

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Classical Studies
REPORT**

**Ratoath College
Ratoath, County Meath
Roll number: 76088T**

Date of inspection: 7 February 2014



**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 CLASSICAL STUDIES

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	7 February 2014
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 three lessons over six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good with some exemplary practice in evidence.
- Lesson planning was good and a variety of teaching approaches ensured a very good level of student engagement.
- During interactions, students demonstrated confident knowledge and understanding of topics under study.
- The learning atmosphere was very positive.
- Whole-school support for the subject is very good but lesson distribution is challenging.
- Planning is very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Learning outcomes should be specific and review should take place at the end of lessons to ensure learning has been achieved.
 - To meet the challenge of frequent double periods, consideration should be given to dividing the lesson period between two contrasting topics.
 - In the teaching of texts, students should develop a broad understanding of social and cultural contexts, key themes and stylistic features of the genre under study.
 - While acknowledging the challenges of timetabling, the school should examine ways in which it can ensure an even distribution of lessons over the week.
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INTRODUCTION

Ratoath College is a co-educational, post-primary school with a current enrolment of 988 students. It provides Classical Studies as an optional subject in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes. It is a compulsory module in the optional Transition Year (TY) programme. The subject is relatively new to the curriculum. Senior cycle students completed their first Leaving Certificate examination in 2012 and junior cycle students will undergo their first certificate examination in 2015.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good with some exemplary practice in evidence.
- Teacher preparation for lessons was very good. Resources chosen enhanced learning and catered for different learning styles. Content was appropriate to the programme of learning. Consideration should be given to switching topics during double periods to maintain momentum and assist in the incremental coverage of syllabus topics.
- The lessons had clear aims that were shared with students. However, it is recommended that clear, specific and achievable learning outcomes be developed and review take place at the end to ensure learning has been achieved.
- A variety of teaching approaches ensured a very good level of student engagement. Group work promoted collaborative learning and was well organised. In all cases, where extended group work activity is arranged, this should be frequently punctuated by whole-class teaching to consolidate learning achieved. All students should have a clear and specific role in the group.
- Questioning strategies were very good and there was a fair balance between individual and global questioning. Questions ensured that the knowledge base was secure through review of work done.
- Student questioning indicated a spirit of curiosity and enquiry.
- Active listening was promoted: a question sheet focused student attention on the content of a video clip and answers were checked by peers. This is very good work.
- In all lessons content language was emphasised and this is very commendable. Visual material supported language development. To build on good practice, oracy could be further developed through structured discussion.
- It is very appropriate that students reflect on differences and similarities with contemporary culture when studying architecture and social topics.
- Students have a good knowledge of narrative detail. In the teaching of texts, students should be encouraged to develop a broad understanding of social and cultural contexts, key themes and stylistic features of the genre under study. As they progress, students should be encouraged to draw comparisons with other syllabus texts within the topic area. Such approaches develop higher-order critical and analytical skills.
- Creativity is encouraged through project work. Students' work was displayed and they had considerable pride in their achievements. To build on this good work, it is suggested that students be encouraged to research topics and be given the opportunity to make presentations to their peers, having initially collaboratively agreed assessment criteria.

- Classroom management was excellent: teacher mobility ensured that learning was constantly monitored.
- An attractive and stimulating learning environment has been established.
- High but appropriate expectations are set. Students were supported and affirmed in their learning.
- During interactions, students demonstrated confident knowledge and understanding of topics.
- Copybooks examined indicated a good body of work covered. Helpful written teacher feedback directed learning. Students should be encouraged to note and correct spellings.
- Copybook maintenance was good in most cases. However, there is scope for students to learn personal organisational skills in a minority of samples seen.
- A good range of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is provided and this supports learning in alternative sites.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school support is very good and the school is commended for enriching the curriculum through the introduction of Classical Studies. It is available in all programmes. Currently, 18.5% of the cohort are studying the subject.
- Timetabling allocation and resources are very good.
- In the Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate programmes, Classical Studies is set mainly against practical subjects so that it is predominantly taught over double periods. Distribution and length of lessons is a challenge and this can impact negatively on learning experience. While the difficulties of timetabling for such a wide range of subjects are acknowledged, the option bands should be kept under review to examine how Classical Studies can be provided to maximise learning opportunities.
- Two fully qualified and very committed and enthusiastic teachers are deployed and there is very good engagement with continuing professional development (CPD).

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A very good, comprehensive subject plan has been developed and the schema links content to methods and assessment.
- The school is a participant in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment Junior Cycle Network and this is impacting positively on the quality of planning. The team is particularly commended for the level of forward planning for the new junior cycle framework and the quality of self-evaluation in evidence. Over time the evidence base available, for example, examination data, will increase and this will feed into subject planning. Another area for future monitoring is the pace and sequencing of syllabus delivery. The department is well positioned to engage fully in the process.
- Both junior and senior cycle topics chosen are stimulating and cater for a wide range of interest and ability.

- Classical Studies is a compulsory eleven-week module in the Transition Year (TY). Currently, content provides a useful introduction to the subject. However, in future, the module will need to be reviewed to take into consideration the mixed experience of students, some of whom will have studied Classical Studies in the junior cycle, while others will have limited or no prior knowledge. Project work that focuses on a wide range of documented key skills should feature strongly in module content and the schema should be consistent with the very good plan for the other programmes.

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. 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.