

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

**Subject Inspection of HISTORY**  
**REPORT**

**Christian Brothers Secondary School**  
**New Ross, County Wexford**  
**Roll number: 63600F**

**Date of inspection: 28 April 2016**



**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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	28 & 29 April 2016
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li><li>• Interview with subject coordinator</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Examination of subject department plan</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The standard of teaching and learning observed in all lessons was good and, in several instances, very good.
- Lessons were strongly focused on student activity and learning, in a positive classroom atmosphere despite low levels of subject-specific visuals in most rooms.
- Timetable provision for Junior and Leaving Certificate History is good, although management has acknowledged that the absence of History in Transition Year (TY) needs to be rectified.
- The history department has been active in organising trips, competitions and visiting speakers to support the subject across the curriculum.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It is very important that History be provided for in TY and be allocated a meaningful part of the school's TY timetable.
- Current practice of relying largely on lunchtime meetings for departmental planning is unsatisfactory. Longer, more formal meetings need to be scheduled by management, to allow for discussion of teaching and learning as well as issues of organisational concern.
- Department members are urged to seek out more opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) and involvement with the History Teachers Association of Ireland (HTAI) than is currently the case.

## **INTRODUCTION**

CBS New Ross is a voluntary secondary school for boys and girls, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school serves a catchment area of New Ross and the surrounding area. It has a current enrolment of 264, and curricular provision includes a TY option taken by a little over half of the eligible students, but which does not include History at present.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The standard of teaching and learning observed in all lessons was good and, in several instances, very good. Lessons were clearly presented and well-paced, with only occasional difficulties being experienced when too much was attempted in the available time.
- Lessons were focused on student activity and learning, using good classroom management techniques. Where revision for Certificate examinations was necessitated, this was done with an appropriate emphasis on pair tasks, sorting exercises, cloze tests and other student-centred learning strategies.
- Teachers operated comfortably as facilitators, although occasionally clearer instructions were needed on some tasks. Students' in-class work or presentations on projects were organised and monitored very well overall, and particularly in one lesson where students were asked to make presentations using information and communication technology (ICT).
- There was a good sense of student engagement with History in all classes, and nice touches of humour from teachers were observed in most lessons. Students were enjoying their lessons and some good banter enhanced the positive classroom atmosphere.
- A small number of lessons became a little static, for example where there was a little too much emphasis on reading textbook extracts, or where students transcribed answers to in-class tests from the textbook. Encouraging students to use their own words, orally and in written work, is a better means of gauging understanding and developing subject-specific literacy.
- The general use of visual and video stimuli by teachers was good, with a good use of these materials as historical sources. Visuals were either deployed through the use of ICT or handouts, and good back-up preparation was evident where internet access was a difficulty in one room.
- There was an absence of subject-specific visual displays, charts or maps in most rooms. The school intends to move towards more teacher-based classrooms, and addressing these issues in that context or sooner ought to be a target, as it would enhance the pedagogical emphasis on visuals, already commended, and allow for the display of student projects.
- Oral questioning was used well, both to monitor and correct some homework, and to develop lesson content. There was a good blend of lower and higher order questioning, and students were given good opportunities to develop their responses, or challenged to summarise their findings and develop their ability to interpret and synthesise information.
- Copybooks examined showed a good range of home tasks being assigned to students, and these were generally monitored well by teachers. The department ought to include agreeing a policy on formative assessment as part of its formal meetings when time permits.

- Some good supports to students' literacy and numeracy were observed at individual classroom level. Some use of timelines and key concepts was evident, as was one good key-word identification game as part of a revision lesson. Elsewhere a clear effort to help students develop their capacity for extended writing was built into work on shorter answers.

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

- Timetable provision for Junior and Leaving Certificate History is good. In general, there is an open choice of subjects in senior cycle, and uptake levels in History are good despite the fact that TY students have had no access to the subject.
- It is very important that History be provided for in TY and be allocated a meaningful part of the school's TY timetable. Management has accepted this for the coming year, where it is anticipated that there will be two TY groups, each doing History.
- Current practice of relying largely on lunchtime meetings for departmental planning is unsatisfactory. A one-hour subject meeting per term ought to be officially scheduled, and used to support pedagogical development as well as dealing with immediate organisational tasks.
- While the school needs to revisit the wording on special educational needs in its admissions policy, the degree of information available to and accessed by teachers of History where students have additional learning needs is good.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Individual teacher preparation for lessons was satisfactory, with a good range of resources, handouts and ICT materials prepared for use. Schemes of work were sometimes electronic and sometimes hand-written, but all were clearly linked to relevant syllabuses.
  - The history department has been active in organising a number of subject-relevant trips, competitions and a visiting speaker on the Holocaust to support the subject across the curriculum.
  - Some customary aspects of departmental planning, including analysis of higher and ordinary level uptake in Certificate examinations and the sharing of co-ordination duties require more attention.
  - The subject department plan is not an expansive document. Longer, more formal departmental meetings are needed, and should be used for discussion of teaching and learning and to identify appropriate methodologies, resources and agreed plans which should be included in the department plan.
  - Department members are urged to seek out more opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD) than is currently the case. Involvement with the History Teachers Association of Ireland, even through rotating attendance at meetings, is recommended.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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.

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