

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Royal School Cavan
County Cavan
Roll number: 61080S

Date of inspection: 9 December 2011



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	8 and 9 December 2011
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 5 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning were good to very good across all classes inspected, with good and often imaginative methodologies in evidence.
- There was good emphasis on learning outcomes in most lessons inspected. Student-to-student questioning was encouraged, which reinforced learning.
- Provision for History is good across all programmes delivered.
- Whole-school support for History is very good with teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) encouraged by management.
- History department planning is very good, with frequent meetings, good record-keeping and regular reviews.
- Assessment methods are good and developing, with a growing emphasis on assessment for learning (AfL) and self-evaluation.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that learning outcomes be shared with students at the outset and revisited at the conclusion of each lesson.
 - There should be greater use of pair and group work in lessons, with more emphasis on student-centred learning activities.
 - Further development of AfL is recommended, with an emphasis on literacy.
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INTRODUCTION

The Royal School, Cavan, a co-educational school with an enrolment of 237 students (130 males and 107 females), provides boarding facilities for over 40 students. The school celebrated its quatercentenary this year, when An Taoiseach attended and spoke at the event marking the anniversary. The Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) which is compulsory, and Leaving Certificate programmes are provided in the school, which is under the patronage of the Church of Ireland.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning were good to very good in all lessons inspected. There was a wide variety of methodologies employed in the various lessons which were characterised by clear introductions, the use of key words and the display of learning objectives, in most cases, on the whiteboard.
- Question-and-answer sessions, used in most instances to recap on the previous material covered, were well utilised, with evidence of differentiation in many cases. Questions were well distributed around the classes and all questions were asked of named students, which is good practice. In some cases, students were asked to frame and ask questions of their peers before the conclusion of the lesson. This strategy worked well, represented a level of self-evaluation, and should be extended to more classes.
- At the end of each lesson, there was some further reference to the learning outcomes. This practice should be used to reinforce the learning process at the conclusion of all lessons.
- A wide range of methodologies was in evidence in the lessons inspected, with frequent use of information and communications technology (ICT) to underpin and illustrate the principal concept or theme of the topic. Imaginative use of ICT, in combination with worksheets, moved the students forward in their understanding of the subject, with reinforcement through verbal questioning or written work. In some cases maps and other illustrative material on the classroom walls were utilised to expand the students' understanding and this is very good practice. In a few instances it was recommended that specific visual aids be used to illustrate a point, especially where art or technology were part of the topic.
- Good documentary material was used to support learning in senior cycle History, where such material is mandatory in the syllabus. This was carefully prepared and used in the lessons inspected. Students responded well to both documentary and film material used in classes, and displayed their learning and understanding in exercises and discussion which followed.
- Classroom management was good in all cases, enabling teachers to keep students on task throughout the lessons. Where pair or group work was used it was successful in promoting learning, and further use of this strategy is recommended. Where teachers tended to monopolise activity or information-giving it was recommended that they diversify their methodology to include more student-centred learning.
- Students in all instances were focused, engaged, hard-working and well-behaved. Teaching and learning were thus enhanced in all lessons inspected, which is commended.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- History is compulsory in junior cycle and TY. Subject provision is good across all programmes, with an unusual deployment of time in junior cycle which appears to work well. Management strongly supports the development of the subject and co- and cross-curricular activity. Subject options available for Leaving Certificate have been reviewed in recent years, with a resultant increase in History uptake. It is recommended that this good practice be continued. Timetabling is appropriate and adequate for the subject in all programmes.
- Extracurricular activities are organised frequently, particularly for first-year and TY students. Both local and national facilities are visited in this programme, which expands students' experience in the subject and is commended.
- The school has developed both assessment and homework policies, and these were in evidence during the inspection. The assessment focus is currently on expanding Assessment for Learning (AfL), which is beginning to work well. There was evidence of formative assessment in the correction of students' work, and teachers are recommended to expand and develop this practice.
- History teachers encourage students to take the subject at the level appropriate to their abilities, and analyse certificate examination outcomes annually, using national and past statistics to inform future practice and policy in the subject.
- There is currently a move towards student self-evaluation, which was observed in two of the classes inspected. This is positive, and the teachers are planning to expand its use.
- The students' diary is reasonably well-utilised to record work and to facilitate home-school communication, but its use needs to be expanded to include all students, parents and teachers.
- Regular end-of-topic tests in History are complemented by in-school examinations twice a year, after which written reports are sent home to parents.
- The History teachers, all of whom are appropriately qualified, are encouraged by management to access CPD. Several courses have recently been attended, for example in ICT, AfL, and junior cycle History. This is commended, as is expanding their links with professional associations. Teachers also access History periodicals and share content and ideas with senior cycle classes, which is good practice.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- History subject department planning is very good. The teachers meet monthly, and their coordinator, who is appointed by rotation, organises the agenda and minutes. These records are carefully kept and used as action plans, which is best practice. The department frequently reviews its plans and discusses syllabus and assessment progress and outcomes.
- A comprehensive planning folder, which incorporates records, syllabuses, lists of resources and yearly plans, is kept updated and is accessible to all History teachers. Curricular and class plans are developed by teachers, who also ensure that displays of subject-relevant materials are maintained in their classrooms. They use school and local

libraries, as well as the ICT room, for history resources and research. Students are encouraged in this work.

- Attendance and progress records, which are kept by all the History teachers, are also utilised for future planning, which is very good.

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.