An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Classical Studies
REPORT

Malahide Community School
Malahide, Co Dublin
Roll number: 91325R

Date of inspection: 10 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN CLASSICAL STUDIES

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in lessons observed.
- The quality of planning is very good both for the subject and for individual lessons.
- Lessons were student centred: learning activities and resources were varied and learning was scaffolded with useful handouts.
- There was a good focus on the teaching of subject vocabulary.
- Whole-school support for the subject is good and provision reflects the school’s inclusive practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In-house assessment instruments and outcomes should be reviewed and the analysis should feed into planning, teaching and learning.
- The staged integration of Roman Art and Architecture over the duration of the programme would add variety to the literary and historical topics.
- Methods could be improved further by more pair and group work to develop students’ skills.
INTRODUCTION

Malahide Community School has served a diverse local community since 1976 and has a current enrolment of 1228. It provides a good range of curricular programmes including an optional Transition Year (TY). Classical Studies (CS) is provided in the Leaving Certificate (LC) programme only.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed in lessons was very good.
- Written lesson plans were presented to the inspector and these were of high quality. Teaching strategies were designed to achieve the stated outcomes which were written on the board so that students understood the purpose and direction of the lessons. This is very commendable.
- Methods used were student centred and varied. Question-and-answer sessions were used for clarification and to encourage thoughtful responses. In general, a good balance was maintained between questions aimed at individuals and whole-class questioning. It is recommended that students be afforded collaborative learning opportunities in lessons through group and pair work. This would give all students the opportunity to participate and would also have the advantage of developing analytical skills in a co-operative learning environment.
- The resources used to support learning were well chosen and included maps and film clips. Reinforcement of key lesson outcomes was achieved through helpful worksheets. Some students require more time to complete these. The board was used to good effect for mind maps to help students organise information. Where more complex sequencing of events is being studied, for example, aspects of Alexander’s military campaigns, maximum use should be made of diagrams and charts to prevent students from being overwhelmed with complex details.
- The quality of class management was good. The classroom atmosphere was conducive to learning. The walls of the classroom in which the teacher is frequently based were used as an additional learning space and there were some attractive visual presentations of, for example, the Pantheon and the Roman Forum. There was also an attractive display of students’ work.
- Students were fully engaged in classroom activities. They had a good grasp of key concepts and were secure in their knowledge. They were able to recall key facts and were also able to argue coherently using evidence. It is understood that students were given an opportunity to engage in a collaborative history project that involved a presentation on Alexander the Great to one of the deputy principals. This approach is highly commended as it develops a variety of important communication skills and cultivates an awareness of audience.
- There was some inconsistency in the organisational skills of students in relation to maintenance of folders. Exemplary practice was noted in a couple of instances and these should be used as models for others so that all develop essential study and life skills. Students should also routinely enter homework assignments in journals so that they can track their work as not all are doing so currently.
- In copybooks examined, very good assessment feedback directed student learning.
- An analysis of summative assessment outcomes should be conducted that would feed into planning and delivery. Currently, some students are not performing well on in-house tests. Assessment instruments may need to be reviewed to ensure that they match ability and learning achieved. Data gathered in the area of assessment would greatly assist in accurate differentiation.
• Particular attention was paid to subject-related vocabulary which was written on the board and there was evidence in student folders of handouts featuring keywords from sections of the course. These strategies are highly commended since they contribute to the development of literacy skills. To complement the good work, it is suggested that keywords related to the themes being taught be displayed on the walls, particularly in view of the special educational and additional language needs of some students currently taking the subject.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The school introduced CS in 2008 to cater for students with exemptions from Irish in the LC programme. The school is commended for its inclusive practice in this regard. In the 2011/13 LC programme, the subject was offered to all students on a standard options band and uptake is good. There are currently two fifth-year groups studying CS. The school does not provide the subject in TY. It is suggested that this be given serious consideration as the subject is ideally suited to a wide variety of experiential and cross-curricular approaches.

• The school has a homework policy. Standard reporting procedures such as parent-teacher meetings and formal reports home inform parents of students’ progress. The teacher is proactive in making direct contact with the parents of students whose learning may be giving cause for concern. At whole-school level, consideration should be given to the promotion of the school journal to impart good news regarding students’ efforts as well as notifying parents of lapses in work standards where applicable.

• The school actively supports the subject in a variety of ways. Timetabling allocation is good. Provision of resources, including ICT, is good and every classroom is equipped with a data projector and computer. It would be very helpful if the teacher could be based in one classroom given that the subject is so resource intensive.

• It is commendable that the teacher is a member of the subject-specific teachers’ association and networks with fellow practitioners to enhance personal professional development.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• Planning for the subject is very good. Syllabus delivery is mapped out over the two years of the LC programme and weekly schemes are good. It is recommended that Roman Art and Architecture be integrated over the two years to add variety to the literary and historical topics. It is commendable that a good portion of the course has been covered at this stage of the LC programme and this is attributable to good quality planning and pacing.

• The planning folder has useful documents including the chief examiner’s report. The list of resources for the subject facilitates review and planning for development.

• Records of assessment and attendance were maintained and a folder contained students’ results from summative assessment along with teacher comments and observations. This level of profiling is very good practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy and subject teacher 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 2011