a planned development that involved the preparation of selected resources to enhance students' study of a new topic or the revision of a subject previously studied.
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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; a response was not received from the board.