

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Gael-Choláiste Chill Dara,
Co. Kildare**

Roll number: 68072I

Date of inspection: 29 April 2010



**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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Gael-Choláiste Chill Dara. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in History and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and the teacher, examined students' work, and had discussions with the subject teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the teacher's written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teacher. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Gael-Choláiste Chill Dara is in the voluntary secondary sector and is housed in temporary accommodation on the Curragh, Co.Kildare. It has 140 students enrolled and this is projected to grow over the next few years. At the time of the evaluation management was seeking new school accommodation. Provision for History in the school is very good. History is a core subject at junior cycle and students at this level have three class periods per week. This is satisfactory. Transition Year (TY) is compulsory and students study History as part of the TY programme for one period a week across the full year. Leaving Certificate students are allocated five class periods per week, one double and three singles. This is in line with guidelines for the subject. Timetabling is good across the week and between morning and afternoon lessons.

There are very good arrangements in place for access to the subject at Leaving Certificate level. Students are offered an open choice of all subjects available in the school prior to entry to this level and option bands are created using this information. This student-centred approach is commended. Students are given good support from the guidance counsellor and subject teachers when making their choices. An information booklet also is made available to supply additional information to students and parents.

The history department is a one-teacher department at present. There are good resources available in the school for the teaching of History. History classes take place in a teacher-based room. The room itself is large and well-appointed. It is commendable to note that a subject-rich environment had been created in this room. A small history library, posters and murals added to the historical ambience of the room. Unusually, the room contained a photocopier which was a good resource for teaching and learning in the subject. Information and communication technology (ICT) equipment in the form of a data-projector, TV and overhead projector is available to support teaching and learning in the subject and good use of ICT was seen on the day of the inspection. A computer room is also available for teacher use. It is recommended that a central planning folder for subject plans and resources for each subject be made available on the school system.

There is very good support for the professional development of teachers in the school and the teacher involved in teaching History is very well qualified in the subject. Teachers are facilitated in their attendance at both whole-school and subject-specific in-service courses. Membership of the History Teachers Association of Ireland is recommended as an additional support to the history department.

Management gives very good support to co-curricular and extracurricular activities in the subject. History field trips to areas of historical interest, both local and national, are organised throughout the year. Links have been formed between the school and the archival service in the local library. This is commendable.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Very good departmental planning for History takes place in the school. While department meetings do not take place, as it is a one-teacher department, very good links have been forged with history teachers in other schools and good co-operation with teachers outside the school and with external agencies such as the SLSS in relation to planning and resource materials has added greatly to the efficacy of the department. This is praiseworthy. Good co-operation across the school in relation to students with additional educational needs was noted. It is recommended that consideration be given to the organisation of cross-curricular meetings every term where teachers of subjects with a similar base like History, Geography and Civics, Social and Political Education (CSPE) can come together to discuss generic teaching and learning issues such as teaching methodologies, differentiation and assessment. The results of these discussions could then be used to feed into both general school planning and subject planning.

Extensive planning documentation for the subject was made available to the inspector on the day of the evaluation. An examination of this documentation revealed exemplary planning across a range of areas, including the department plan and schemes of work. Of particular note was the detailed information given about teaching methodologies in the subject, planning for students with additional educational needs, including gifted students and students who come in to the school with a low level of language proficiency, and assessment practices. It is clear from the planning documentation that a culture of planning is well embedded in the department. Frequent review of planning was evident from documentation examined.

Very good planning for extracurricular and co-curricular activities was also noted, especially in Transition Year (TY). For example, a visit to Belfast is organised for TY students each year. A review of the documentation associated with the TY history module revealed an interesting and varied programme. To broaden the historical base associated with the module, it is recommended that the module be reviewed to incorporate one extra topic, possibly from European or World history.

Comprehensive individual lesson plans were made available to the inspector for each lesson inspected. These outlined clear aims and objectives, activities undertaken at each stage in the lesson by both pupils and the teacher, and the resources to be used.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very high quality teaching and learning was in evidence in the course of the inspection. Three lessons were inspected on the day of the evaluation. Each lesson had clear aims communicated in writing to students at the start, good pace and timing, and the teacher made time for review at the lesson end. This is very good practice.

There was good emphasis on self-directed learning in each lesson inspected with an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity. Pair work or group work was a feature of every lesson observed. Students were also given opportunities to work independently. For example, in one senior cycle lesson on Irish neutrality during World War II, the teacher initially used questioning to introduce the main points of the lesson. Students were divided into groups and asked to put themselves into the position of Eamon de Valera in 1939 and debate the pros and cons of remaining neutral. The teacher then took feedback from the different groups. Students were shown a clip from a DVD that featured a speech from De Valera on the subject and asked individually to collect as many points as possible from the speech. Students then collated the information gathered in their groups.

Very good use was made of resources in each lesson observed. High quality teacher-produced resources supported learning in many lessons. For example, in one lesson on the Industrial Revolution, students had been supplied with a comprehensive ten page handout *as Gaeilge* on the subject. A mural was used in another lesson as a prop to revise the main features of a motte and bailey castle. Good use was made of the whiteboard to note down key points and in one instance the use of a spider diagram helped students to structure their learning. Effective use was made of ICT, including an overhead projector and data projector, to present resource material. It is recommended that the very good electronic resources compiled be stored in a folder on the school system as an aid to teachers new to the department. The textbook, classroom wall-maps and replicas of historical artefacts, such as a shield and helmet, were also used to good effect to underline points being made and to add to student understanding.

Good differentiation strategies were observed in the course of the inspection. A good emphasis on the acquisition of new vocabulary was a feature of every lesson inspected. This is especially relevant in a school such as this, where the language of tuition is not always the language of the student's home. Students *ar bheagán ghaeilge* were supported sensitively within the class and additional supports such as a dictionary of *Téarmaí Staire* were provided to these students. The teacher was aware of the different levels within the class and adjusted explanations and tasks to suit different students or groups of students.

A very good atmosphere prevailed in all lessons observed. Very good rapport between pupils and teacher was evident. The quality of students' learning was high. Students were comfortable asking and answering questions and most students showed a very good understanding of the themes and concepts associated with the lesson.

ASSESSMENT

Very good modes of assessment are in use in the department. Project work is used routinely as a continuous assessment mode during first and second year. Peer assessment is also used to very good effect. For example, teacher and peer assessment of a submitted project contribute part of the marks in the summer examination. Observation of student copybooks revealed that homework is given regularly and frequently monitored and that students are given helpful feedback on how to improve their work. This is commendable. At times, students submit homework electronically and review work submitted in the light of formative feedback given. This is praiseworthy and shows a good emphasis on self-directed learning. Good attention to preparation for certificate examinations was also in evidence. To encourage students to develop the generic skills associated with history writing, it is recommended that marking according to examination criteria is not introduced until the final year of students' courses.

Very good electronic records are kept of student progress and these are communicated regularly to students and parents.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Provision for History in the school is very good.
- There are very good arrangements in place for access to the subject at Leaving Certificate level.
- There are good resources available in the school for the teaching of History.
- Very good planning for extracurricular and co-curricular activities was noted.
- Very good departmental planning for History takes place in the school. It is clear from the planning documentation that a culture of planning is well embedded in the department.
- Good co-operation across the school in relation to students with additional educational needs was noted.
- Very high quality teaching and learning was in evidence in the course of the inspection.
- Very good modes of assessment are in use in the department.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- To broaden the historical base associated with the TY history module, it is recommended that the module be reviewed to incorporate one extra topic, possibly from European or World history.
- It is recommended that the very good electronic resources compiled be stored in a folder on the school system as an aid to teachers new to the department.
- To encourage students to develop the generic skills associated with history writing, it is recommended that marking according to examination criteria is not introduced until the final year of students' courses.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

Cuireann Bord Bainistíochta Ghael-Choláiste Chill Dara fáilte roimh an Tuairisc Staire. Is mór an chabhair é don bhord agus do phobal na scoile an dearbhchothú atá léirithe sa tuairisc d'obair an bhoird agus do sholáthar an ábhair staire sa scoil.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Cuireann an bord fáilte roimh an chabhair atá tugtha sna tátail agus sna moltaí atá mar chuid den tuairisc. Tá an bord lán sásta na moltaí a chur i gcrích.