

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Drogheda Grammar School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Mornington Road Drogheda County Louth
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	63870L

Date of Inspection: 07-12-2016



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	6-7 December 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and subject teachers• Meeting with subject coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction with students• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Drogheda Grammar School is a co-educational fee-charging school with a current enrolment of 306 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes and there is a compulsory Transition Year (TY) in the senior cycle.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good; lessons were characterised by very high standards of behaviour and attention, with a very good student-teacher rapport evident.
- All lessons were well planned and teachers made good use of worksheets, film clips and electronic presentations to present and structure historical content.
- While some good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, the main pedagogical approach in the majority of lessons observed was teacher-centred.
- In all lessons, there was a very good emphasis on the development of students' historical literacy through a focus on subject-specific vocabulary and concepts.
- Subject provision and whole-school support are very good.
- A comprehensive history department plan is in place; it is very good practice that teachers' reflections on the progress of lessons each term inform annual reviews of the schemes of work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers' should review why and how they use a learning intention approach to teaching and consider the level to which students take responsibility for achieving the lesson's learning intention.
- To accommodate the varying learning styles in a mixed-ability setting, teachers should plan for differentiated strategies in lessons and for the inclusion of student-led activities to appropriately challenge all learners.
- Teachers should incorporate the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment opportunities to allow all students to make judgements about the quality of their learning and to further assist them in taking responsibility for improvement.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons were characterised by very high standards of behaviour and attention, with a very good teacher-student rapport evident.
- In the main history room, there is an impressive display of student projects on Ancient Rome and the Battle of Clontarf, historical posters and keywords which creates a very positive learning environment.
- All lessons were well planned and teachers made good use of worksheets, film clips and electronic presentations to present and structure historical content.
- In the majority of lessons observed, learning intentions were shared with students mainly in terms of lesson content. Best practice was noted with senior students where the learning intention clearly articulated the knowledge, understanding and skills to be achieved by the end of the lesson. It is recommended that teachers review why and how they use a learning intention approach to teaching and consider the level to which students take responsibility for achieving the lesson's learning intention.
- Teachers made good use of models, images and video clips to engage students with historical content such as Ancient Rome and Rise of Hitler. To optimise the benefits of these visual stimuli, further interrogation of these sources is required, such as the pre-identification of key questions for students to consider individually or in pairs.
- Group tasks were a positive feature of half the lessons observed. While engaged with such tasks, students showed a very good level of understanding and knowledge of the historical topics, particularly senior students when discussing the 'Hunger Strikes' in Northern Ireland.
- In some lessons, students were encouraged to record key facts by themselves as the lesson progressed; while in other lessons, students' simply transcribed notes from electronic presentations. Teachers should consider the benefit of note-taking for student learning and incorporate opportunities for students to reflect and discern what is important in order to further develop their skills of selecting, recording and synthesising historical information.
- While some good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, the main pedagogical approach in the majority of lessons observed was teacher-centred with the same material, tasks and homework assigned to all students. To accommodate the varying learning styles in a mixed-ability setting, it is recommended that teachers plan for differentiated strategies and for the inclusion of more student-led activities.
- There was good use of directed and global questioning to monitor students' overall understanding of key words, facts and knowledge. However, whole-class questioning focused mainly on lower-order questions and, at times, there was a need for questions to delve more deeply to challenge students. More variation of questioning strategies that actively engage and challenge students is required to foster deeper historical understanding.
- From reviewing student copybooks, it was evident that in all lessons teachers assign homework frequently. Written formative comments were noted on extended writing tasks; in some cases, this feedback was of particularly high quality. The most effective feedback gave directional guidance to students on areas of improvements.
- It is good practice that assessment criteria are shared with Leaving Certificate students and are used to assess their written work. To build on this good practice, teachers should incorporate the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment opportunities to allow all

students to make judgements about the quality of their learning and to further assist them in taking responsibility for improvement.

- In all lessons, there was a very good emphasis on the development of students' historical literacy through a focus on subject-specific vocabulary and concepts.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole school support is very good. Timetable provision for History is in line with good practice for all year groups. All students take History for both Junior Cycle and TY, and it is offered as an optional subject at Leaving Certificate. Uptake of History is good at senior cycle.
- School management is very supportive of teachers continuing professional development (CPD). To build on the learning from these CPD opportunities, school management should provide opportunities for the sharing of good practice to further enhance the good history pedagogy already noted in classrooms.
- Very good provision is made for the management of resources. The department has an extensive collection of books, DVDs and videos and students can also use the library to conduct research.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of planning and preparation is very good. A collaborative and collegial approach to subject planning for History was evident. Department meetings are held regularly and a good record of discussions is maintained.
- A comprehensive history department plan is in place; it is very good practice that teachers' reflections on the progress of lessons each term inform annual reviews of the schemes of work. In this way, the collaborative department plan supports and guides the teaching and learning of history.
- The department has collated an impressive shared folder of electronic resources which supports a collaborative approach to teaching and assessment.
- A broad range of topics is studied in TY and the content is detailed within the department plan. As part of a planned review of this programme, reference to expected learning outcomes, a variety of assessment modes and the development key skills, such as research skills and oral presentation, should be incorporated into the plan.
- The work the department has done in creating a school website dedicated to supporting students' learning of History is commendable.
- The history department conducts an annual analysis and review of certificate examination results. To benefit from this good practice, the department should 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 and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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 Drogheda Grammar School is pleased with the History Inspection Report and its observations and findings.

The comments in relation to Teaching and Learning, Subject and Whole School Support and Planning and Preparation are positive and reflect well overall on the staff and school.

The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the good quality teaching and learning taking place in the History department and also welcomes the recognition that our teachers ensure “very high standards of behaviour and attention, with a very good teacher-student rapport”.

It also noted the comments regarding the high quality of feedback given, of the high standard of planning and reflection our History department engages in and the examples of best practice that were evident in the classes.

The Board welcomes the recognition of the good quality subject provision and whole school support for History is also welcomed. Overall the inspection was a positive experience which highlighted the strength and quality of the history department.

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, as a school community, are committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning in our school and we value reflection on our practice and any advice given.

We have undertaken a review of our school timetable and will be increasing the length of classes to allow for more differentiated strategies and more student led activities.

The school is also completing a Forbairt leadership and training programme based on feedback which will challenge students to make stronger judgments about the quality of the teaching and learning and self-assess.

The History Department will aim to adopt a directive for outlining learning intentions at the beginning of lessons which will encourage students to take responsibility for achieving the lesson’s learning intention.

To further encourage student self-assessment the History Department is implementing a shared spreadsheet which will require students to record their grades and feedback to encourage them to self-assess and to reflect on their learning.

The History Department will continue to work on their strategy to accommodate alternative learning styles and will continue to add to the wide variety of resources already available on DGSHistory.com

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