

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

**Subject Inspection in History**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Ó Fiaich College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Dublin Road Dundalk County Louth
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	71770D

**Date of Inspection: 07-12-2017**



### **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. 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.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	4 & 7 December 2017
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Ó Fiaich College operates under the management of the Louth Meath Education and Training Board and comprises a post-primary school and an Institute of Further Education that provides Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The co-educational post-primary school has a current enrolment of 322 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion and offers the full range of curricular programmes including an optional Transition Year (TY).

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good with a significant emphasis placed on developing students' interest in the historical period in an affirming and positive manner.
- The quality of assessment was good or very good in the lessons observed; very good practice was evident with some year groups when directional feedback on areas for improvement was provided.
- Students' historical literacy was strongly reinforced by teachers' deliberate focus on key words.
- The quality of whole-school provision for the subject is good; History is an optional subject and uptake has fluctuated from year to year.
- School management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) and a good range of whole-school in-service opportunities has taken place.
- The quality of planning and preparation is very good with good-quality schemes of work in place; there is scope to develop the TY plan further.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should agree and implement strategies which provide a more structured approach to developing writing skills with junior-cycle students.
- School management and the history department should review the provision of History for students involved in the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP).
- To continue to support students' engagement with History in TY, more explicit links to the development of key skills and specific assessment approaches should be incorporated into the department plan.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good.
- In all lessons, significant emphasis was placed on developing students' interest in the historical period in an affirming and positive manner. Students were able to contribute their opinions during class discussion and in some lessons they made presentations confidently displaying a good knowledge and understanding of the particular topics.
- Highly effective engagement in learning was evident in some lessons where very creative examples of introducing learning intentions were observed. For instance, where a 'post-it' size image of a child working in a factory was used as a stimulus, fostering historical enquiry and facilitating the sharing of the learning intentions. Students recorded what they had learned on the reverse of the image as part of the reflection at the end of the lesson.
- Very good preparation for teaching was evident in all lessons with teacher-designed worksheets, electronic presentations and video clips. In a few lessons, these resources were used effectively to scaffold learning, supporting a developmental approach to students' understanding and knowledge of History. In one particular lesson, further differentiation was evident in the provision of an optional research task.
- Very good use of primary sources such as documents and images were evident in almost all lessons to enable students to connect with the period. In a few lessons, very effective analyses of these images was observed through oral questioning. This approach supported students to identify and describe key information and to draw conclusions, thus promoting historical enquiry.
- In the majority of lessons, there was a strong focus on learning by doing with opportunities for students to work independently, in pairs or in small groups. In one very successful lesson a 'jigsaw' approach to learning was adopted as students became experts and taught each other significant information relating to a key historical figure.
- Student engagement was less effective in a few lessons where too much time was given to teacher explanation and delivery of information. In these lessons, teachers should be mindful of the balance between student and teacher input and plan for more opportunities for students to engage actively with the historical material.
- The quality of assessment was good or very good in the lessons observed. Teachers were adept at distributing oral questions, involving both volunteers and nominated students. In some lessons, the use of images and maps as prompts and the frequent asking of 'why?' and 'how?' questions by teachers supported the development of students' critical thinking skills well.
- Some good strategies associated with assessment for learning were observed, including exit-notes, quiz, word search and oral questions with junior students and online assessment applications and mini-white boards were used with seniors.
- Teachers track the progress of students in class effectively through homework and regular class tests. Information gathered from these in-class assessments can also be used to inform planning for teaching and learning approaches to support on-going improvements.
- Students' historical literacy was reinforced strongly by teachers' deliberate focus on key words, which is in line with the whole-school approach evident in DEIS planning. Very good practice was noted with Leaving Certificate classes where directional feedback on areas for

improvement related to written assignments was provided. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that teachers agree and implement strategies which provide a more structured approach to developing writing skills with junior-cycle students.

## **2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The quality of whole-school provision for History is good. Overall, timetabling arrangements are supportive of the subject; however, further consideration is needed to the weekly spread of lessons in senior cycle to ensure regular contact where possible.
- History is an optional subject. Students who chose History in junior cycle either follow the established History syllabus or Environmental and Social Studies (ESS), a combination of History and Geography, for students involved in the JCSP. In light of changes outlined in the *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015*, it is an opportune time to review the provision of History for JCSP students and the associated statements of learning which feature in the programme.
- It is commendable that all students in TY have the opportunity to study History for a semester.
- Uptake for the subject at both junior and senior cycle has fluctuated over recent years. In an effort to address this, the history department should review and monitor student uptake and liaise with senior management in relation to more effective promotion of the subject.
- School management is very supportive of teachers' CPD and a good range of whole-school in-service opportunities has taken place.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of planning and preparation is very good. Both the history and the ESS planning folders were reviewed during the course of the inspection.
- Department meetings are held regularly, both formally and informally, and minutes of meetings are documented appropriately. A collaborative approach to the sharing of resources is supported by the collation of all department planning documentation on the school's intranet.
- A comprehensive subject department plan includes good-quality schemes of work for each year group which are used to guide and structure lessons.
- A very interesting scheme of work has been developed for TY students which is differentiated appropriately to ensure it engages all students, not just those who have previously studied History. To build on these topics of study, the department should outline the expected learning outcomes, links to development of key skills and specific assessment approaches.
- Commendably, the history department tracks and analyses trends in attainment by conducting an annual analysis of student achievement in the certificate examinations. There is scope to use this data further to inform actions that support continuous improvements in teaching and learning.

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**

The History department has held internal meetings and liaised with management to discuss the History subject inspection report and its recommendations.

In order to develop writing skills with the Junior Cycle, the History department has decided to implement strategies that have been recommended by the PDST. In particular, the department will adopt the use of writing frames in order to develop our students' ability to scaffold answers and thereby improve the structure of written answers.

Each teacher from the department will agree on a strategy they will implement with their class and come back to the department with the positives and negatives of their experiences. Following these department meetings, the History Subject Policy will be updated with these strategies.

Regarding the fact that the subject Environmental and Social Studies (ESS) is no longer available in the new Junior Cycle, a number of options are being examined for subject provision to the Junior Cycle Schools programme. Discussions with advisors from the JCT programme are scheduled that will examine options, including the possibility of first-year students having the option of studying the new common level History syllabus. Further options will be explored in these discussions.

The History department will liaise with the TY coordinator and management to discuss linking the History plan to the development of key skills as outlined in the Transition Year Plan. Our aim is to help TY students improve communication, organisation and creativity skills in line with the overall TY objectives.

## 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
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;