

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Coláiste de hÍde
Tallaght, Dublin 24
Roll number: 70021D**

Date of inspection: 8 December 2009



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste de hÍde. 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 two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

There is good provision for History in Coláiste de hÍde. Junior cycle classes are timetabled for three periods each week. Transition Year (TY) History is timetabled for a double period per week for a half-year module. Leaving Certificate students have five periods of History per week. This is very satisfactory. Timetabling, in general, is very good in most instances, with a good spread of lessons across the week. It is noted however, that the double period for TY History is timetabled on a day of the week when TY students are frequently brought on excursions. This results in a frequent loss of teaching time for TY History. It is recommended that this be avoided in future years if at all possible.

History is a core subject at junior cycle and is offered as an optional subject at senior cycle. Students are well-supported when making their subject choices. TY is mandatory in the school. Teachers make a presentation to TY students about possible Leaving Certificate subjects. This good practice is reflected in the high numbers of students taking History to Leaving Certificate. Option bands are generated around student choice to accommodate as many students' choices as possible. This student-centred approach is commendable.

There is very good provision of resources for History in the school. There is no fixed budget but management are open to the purchase of resources. The history department has purchased class sets of textbooks to supplement the students' main textbook. All history lessons take place in teacher-based rooms which allow for the storage of resources and the provision of a subject-rich environment. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) is well-integrated into teaching and learning practice in the school. All classrooms visited had a classroom computer and most had a data-projector. A demonstration room and computer room are also available for teachers' use. Much of the history course has been made available by teachers in PowerPoint and notes form on the school's intranet. This is highly commended as a very good support for History in the school.

Teachers are deployed in line with their qualifications and interests. Teachers new to the department are well-supported by management and members of the department, both formally

and informally. For example, they are facilitated in their attendance at history inservice by management and are introduced to the history plan and history folder on the intranet by members of the department.

There is good support in the school for history field-trips, especially at TY level.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

There is very good department planning in the school. Management facilitates department planning by providing five planning meetings per year, for which minutes are available. This is very good provision. It is suggested that, when future minutes of meetings are taken, decisions taken at the meetings as well as issues discussed be documented. At present there is no dedicated history co-ordinator in the school, although two teachers share the co-ordination role. It is recommended that one teacher take on the formal co-ordination role and that a list of duties associated with the position of co-ordinator be decided upon.

Minutes of departmental meetings show collaboration on a range of issues with a good level of reflective practice in evidence. For example, the scheme of work for one class group had been adapted by members of the department to suit the needs of that class group. It is evident from these minutes that collaborative practices take place in the department with teachers working together on the sharing of resources on the school's intranet. Indeed, a very good range of notes and PowerPoints on the whole history syllabus have been developed by teachers and are available for use by all members of the department. Teachers deserve to be highly commended for making such an important resource available. It is also noted that teachers are willing to share resources with history teachers elsewhere teaching through Irish. For example, a member of the department has submitted history resources, including notes and PowerPoint presentations, to an Chomhairle um Oideachais Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) for publication on their resource sharing web-site. This is worthy of the highest praise.

It is commendable that the department monitors certificate examination results and that student achievement and attainment is frequently considered at department meetings. It is recommended that the analysis of results be used to inform long-term planning for the department.

Considerable work has gone into the formulation of a department plan. The department folder deals with a vast range of areas including aims and objectives for the subject, projected learning outcomes, schemes of work for the medium and long term, assessment practices, resources available and suggested methodologies for students with additional educational needs. It is suggested that some time be spent at future department meetings discussing teaching and learning, matching suggested methodologies and resources to different parts of the course.

Very good individual planning was in evidence in the course of the inspection. Teachers made their individual planning materials available to the inspector. Teachers had prepared a very good range of individual resources for their classes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very good quality teaching and learning was in evidence in the course of the inspection. In every lesson inspected, a supportive classroom atmosphere prevailed with a good level of pupil-teacher rapport evident throughout. Each lesson had clear aims which were communicated to students at the start of the lesson. At times, this was done in writing on the board which is good practice. It is

recommended that this practice be extended to all lessons. Good continuity with prior learning was evident in most lessons observed.

Very effective use of resources was seen in all lessons observed, including some very good use of ICT. Teachers had prepared a very good range of resources for their students including PowerPoint presentations, handouts, film clips and worksheets. For example, in one senior cycle lesson observed, in advance of showing students a film clip of Bloody Sunday, the teacher wrote a number of questions on the board to focus students' attention on the clip. A PowerPoint presentation, with an accompanying handout, was then used to advance the lesson. In another lesson observed, the teacher skilfully interwove a PowerPoint presentation with film clips of two speeches, one by Winston Churchill, one by Hitler, to compare German and British attitudes during the Battle of Britain. These resources added greatly to the level of student participation and enjoyment and encouraged the development of historical skills.

A number of teaching methodologies were in evidence in the course of the inspection. Good use of questioning was apparent in all lessons. Some very good examples of the development of higher-level thinking through questioning were observed. Teachers, in many instances, linked the learning with students' own experience. For example, in one lesson on the Celts, the teacher used local place names to expand student's understanding of the terms *rath*, *lios*, *dún* and *crannóg*. In one lesson, students presented their projects to the class. The teacher, in this instant, acted as facilitator and invited students to question each other on the projects. This is highly commended and brought a good measure of self-directed learning to the lesson.

Good practices were in evidence for students experiencing difficulty accessing the subject. In one lesson observed, a special needs assistant provided good support for students. There was good attention paid to the development of key-word skills in all lessons. This is commendable as not all students are at the same skill level regarding language. Very good use of visuals was seen in all lessons observed. This caters for students with different learning styles. In one lesson observed, students being introduced to a new topic were introduced to a long PowerPoint presentation on the topic. It is recommended that teachers keep the different levels in the class in mind when preparing lessons and that care is taken not to introduce too much material when a new topic is being introduced to students. It is also suggested that the use of visuals, timelines and the provision of independent learning opportunities are all good strategies to ensure effective differentiation in the classroom.

The display of a classroom history library, subject-relevant materials and student project work in most classrooms visited added to the historical ambience of the rooms. Teaching was relevant to the syllabus and students were knowledgeable about their courses.

ASSESSMENT

There is a good range of assessment modes in use in the school. Homework is given regularly and is frequently monitored in most classrooms. In most cases *Assessment for Learning* strategies are used when homework is being monitored. This is commendable. It is recommended that these good strategies be extended to all classes. It is suggested that when homework is given it should refer to work that has been already covered rather than work that has yet to come. This will facilitate those students that have difficulty accessing the subject. The use of peer-assessment and self-assessment strategies seen in some classrooms visited is highly commended. Project work is used frequently as an assessment strategy.

Teachers keep good records of student progress and there is good awareness in the school of students' achievement in certificate examinations. This informs planning practices. Good practices are in place in the school in relation to formal examinations and continuous assessment. It has been found by the school that frequent reports to students' homes have been useful in raising standards. This shows a good degree of reflective practice in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good provision for History in Coláiste de hÍde.
- The use of ICT is well-integrated into teaching and learning practice in the school.
- Much of the history course has been made available by teachers in PowerPoint and notes form on the school's intranet.
- Considerable work has gone into the formulation of a department plan.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was in evidence in the course of the inspection.
- Homework is given regularly and frequently monitored in most classrooms. In most cases *Assessment for Learning* strategies are used when homework is being monitored.
- In every lesson inspected, a supportive classroom atmosphere prevailed with a good level of pupil-teacher rapport evident throughout.

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

- To ensure against loss of teaching time in TY, care should be taken not to timetable the double period for TY History on a day when students are frequently taken on TY excursions.
- It is recommended that one teacher take on the formal co-ordination role and that the post be rotated every two years in line with best practice.
- It is recommended that teachers keep the different levels in the class in mind when preparing lessons. It is suggested that the use of visuals, timelines and the provision of independent learning opportunities are all good strategies to ensure effective differentiation in the classroom.

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