

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Mary's Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Irishtown New Ross Co. Wexford
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63620L

Date of Inspection: 06-10-2016



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 evaluated learning and teaching in [History](#) under the following headings:

1. Learning, teaching 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.

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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	05/06-10-2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers of History• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 7 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers of History

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Saint Mary's is a voluntary secondary school with 631 female students from New Ross and its hinterland. The school is under the patronage of Catholic Education: An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). Its curriculum includes the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional Transition Year (TY) which is taken by the vast majority of students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Although more student-centred approaches are recommended, teaching and learning observed in History was of a consistently good quality, with some instances of excellent practice.
- Very good evidence of teacher subject knowledge, student diligence and positive student-teacher relationships was found in all lessons.
- Whole-school provision for History is very good, including resourcing, support for subject-related initiatives and timetable provision, despite limited availability in TY.
- Individual and departmental planning for History are consistently good, and recommendations within the report focus on some areas for collaborative development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A greater emphasis on active and participative teaching and learning approaches is recommended, particularly the use of stimulus material, student activities and sometimes deeper questioning strategies.
- The principles of assessment for learning merit closer consideration and more consistent deployment.
- While it is good that some provision is now being made for historical studies in TY, this provision needs to be consolidated and extended if possible.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was consistently good. There were occasional instances of excellent practice, particularly where seating arrangements were conducive to active learning and students were offered a variety of learning opportunities.
- Teachers demonstrated very good subject knowledge, and covered content appropriate to the relevant syllabus and level of the students. The quality of teacher explanations was uniformly very good.
- In most lessons, information and communication technology (ICT) was well used to provide text and visual material, and some very clear board structuring was also observed.
- In several instances, teachers were able to link content to broader issues like current affairs, how towns began, word origins, and causation and consequence. It was a challenge to get students to engage in prolonged discussion, but when this was done it was successful.
- In one lesson with particularly interactive methodology, the use of visual evidence to provoke interpretation and historical imagination was exemplary. In that context, it was very good to note a teacher comment 'Who have I not spoken to yet?' less than halfway through the period.
- Teacher-student rapport was very good in all lessons and classroom atmosphere was safe and supportive. Teachers were always positive and affirming of students.
- The challenge in a number of lessons was to make students more active in their own learning. A greater use of stimulus materials, such as comparative photographs, linked to questioning which requires student reflection and discussion, is recommended to encourage deeper learning opportunities and more student participation.
- In a small number of lessons, very good use was made of short video clips, including some humorous scenes, and these were consistently helpful in engaging students when used.
- Group working was not widely used as a methodology. Where pair tasks, word or matching games were used in individual lessons, these added variety and energy to students' work and placed responsibility appropriately on students for their own learning. Such strategies ought to be used more widely.
- The principles of assessment for learning merited more consistent deployment in several lessons. At optimum level, learning intentions were clarified from the outset and revisited as the lesson proceeded, providing a structure for students' self-directed learning.
- Most lessons included a review of recent homework. This was done orally, but a review of copybooks also showed that most teachers are giving good guidance and support on students' written work, including on extended writing tasks in senior cycle.
- Oral questioning was a significant feature of all lessons observed, though mainly based on gauging students' factual knowledge. More higher-order questioning is recommended overall to encourage discussion and reflection on deeper aspects of topics.
- Homework was assigned in every lesson visited, and linked to lesson content. Good variety in homework tasks was evident in most lessons, and included short questions and extended-writing work and, in one instance, some interesting drawing tasks.
- The overall policy of encouraging students to retain a glossary of key terms as they encounter them is a very sensible aid to subject literacy. Student note taking was observed in several lessons. Over time, it would be good to encourage students to reflect and, ideally, make their own notes based on classroom discussion.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school provision for History is very good. Most history lessons are delivered in teacher-based classrooms. These are generally well appointed, with good visual supports, including maps and timelines, with very good ICT provision.
- The school provides commendable co-curricular support for History, including history-themed trips and participation in the Ireland 2016 Proclamation Day.
- Timetable provision is very good, with three single periods per week for junior classes, where History is a core subject, and five periods per week for Leaving Certificate.
- With no provision for historical studies previously in TY, it is commendable that there is now a rotating module in social studies, which includes History. If more time could be found on the timetable for this, it should be an important support for senior History.
- The school intends to develop whole-school approaches to assessment for learning in particular. This would fit very well with some of the directions in teaching and learning which are recommended in this report.
- Commendable monitoring of outcomes in certificate examinations occurs at both management and department level, and these outcomes are impressive.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual and departmental planning for History are consistently good, and recommendations within the report focus on some areas for collaborative development.
- Regular subject department meetings are held and the outcomes minuted, under the direction of the volunteer subject co-ordinator. The department has agreed a common pace of course coverage for Junior Cycle and all lessons observed were at the desired point in syllabus delivery.
- Over time, the pooling of some individual teacher resources into an electronic department folder would further support collaborative planning. The school has good ICT and networking facilities, making this a realistic goal if and when time allows.
- Some common assessment approaches have been agreed, but there is scope for development here. Moving towards agreed test instruments in Christmas and summer examinations is recommended as a further support to common understanding of appropriate pedagogy and pace. This would also support any new, student or substitute teachers in the future.
- The approach being taken in the available time for historical studies in TY commendably emphasises students' enjoyment. The possibilities for TY studies in such a historic town are exciting, and the current timetable provision is a vital step in this direction.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Mary's Secondary School is pleased with the History Inspection Report. The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the 'consistently good' individual and departmental practice and that the teaching and learning observed 'was of a consistently good quality.' The Board welcomes the positive findings relating to teacher subject knowledge, student diligence and the 'positive student-teacher relationships.' Recognition of the 'very good' whole-school provision for History is also welcomed.

Part B: 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, Senior Management and staff welcome the recommendations of this report. We are committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning and value reflection on our practice. The History Department teachers are incorporating the recommendations regarding a greater emphasis on active and participative teaching and learning approaches. They are also reviewing how best the principles of assessment for learning can be used in their lessons. The possibility for consolidation and extension of historical studies in TY will be considered in our timetable review later in the school year.

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 the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;