

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Coolmine Community School
Clonsilla, Dublin 15
Roll number: 913150

Date of inspection: 10 May 2013



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	9 and 10 May 2013
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 ten class periods including one double period.• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good with a number of excellent lessons observed.
- A range of differentiation strategies such as the consolidation of subject specific vocabulary and inclusive questioning was evident in many lessons.
- Written homework is assigned and corrected in most of the classrooms visited. However, in a minority of cases homework practices could be improved.
- Curricular provision for the subject is very satisfactory and very good facilities are provided to support teaching and learning.
- The uptake of history is very good in the school with a higher than average number of students taking History to Leaving Certificate.
- Department planning of a high quality was evident.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To encourage student participation and to allow students to demonstrate their learning teachers should ensure that students are given an opportunity to undertake independent or collaborative activities in lessons.
 - A homework policy for the department should be developed and all teachers should ensure that students are given frequent homework which is regularly corrected with formative feedback in order that students may develop their writing skills.
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INTRODUCTION

Coolmine Community School is a co-educational post-primary school in Dublin 15. History is a core subject in junior cycle and is available as an option to leaving certificate students. An optional Transition Year (TY) programme is available to students. History is provided for in TY through the provision of TY modules of Classics and Archaeology. In addition, the “Know your Dublin” module undertaken by all TY students has a significant history component. At the time of the evaluation there were 1091 students enrolled in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good with a number of excellent lessons observed.
- Lesson content and pace were appropriate and all lessons were well structured. There were very good resources evident in many lessons, for example, film or audio clips, Power-Points presentations and handouts.
- In the vast majority of cases the lessons were well introduced with the intended learning outcomes of the lessons made clear in writing. Review of learning took place in a few lessons. This good practice should be extended.
- In many lessons interesting starter activities were used to review prior learning. For example, in a senior cycle lesson the teacher showed students a photograph of a key personality and invited students to note down three points that they remembered from previous learning at the lesson onset.
- A mix of teaching methodologies was used to support student learning including teacher exposition, student questioning and note-taking from the board or Power-Point. Where best practice was evident this was combined with independent or collaborative learning opportunities. For example, in one lesson students working in pairs discussed the differences between a medieval and renaissance painting. In another lesson students worked individually on questions on historical documents. In some lessons little or no such learning opportunities were provided. To encourage student participation and to allow students to demonstrate their learning teachers should ensure that students are given an opportunity to undertake independent or collaborative activities in lessons.
- When student questioning took place most teachers used a broad mix of questioning styles including directed questioning, wait-time and differentiated questioning to include all students and to develop the lesson. In a small number of cases questioning mainly consisted of the teacher directing lower-level questions at the whole class and allowing chorus answering from students. This practice should be used sparingly as it allowed some students to disengage from the lesson and did not promote the development of higher-level thinking.
- In general, effective differentiation practices were evident. Good attention was paid to the development of subject specific vocabulary in many lessons. The use of a bingo game in one lesson to revise key terms was particularly interesting. A graphic organiser was used in another lesson to support essay-writing and was an effective way to help students who struggle with extended writing assignments. In another lesson the teacher set differentiated work to certificate examination students and provided differentiated support to both groups.

- Classroom atmosphere was good overall and teachers dealt firmly but respectfully with any instances of minor inattention. Many well organised and interesting lessons were observed where student enjoyment of learning was evident.
- Written homework is assigned regularly in many of the classrooms visited. In most of these classrooms teachers give students helpful feedback on their work. In these cases student work was of a high standard and copies were well kept. However, in a third of classrooms visited there was evidence that written homework is given infrequently and that student work is rarely corrected. Students in these classrooms had regularly noted “no homework” or “revise class work” in their journals under history homework and work in many of their copybooks was incomplete and of a poor standard. It is recommended that all students receive regular written homework and frequent formative feedback on their work.
- Regular testing is a feature of many classrooms visited. There was good use of peer assessment in many classrooms.
- Common testing takes place in senior cycle and a common testing policy has been agreed. This is good practice and should be progressed. It is suggested that first year students be encouraged to undertake project work and that students be given credit for this work in the in-house examinations.
- A print-rich environment was evident in many classrooms visited with some interesting displays of student work, history posters, time-lines and key words evident.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Curricular provision is in line with recommended syllabus requirements in all relevant curricular programmes with very good provision evident for second and sixth year students. Timetabling for the subject is satisfactory in most cases.
- There are good facilities available to support teaching and learning such as the history book room adjacent to one of the history classrooms and the provision of a history shared folder on the teacher drive onto which teachers have uploaded a number of teacher-produced electronic resources as well as other relevant material.
- The arrangements for student access to the subject at leaving certificate level are very appropriate with students being offered an open choice of subjects after which subject bands are created. Teachers are commended for producing a PowerPoint presentation to support students making choices at this level.
- Uptake of leaving certificate History is very good in the school. Most years there are three history classes in both fifth and sixth year. This is a reflection of students’ positive experience of History in junior cycle. The school is highly commended for providing a Resource class for history students with learning needs in both fifth year and sixth year which runs parallel to other options.
- Teachers are deployed in line with their qualifications. It is positive that teachers are deployed across different levels and programmes. Teachers, in general, displayed a good level of professionalism and knowledge of the subject area.
- Teachers are encouraged and facilitated to attend relevant curriculum development for the subject. Even though there is a large team of thirteen teachers involved in teaching

History, careful consideration is given when organising the frequent subject planning meetings to ensure that as many teachers as possible are free to attend such meetings.

- Students in junior cycle are divided into two bands based on the results of assessment tests on entry and consultation with primary schools. It is positive that students in both bands have access to higher level papers. The school should monitor uptake of higher level papers in the lower bands to ensure that all students in the lower bands are reaching their potential.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Department planning is of a very good quality. A subject coordinator is in place. This position should be rotated.
- Minutes of meetings are available and show clear evidence of very good collaboration and planning for improvement. Discussions on teaching and learning take place at department meetings and a literacy and numeracy policy for the subject has been developed. This is commended.
- Planning documentation is comprehensive and clearly identifies learning outcomes, assessment practices and resources available for most year groups in line with good practice as well as a wide range of other materials such as policy documents and syllabus relevant materials.
- Two areas for development were identified. The first is the promotion of co-curricular activities for the subject. The second is the development of a homework policy for History where teachers agree best practice in relation for homework for each year group. This should include giving students frequent extended writing assignments in line with the literacy policy for the subject.
- Teachers plan well for lessons. Effective planning for resources was evident. Teachers, in general, keep very good records of student progress.

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.