

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Coláiste Choilm Christian Brothers School
Swords, County Dublin
Roll number: 60383I

Date of inspection: 11 November 2015



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	10 & 11 November 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• 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 and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good, with some instances of excellent practice observed.
- Very good teacher-student relations were evident and all lessons were taught in a respectful and supportive learning environment.
- A very comprehensive subject plan and range of resources have been developed to support the teaching and learning of History.
- While some very good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, the main pedagogical approach in the majority of lessons was teacher centred.
- The provision for History is very good and school management is very supportive of teachers' continuous professional development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further integration of cooperative learning strategies is required to enhance a collaborative approach to learning and to allow for greater differentiation in mixed-ability classes.
- Written, formative comments should be used on students' work in order to provide clear directions on how to maintain ongoing improvement.
- Engagement with the History Teachers' Association of Ireland (HTAI) and other professional agencies would be worthwhile for the history department.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Choilm, Christian Brothers School, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust, is an all-boys voluntary secondary school catering for 540 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate programmes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good, with some instances of excellent practice observed in lessons.
- Very good teacher-student relations were evident and all lessons were taught in a respectful and supportive learning environment with examples of students' project work on Ancient Rome and World War I, along with key-word walls and historical posters, displayed prominently in some classrooms.
- In the majority of lessons, the teachers used the board effectively to support students' learning by recording the learning intentions, key words and homework. To build on this good practice, learning intentions should be expressed in terms of what students should know or be able to do and should be reviewed at the end of lessons to assess students' progress.
- Teacher-led instruction was the dominant methodology in the lessons observed. A more effective balance between teacher input and student activity was achieved during some phases of lessons. For example, students were more engaged and challenged in their understanding of events when involved in paired activities, using primary sources, matching vocabulary and a discursive task on the actions of Oliver Cromwell. Further integration of such cooperative learning strategies is recommended to support a collaborative approach to learning and to allow for greater differentiation in mixed-ability classes.
- Good analysis of maps, photographs and video clips used to introduce topics, such as the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the Plantations, brought an important visual dimension to class work. Consideration should also be given to the pre-identification of related tasks when planning lessons, such as key questions for students to consider in pairs, to further promote historical enquiry and analysis.
- There was good use of directed and global questioning to monitor students' overall understanding of key words, facts and knowledge. This good practice could be broadened to include approaches such as the use of open-ended questions, increased wait-time, and peer reflection and discussion to foster deeper historical understanding.
- Students, in most classrooms visited, received regular homework; the dominant approach being to deploy comprehension tasks. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that students be given opportunities to undertake a variety of tasks throughout the year. Written formative comments should be used on work in copybooks to provide students with clear directions on how to maintain ongoing improvement.
- Common testing takes place across all year groups. It is good practice that project work is a key feature of TY and forms part of the formal assessment system.
- In the majority of lessons, there was a good emphasis on the development of students' historical literacy through a focus on subject-specific vocabulary and concepts. Students' literacy is further reinforced by the whole-school strategy of providing students with

opportunities to read aloud and the emphasis on developing their oral presentation skills; something that was particularly evident with TY students presenting information on the 1916 Rising. An additional focus on specific keywords associated with cause, consequence, deduction and argument could help to further extend students' ability to discuss and write History.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for history is very good in all relevant curricular programmes and timetable provision is in line with good practice.
- The increased number of students taking History for higher level at Junior Cycle and the increased numbers taking History as an optional subject at Leaving Certificate are praiseworthy.
- The school management is open to the purchase of resources for the history department and very supportive of teachers' continuous professional development. Engagement with the History Teachers' Association of Ireland (HTAI) and other professional agencies would be worthwhile for the history department.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- In the majority of lessons, teacher preparation was very good. In some instances, good-quality electronic presentations were used to introduce new topics.
- The members of the history department are highly commended for the range of resources available on their shared folder on the school intranet that is accessible to all teachers. In addition, they have started to use a social learning platform as a means for students to access additional resources to support their learning outside the classroom.
- Departmental planning for History is of a very good quality. A comprehensive subject plan includes very good sections on literacy and planning for students with additional educational needs. The schemes of work for each programme are time bound and laid out in terms of learning outcomes, assessment methodologies and resources, in line with good practice.
- A TY plan was reviewed during the inspection; it provided a good indication of the areas of study and included good reference to key skills to be developed such as oral presentation and research skills throughout the course. Expansion of this plan to include the expected learning outcomes for students is recommended.
- The position of co-ordinator is shared between two teachers, meetings are held regularly and minutes are recorded. To further develop the effectiveness of this planning time, a greater focus on teaching and learning methodologies that will support differentiation in mixed-ability classes is recommended.
- To promote a shared focus on teaching and learning, the teachers should reflect on and track students' certificate examination results and plan appropriate actions as necessary to further support students' learning.
- Practices relating to record keeping and reporting to parents are good. Students' attendance, examination results and progress in class are communicated to parents at parent-teacher meetings, in formal reports throughout the year and through the school journal.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. 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.