

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Christian Brothers Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Thomas St Wexford
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63640R

Date of Inspection: 12-10-2016



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; a response was not received from the board.

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	11 & 12 October 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with deputy principal and subject teachers• Discussion with subject co-ordinator• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and subject teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Coláiste Éamonn Rís is an all-boys voluntary secondary school in Wexford town under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust. The school offers the Junior Certificate (JC), Leaving Certificate (LC) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school also offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. Current enrolment is 603 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons observed; in a minority of lessons, good and satisfactory provision was evident, with some areas for improvement identified.
- In the majority of lessons, there was a strong focus on 'learning by doing' with many opportunities for students to work in pairs or in group activities.
- Some very good examples of well-designed worksheets and activities were used in lessons to promote historical enquiry and analysis.
- Good differentiation for students of varying abilities was evident in the oral questions teachers posed and in one-to-one interactions with students. However, in the majority of lessons, there was scope for greater differentiation.
- The history department conducts an annual analysis and review of certificate examination results and is commended for its ability to reflect on these results.
- An excellent online resource has been developed by the department to support senior students accessing lesson materials and additional resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The further integration of differentiated methodologies is advised to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged.
- Schemes of work should be revised and updated to promote a more developmental approach to include links to learning outcomes, teaching and assessment methodologies, and resources.

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons observed; in a minority of lessons good and satisfactory provision was evident with some areas for improvement identified.
- All lessons had a clear purpose and began with the sharing of learning intentions. In a minority of instances, more linkage of lesson content to learning outcomes was recommended. At optimum level, learning intentions were expressed in terms of what students should know or be able to do and were reviewed at the end of lessons in order to assess students' progress.
- In the majority of lessons, there was a strong focus on 'learning by doing' with opportunities for students to work in pairs or in group activities which were linked to either oral feedback or completion of a worksheet. In these contexts, teachers were very adept at facilitating discussion and ensuring all students participated meaningfully.
- Very good examples of well-designed worksheets and activities were used in some lessons to promote historical enquiry and analysis. For example, mind-maps were used to assist students in organising key historical content relevant for extended writing assignments and a sorting exercise was used to challenge students to make links between opinions expressed and key historical figures during the Treaty negotiations.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers effectively used a think-pair-share template to facilitate student engagement both independently and collaboratively. Students displayed a very good knowledge and understanding of the topics taught throughout these lessons.
- Video clips and the use of images brought an important visual dimension to almost all lessons. One very good example of historical enquiry and analysis of visual sources, involved the use of primary source material. To encourage an interrogation of this source, questions were set to guide purposeful student discussion of the source material: this type of approach merits further use.
- In a few lessons, emphasis was placed on giving information through teacher talk or well-prepared presentations which students copied down. In these instances, strategies to provide opportunities for student-centred activities and to facilitate students to develop their own notes should be fostered. Teachers should discuss and share good practice in the use of student-centred approaches, with the possibility of targeting this as an area for peer observation.
- The overall quality of assessment was good. Most teachers distributed oral questions around the class successfully, involving both volunteers and nominated students. Students were supported by teachers to contribute their opinions freely in class discussion.
- Good differentiation for students of varying abilities was evident in the oral questions teachers posed and in one-to-one interactions with students observed in some lessons. However, in the majority of lessons, there was scope for greater differentiation. It is recommended that the department further integrate differentiated methodologies to ensure all students are appropriately challenged.
- A selection of students' copybooks and journals were reviewed. In the majority of cases, homework was assigned frequently. In some instances, supportive formative comments from teachers were evident and this good practice should be extended. There is scope to incorporate peer and self-assessment opportunities to encourage learner autonomy.
- Literacy skills were supported in all lessons. Excellent practice was observed where a venn diagram was used by students to categorise key vocabulary. Students worked both

independently and collaboratively on this task, with an emphasis on discussing their understanding of key terms and to justify orally their choices.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- History is a core subject in junior cycle and is one of a number of subjects offered to students at senior cycle. Subject option bands are generated around students' choice in senior cycle and the uptake of History is very good.
- In TY, History is provided to students as a ten-week module. It was noted during the evaluation that some students could miss up to a third of the module through involvement in other TY activities. It is advised that timetabling of TY should be monitored regularly and provision reviewed to ensure students have the opportunity to engage purposefully with the History course.
- School management encourage teachers to attend continuous professional development (CPD) events and to share good practice within the subject department. Teachers have identified the area of differentiation for mixed-ability settings as an area for further CPD. The department, in collaboration with senior management, should address this.
- The history department has an extensive collection of books, DVDs and videos. An excellent online resource has been developed by the department to support senior students accessing lesson materials and additional resources.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Department meetings are held regularly and it is good practice that minutes of meetings are appropriately documented. Given the culture of shared responsibility already within the department, rotating coordination duties among the team would be a further means of strengthening capacity and experience.
- The history department planning folder gives a good outline of the provision and organisation of the subject in the school. Some areas need to be updated to reflect current practices, such as providing support to students with special educational needs (SEN) and the organisation and mentoring of Professional Masters in Education (PME) teachers within the history department.
- Adequate yearly schemes of work have been developed. There is scope to progress these schemes more as 'living documents' that direct and guide classroom practice and student experience. Schemes of work should be revised and updated to promote a more developmental approach to include links to learning outcomes, teaching and assessment methodologies, and resources.
- The TY subject plan provided a good indication of the areas of study. Expansion of this plan is recommended to include expected learning outcomes, a variety of assessment modes and references to key skills. The use of the NCCA Transition Unit planning template should be considered.
- The history department is highly commended for its analysis and review of certificate examination results. To advance this good practice the department could identify specific actions related to teaching and learning that would support improvements and include these in their planning documentation.

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 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. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. 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;