

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Cnoc Mhuire
Granard, County Longford
Roll number: 63730S

Date of inspection: 18 October 2011



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

Date of inspection	18 October 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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning varied from good to poor in the lessons observed.
- There was good use of resources in most lessons to enhance teaching and learning.
- Student learning was supported by the range of effective teaching and learning methodologies observed.
- There is good support for History within the organisational framework of the school.
- The progress of the students is monitored by management and the history teachers.
- The collaborative work of the history teachers supports the development of History in the school.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Management and the history department should identify and implement strategies to encourage the uptake of Leaving Certificate History among senior cycle students.
- The ongoing development of the subject department plan should be maintained.
- Strategies should be employed to ensure that all students choose the level in their Junior Certificate History examination that is most appropriate for them.

INTRODUCTION

Cnoc Mhuire is a voluntary, co-educational secondary school with a current enrolment of 446 students. The curricular programmes provided by the school include the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning varied from good where the development of the lesson had a clear structure, to poor where a definite structure was lacking as was the case in one lesson.
- At the outset of most lessons the students were informed of the topic to be studied and in a number of lessons the students were also informed of the learning outcomes, which were noted on the classroom board. These good practices should be adopted in all lessons because they highlight the purpose of the lesson to the students.
- There was good use of resources in most lessons to enhance teaching and learning. For example, the classroom board was used very effectively in one lesson to display in a diagrammatic format important points relating to the students' study of their lesson topic. This information was gleaned from teacher exposition and interaction with the students as the lesson progressed. A PowerPoint presentation was used in another lesson in conjunction with a work sheet and ongoing teacher interaction to enhance learning. Another instance was the reading of a prepared handout and the display of a model of a Roman sword which increased the student's knowledge of the subject of their study and facilitated class discussion.
- The quality of teaching and learning in one lesson observed was poor. The lesson lacked a clear focus and progressed in an ad hoc manner following the malfunctioning of a classroom computer.
- The addressing of questions globally to the class and to named students was used throughout most lessons to guide and gauge learning. There was however, scope to make greater use of targeted questions as a means of involving all members of the class and there was also scope to make greater use of higher-order questions.
- The majority of the students were engaged and remained on task during the lessons observed. The sample of students' copybooks reviewed frequently contained neat work and reflected the positive application of the students to their coursework. The copybooks also reflected the teachers' regular correction of their students' homework. As a means of strengthening this good practice, it is recommended that greater use be made of written constructive feedback comments when correcting homework assignments.
- The development of the students' literacy and numeracy skills was supported by the range of effective methodologies that were observed. The provision of opportunities for selected students to read aloud to their peers is an area that could have been further explored.
- The teachers monitor the progress of their students through their classroom practices that include observation, interaction, the setting of assignments, class tests and the students' performances in the formal school and certificate examinations.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- History is a core subject for junior cycle students and the TY History module is a mandatory component of the TY programme. The timetabled provision is supportive.
- Prior to commencing fifth year, Leaving Certificate students are provided with an open choice from which they select their optional subjects. The uptake of History was insufficient in the current academic year, 2011/2012, to form a viable class group. It is recommended that management in conjunction with the history department review the factors that may have contributed to this situation and explore means of encouraging the uptake of Leaving Certificate History.
- The three history teachers are deployed to teach the subject. Continuity of contact is maintained where practicable with the first-year history class group to which the teacher is assigned until the students complete their junior cycle. These good practices are supportive of the teaching and study of History in the school.
- The history teachers have their own base classrooms equipped with information and communication technology (ICT), and a central storage facility containing a bank of supplementary resources.
- Management supports the professional development of the teachers and in-service training is organised for the teaching staff. It has however, been some time since the history teachers have undertaken subject specific in-service training. This situation should be addressed.
- Management systematically records the students' performances in the formal school and certificate examinations.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The good collaborative work of the history department is evidenced by the rotation of the position of subject co-ordinator, the convening of a formal departmental meeting each term and the documentation of the subject department plan.
- The subject department plan is an informative document and in order to support the continued development of the plan it is recommended that additional sections be included such as the agreed responsibilities of the subject co-ordinator, the department's literacy and numeracy policy and analysis of the students' performances in History in the certificate examinations. In the case of the latter and based on a study of the students' achievements in the Junior Certificate History examinations in recent years, the suitability of the higher-level paper rather than the ordinary level paper for a minority of students should be kept under review. The history department should develop and document strategies to ensure that all students choose the level in their Junior Certificate History examination that is most appropriate for them.
- The agreed yearly planned schemes of the coursework are strongest in terms of the timeline, the coursework topics, the main types of resources that are used and the details regarding assessment that includes stated learning objectives. The yearly plans should be further developed over time to include direct reference in respect of each topic to the methodologies that are employed and the intended learning outcomes for each topic.

- The TY history module is an important means of enabling senior cycle students to maintain their contact with History and of developing their interest in the subject. All members of the history team are encouraged to become involved in teaching TY history.
 - Prior planning was undertaken in the case of all the lessons observed.
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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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Published October 2012