

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**St Brendan's Community School
Birr, County Offaly
Roll number: 91491L**

Date of inspection: 14 November 2012



**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(s) of inspection	13-14 November 2012
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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of the teaching and learning of History observed was good to very good.
- A good relationship between teachers and their students and a positive atmosphere for learning were features of all lessons observed.
- A range of effective methodologies and resources was used to support student learning.
- The inclusion of relevant aspects of local history contributed to the quality of a number of lessons.
- Provision for History is very good in the school.
- The history department's subject plan contains scope for further development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More widespread consistency in relation to the precise identification of the intended learning objectives at the start of the lesson, further exploration of the potential of questioning to prompt discussion, and, where relevant, the allocation of sufficient time for students to complete assigned tasks, are recommended.
 - Teachers should be deployed to teach History to more than one class group, where practicable, in order to have more frequently recurring contact with the full extent of the history coursework.
 - The history department's subject plan should be further developed.
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INTRODUCTION

St. Brendan's Community School is a co-educational post-primary school with a current enrolment of 883 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme (LCA). TY is optional. History is taught in a mixed-ability class setting.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of the teaching and learning in the subject was good to very good. The good relationship between teachers and students and the displays of subject materials in the teachers' classrooms contributed to the positive and supportive atmosphere for learning during the lessons evaluated.
- The students were always informed of the lesson topic and the intended learning objectives, which in most cases were also noted on the board. The learning objectives could have been more precisely identified in some lessons and the opportunity to recap on the objectives before the lesson concluded was sometimes overlooked. Achievement of greater consistency across the history department with regard to these strategies is recommended.
- Student learning was well supported overall through the teachers' interactions with their students, the resources used, and the setting of assigned tasks. The methodologies employed also facilitated differentiated learning. However, more effective time management was warranted during one lesson where an initial recap on prior learning became an extended exposition of the lesson topic that impacted on the time available for the completion of some subsequent learning activities.
- Relevant aspects of local history were included in some lessons. They contributed to the quality of the lessons and increased the students' awareness and appreciation of their locality.
- The use of the data projector to display information and selected images and the noting of important points on the board increased students' knowledge and understanding of their lesson topic. They were also frequently used in combination with targeted and global questions to further support learning. The questions however, mainly required the recall of facts or were asked to ensure clarity about a particular point. The potential of questioning to prompt discussion should be further explored. Repeatedly overcrowding the board with information as occurred during one lesson should be avoided as it lessens the visual impact of the information highlighted.
- Setting the students independent learning tasks was a feature of almost all lessons. The tasks included worksheets and note taking with the former involving pair work in some lessons. The written tasks were most effective in supporting learning where sufficient time was allocated to complete them.
- The students remained engaged and attentive throughout the lessons. An example of their good participation was well illustrated during a group work activity where each group competently undertook a defined task. Appointed rapporteurs reported back to the class in the subsequent plenary session and key points of information were noted.
- Support for the development of the students' literacy skills was integrated well into the lessons in a variety of ways such as by placing a strong emphasis on key words, the

reading of selected material from the textbook or a handout, the classroom interactions and the writing tasks.

- The regular setting and correction of homework are among the range of assessment modes used by the history teachers to monitor their students' progress. The teachers also regularly provide written, formative comments on homework assignments in order to help their students maintain ongoing improvement in their work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- All junior cycle and TY students study History as a core component of their respective programmes and History is provided as an elective subject for leaving certificate students.
- The timetabled provision and distribution of history lesson periods are supportive of the subject.
- History is well resourced. Most history teachers have their own base classrooms equipped with a multi-media projector and computer; the history teachers have been provided with a shared electronic folder on the school server and there is a designated history section in the school library.
- All the history teachers have been deployed to teach the subject and this good practice supports them in remaining actively involved in the development of History in the school. It is recommended however, that, where practicable, teachers be deployed to teach History to more than one class group in order to have more frequently recurring contact with the full extent of the coursework.
- Management supports and encourages the teachers' engagement with continuous professional development (CPD). In-service training for the entire teaching staff is organised annually and attendance of teachers at in-service training for their subject specialisms is accommodated.
- Management systematically records students' achievements in formal examinations. Their results in certificate examinations are also analysed and evaluated in order to monitor general performance in the examination subjects and identify areas for improvement.
- The whole-school homework and assessment policies inform subject department practices in these important areas.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The history department fulfils a key role in facilitating the collaborative work of the history teachers. For example, the position of subject co-ordinator is rotated and departmental meetings are organised at least biannually. Termly department meetings should however, become the established practice in order to further support departmental collaboration.
- The history department subject plan reflects the good work that has been invested in developing it. The plan however, lacks copies of the teachers' annual schemes of work and these should be included in addition to the outline plan of the coursework already provided. It is also recommended that an agreed template indicating the methodologies, resources and learning outcomes in respect of each topic be developed for the teachers'

annual schemes of work in order to facilitate their collaborative planning. Details of the department's annual reflection on the analysis of the students' achievements in the certificate examinations and a strategic planning section outlining areas identified for improvement as well as a copy of the department's literacy and numeracy policy when formulated, should also be included in the plan.

- All lessons had a planned development that incorporated a variety of methodologies to engage the students and to meet their needs.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.