

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	St. Catherine's Vocational School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Donegal Road Killybegs Co. Donegal
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	71241W

Date of Inspection: 10-04-2019



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

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. 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.

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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

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.

The school met the requirements in relation to 1 and 2 of the checks above. The school did not meet the requirements in relation to 3 above and therefore was not fully compliant with the checks undertaken. However, the school has subsequently furnished evidence of compliance with these requirements.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Date(s) of inspection	9 and 10 April 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff

School context

St Catherine's Vocational school is a co-educational school under the trusteeship of the Donegal Education and Training Board (DETB). The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate. It currently caters for 326 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good overall; in some instances there was an over-reliance on teacher-led explanation and oral questioning.
- Overall, students' responses and interactions in most lessons demonstrated a good range of knowledge and skills appropriate to the subject level.
- The quality of in-class assessment was good; students' learning would be further enhanced by the embedding of teacher assessment practices that assist students to self-assess and reflect on their own learning.
- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support is very good; management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD).
- The overall quality of subject planning is good; however, in some plans there was a greater emphasis on course content rather than linking learner outcomes with the development of historical skills.

Recommendations

- In all lessons, learning tasks and questioning strategies should be designed to actively engage and challenge students to think critically, and provide sufficient challenge for all students.
- The history department should share success criteria with students to support them to make informed evaluative judgements about their learning.
- The history department should discuss and plan for teaching, learning and assessment methodologies that support the development of students' historical skills.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good; in some instances there was an over-reliance on teacher-led explanation and oral questioning.
- Overall, students' responses and interactions in lessons demonstrated a good range of subject knowledge and skills appropriate to their level. Interactions between students and teachers were respectful and positive. Students expressed their interest in History as motivation for choosing the subject and this interest in the subject was evident during the lessons observed.
- Stimulating learning environments have been created in each of the rooms visited including displays of student projects on a variety of historical personalities and events, historical models such as castles and subject-specific posters.
- In all lessons, relevant learning intentions were shared with students. Good practice was noted where the intentions were presented as what students should be able to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson. There is scope to explore how learning intentions can be used more effectively to support each student to reflect on their own learning. Further embedding of strategies related to learning intentions into lessons, identified as part of the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, would enhance this reflective aspect of students' learning.
- In the majority of lessons observed there was an appropriate balance between student and teacher activity through the use of well-designed tasks to guide students' learning. However, in some lessons observed there was an over-reliance on teacher-led explanation and oral questioning. Learning tasks should be designed to facilitate more meaningful student participation and active engagement with historical material to challenge them to think critically.
- Video clips were used in almost all lessons to engage students with learning and they clearly enjoyed these types of resources. This approach to learning was most effective when accompanied by pre-identified tasks that actively engaged and challenged students and supported the development of historical skills of enquiry and analysis. This good practice should be expanded across the department.
- The quality of in-class assessment was good. Teachers used directed and global questioning appropriately to monitor students' overall understanding. However, many questions tended to be lower-order, requiring very brief answers, with teachers then expanding on the answers themselves. In order to maximise student engagement with the lesson content, teachers should vary the range of questions asked to include more higher-order questions, which challenge students to think and deepen their learning.
- It was evident from reviewing students' copybooks that homework is assigned regularly and student progress is monitored in all lessons. In the majority of lessons observed, examples of good-quality feedback to students was evident on assignments, where directional feedback on areas for improvement was provided. To further support this approach, success criteria should be generated and shared with students. This will enable students to know what success looks like, and empower them to make informed evaluative judgements about their learning.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole-school support for History is very good. History is an optional subject at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels, and forms part of the core subjects studied during the TY programme.
- Subject option bands are generated based on student preferences at both junior cycle and Leaving Certificate. Student uptake of History fluctuates depending on the year group, with high numbers taking the subject in some years to no classes being formed in other years. Notwithstanding this fluctuation, school management is committed to continuing to offer the subject to students each year.
- Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) and a good range of whole-school in-service opportunities has taken place.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning and preparation is good overall.
- A good quality department plan outlines the provision and organisation of the subject in the school. A collaborative approach to subject planning for History is evident. Department meetings are held regularly, both formally and informally, and minutes of meetings are documented appropriately.
- Good progress has been made in the planning for the new Junior Cycle specification for History. Collaboratively, teachers should further develop the 'Units of Learning' approach to planning that take cognisance of the knowledge, understanding, skills and values that the teacher wishes to develop.
- A TY course has appropriately been developed around students' interest in World War One and Two. The TY programme plan reviewed provided a detailed list of the content to be covered in these areas of study, and included a good range of assessment practices. It was noted that there was a greater emphasis on course content than on linking learner outcomes with the development of historical skills. The history department should discuss and plan for the integration of teaching, learning and assessment methodologies that support the development of students' historical skills.
- Data regarding student attainment in the certificate examinations are reviewed annually against the national norms for the subject. To benefit from this good practice, the department should record their observations and discuss how teaching and learning methodologies impact on student attainment.

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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

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Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

School Management would like it noted that in relation check 3 under Child Protection that all school staff partook in Child Protection training on the 27/02/18, the Child Safeguarding Statement & Risk Assessment were circulated to all staff on the 13/1/18 and again on 10/05/2019. The roles and responsibilities of Mandated Persons were circulated to staff in March 2019.

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 of 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;