

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Classical Studies  
REPORT**

**Mount Anville Secondary School  
Dundrum, Dublin 16  
Roll number: 60140F**

**Date of inspection: 5 May 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 CLASSICAL STUDIES**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Mount Anville Secondary School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Classical Studies 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**

Mount Anville Secondary School provides Classical Studies throughout the senior cycle. In order to enrich the curriculum in the junior cycle, the school provides a Classical Studies module for all students in second year and a Latin module throughout first year. In both years, each class group has a lesson a week. The Latin module not only has the advantage of providing a good linguistic foundation for other languages, but subject content links very well with Classical Studies. The school's innovative approach to curriculum design is highly commended.

In Transition Year (TY), all students have the opportunity to study Classical Studies, and three periods are allocated per week. Classical Studies is provided inside and outside the timetable in both fifth and sixth year in order to give as many students as possible access to the subject. The school is highly commended for the efforts it makes to meet the needs of all students with such a flexible approach to subject provision. Those taking the subject within the timetable are well provided for, with five lessons a week in both fifth and sixth year. Outside the timetable, one-hour lessons are provided on each of two mornings a week for fifth and sixth years before the official timetable commences. While this is a smaller time allocation than is provided within the timetable, a high level of motivation on the part the students, who are a self-selected group, and well-organised and well-focused lessons compensate to a great extent. Teachers also provide additional support to individuals as needed and to the sixth-year group as a whole near to the time of the state examinations. The dedication of staff and students is commended in this regard. Students with additional learning needs are given extra help and there is a good level of liaison with the special education needs co-ordinator. In all cases, the subject is taught in a mixed-ability setting and this is positive.

Resources for the subject are very good. Teachers are supported to acquire additional resources as needed. Most teachers are classroom based and therefore there are good storage facilities. For those that are not classroom based, teachers share resources and there is no difficulty switching classrooms when necessary. Staff members have access to very good information and communications technology (ICT) facilities such as interactive whiteboards and digital projectors.

Audio-visual equipment is available to all. The school has an excellent library and is fortunate in having a full-time and well-qualified librarian who has developed a website for the school library and has built up a very good range of resources for all subjects including Classical Studies. There is a very good level of communication between the teachers of classics and the librarian so that information, including good quality web-based information, is up-to-date. The library is also used as an exhibition centre for school projects in all subject areas and the TY Classical Studies students were scheduled to display their work during the week following the evaluation. This is highly commended as it gives students a public forum for their work and allows them to take pride in their efforts. It also facilitates informal peer assessment and this can have the effect of raising expectations and standards where commitment and endeavour are publicly celebrated. It is also an excellent opportunity to promote the subject.

Teacher deployment is appropriate and classes generally have the same teacher throughout the LC programme in the interests of continuity. Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and aim to communicate this to students. It is commendable that the school is committed to the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers and whole-staff events in the past included CPD on assessment for learning and mixed-ability teaching. The subject teachers are involved in the Classical Association of Ireland-Teachers (CAI-T) and through this, engage in subject specific CPD and professional dialogue with colleagues in other schools. This represents a very positive ongoing commitment to the teaching and learning of the subject. The school supports the teachers, for example, by paying the CAI-T subscription and encouraging attendance at conferences. Mount Anville has a staff induction officer who supports new teachers and the department also has a role in this regard and this represents good practice in the area of teacher induction.

The school and subject teachers recognise the importance of learning in alternative sites and students participate in a number of co-curricular and extra-curricular subject-related activities. They have attended the young classicists' conference in Belfast and the school has also hosted the classical table quiz for students from other schools in Ireland. Students also go on subject-related trips to the theatre or cinema and have had the opportunity to visit significant sites on their school tours, for example, those in Rome and Pompeii.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The subject teachers meet formally about once a term and informally on a regular basis. While there is no co-ordinator, an established subject teacher takes a leadership role. It would be useful if the subject had a designated co-ordinator with a clearly defined role. The role could be rotated to give each teacher experience of leadership and to distribute responsibility. The subject team is small and teachers have worked out an informal but effective *modus operandi*. However, a more formalised structure would provide the framework to allow the team to develop a vision for the subject and to plan in a holistic manner across the junior and senior cycles. To ensure consistency, management draws up an agenda for formal meetings in all subject areas and a record of formal meetings is maintained. Records indicate that Classical Studies subject department meetings focus largely on administrative matters, and while this is necessary, meetings should also be used to discuss pedagogical issues and to share good practice. This happens informally but a planned approach would be easier to track and would facilitate review and ongoing planning for CPD. It is whole-school policy to encourage planning, review, self-assessment and reflective practice at formal meetings and this is commendable.

The planning folder contained a number of important documents such as the subject plan, homework policy and materials from the State Examinations Commission. The subject plan is analogous to an annual scheme of work for each year group. The scheme is thorough, is descriptive and outlines course work to be covered for each term. There is good distribution of work in each year of the LC programme with a view to completing the syllabus in an orderly fashion and in time for the state examination. While the work is well distributed, there are areas for improvement. For example, based on documentary evidence, too much time appears to be spent on preliminary or introductory work in fifth year (inside the timetable) and a disproportionately long period of time is spent on a couple of relatively small syllabus areas: these should be reviewed. The co-ordination of planning across the junior and senior cycle would greatly solve the first of these issues. For example, currently, second-year students cover background information that is repeated to some extent in fifth year and the same study area may be touched upon also in TY. While some revision may be necessary in the senior cycle to allow for students who may be new to the subject, (and these may be few in number given that the subject is provided in both second year and the TY programme) cognisance should be taken of prior learning in devising programmes to eliminate overlap. Differentiation in planning for lesson content should ensure that all students are on an equal footing with regard to content covered in a relatively short period. Planning for Latin is not integrated into the subject plan for Classical Studies and this is regrettable. While they are two separate subjects in the junior cycle at the present time, the degree of commonality is very great and collaborative planning should be formalised to give coherence to the plan for classics in the school. This could also serve to prepare the school in advance for the integrated classics syllabus currently being developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). Clear bridges between the two subjects and between the junior and senior cycles should be demonstrated in the subject plan. This would deepen the learning experience for students.

Of particular concern is the scheme for TY. This is, in effect, a third LC year and there is far too much LC material covered in TY. This is not in the spirit of the TY programme. Attention is drawn to the TY programme guidelines that state: “The Transition Year should offer pupils space to learn, mature and develop in the absence of examination pressure” and points out: “Where Leaving Certificate material is chosen for study it should be done so on the clear understanding that it is to be explored in an original and stimulating way that is significantly different from the way in which it would have been treated in the two years to Leaving Certificate.” The TY should offer an opportunity to engage in experiential learning and should promote an interdisciplinary approach. It is strongly recommended that planning for TY be completely reviewed and that a new programme be drawn up. The project work currently featuring is a very positive aspect of the existing scheme, and, with some refinements, it could be integrated into a new Classical Studies TY programme. The overall objective of promoting creativity, of fostering a commitment to independent, reflective thinking and life-long learning and of further developing a love for the classics should inform the plan for TY.

In the next planning review period, the subject teachers should move from knowledge-based subject planning to outcome-based planning. This is in line with the current national and international thinking that underpins the redrafting of all existing syllabuses and the development of all new syllabuses being undertaken by the NCCA. Information can be found on the NCCA website.

Planning for resources in lessons observed was good and this is particularly the case in relation to planning for the use of ICT. However, in some cases, it would be better if lengthy questions and information were prepared on a handout as too much time was spent writing on the board. In one lesson, it was commendable that homework assignments, including questions and necessary

visual material, were ready for students in advance of the lesson. This good practice should be emulated.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Teachers implement the yearly scheme in their lessons. In one instance, an individual lesson plan was presented and was of good quality. It was laudable that evaluation of student learning was a heading in the lesson plan. In another lesson, the theme was documented on the board and the learning intention was announced. All lessons had clear aims, were in line with the planned programme and were appropriate to the year group. Of particular merit was the management of transitions and in one lesson this also necessitated moving from one room to another in order to access ICT facilities. This movement was effected with minimum disruption. Teachers prepared for new learning in some lessons through review of previous content and this is useful in providing a framework and links. In all lessons observed, teachers demonstrated good subject knowledge. Instructions were clear and the quality of class organisation was very good.

Use of resources in all lessons was very good. Apart from the interactive whiteboard, the standard board was used well in a lesson for graphic organisers. Students contributed ideas and examples to the whole-class activity so that learning was shared in collaborative activity. This is highly commended. The questioning strategy was quite good with questioning being used for a variety of learning purposes and it is very positive that there was a good emphasis on higher-order questions. However, more effort should be made to target individual students in the course of questioning to ensure monitoring of all students and to ensure engagement of all students. Students also need more “thinking time” when asked higher-order questions and teachers should resist the temptation to “tell” when there is a delay. Related to this, and in some instances, there was too much teacher intervention and a tendency to “spoon-feed”. Strategies such as “think-pair-share” could be used instead to encourage collaboration and peer moderation. The examination was invoked in non-examination classes as a motivational tool. While it is fair to say that students in the school have high academic expectations and teachers may feel under pressure to “deliver”, the imperative to develop creative and independent thinkers is greater, and such a goal is likely to have more enduring benefits for students. Examination focus is appropriate to the examination year. Students should be required to work independently as often as is practicable and in topics such as history, they should themselves spend more time examining and comparing evidence in a spirit of critical historical enquiry.

A table quiz on the Trojan War was the theme of a lesson visited. Students were thoroughly engaged in this activity and while no teaching was observed in the more formal sense, it was evident that students had learned a good deal about the subject in previous lessons. It is commendable that students were encouraged to work collaboratively in these classes. It is also commendable that students were given responsibility for organising the quiz.

The communicative method underpinning the Cambridge Latin Course was used in the Latin lesson observed and it is very commendable that students had, by way of preparation, devised a short dialogue in Latin that pairs performed in class. There was a high level of participation and student engagement. Roll call was also conducted in Latin. Concordance of nouns and adjectives was learned in the lesson. It is very commendable that vocabulary enhancement in English was developed through Latin and that language awareness in general is being developed through Latin. The subject matter was military service, and specifically, it was positive that graphic

evidence drew on Trajan's Column that records, in relief sculpture, the Dacian Wars. This monument features in a LC Classical Studies art topic and it is commendable that a social and linguistic context is provided in first year for the new learning in the senior cycle. While there is no recorded detailed planning underpinning such a coherent approach, foundations are being generated in the classroom and it would be especially valuable to systematise such approaches in planning.

Copybooks and folders examined indicate that a very good level of work is being covered in some classes. In some samples, the quality of feedback was very good and shows that the school's assessment for learning policy is being implemented. In some folders, it was difficult to distinguish between homework and class tests and there was no dating of homework in most cases. This should be reviewed since clear headings and dating helps students to organise materials and track progress. The folders contained lots of handouts, word-searches, quizzes and short questionnaires indicating that a variety of tasks is set and this maintains students' interest, particularly for those who are taking classes once a week. Students' writing skills are best practised through homework assignments of an extended nature as distinct from short exercises such as word-searches. An appropriate balance between the two should be maintained, while at the same time taking the age level and the duration and frequency of lessons into consideration. Writing for an audience is always motivating and some work could be designed around this, even in the junior classes. The Latin dialogues are a good illustration of this principle.

High expectations were set and met in classes visited and in many lessons, students were enthusiastic and committed to the subject. Students were affirmed in their learning in all lessons. Interaction with the inspector indicates that students were confident in their responses. Learning was good in all cases. Student achievement is very good and in line with expectations.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The school has a well-developed assessment policy underpinned by the principles of assessment for learning. The homework policy outlines the roles of all stakeholders including teachers, students, parents, year heads and management and the rationale underpinning homework assignment is clearly stated. It is laudable that the Classical Studies team has adapted the policy to the subject. Samples of student journals examined indicate that homework assignments are regularly recorded in many cases. In a couple of samples, there was no record and while this may indicate that students themselves were not making a note of homework, it may also suggest that they are not being assigned any. It is possible that students do not regard reading or oral homework as worth recording. It is advisable to review practice in the light of this evidence and ensure that the roles outlined in the school homework policy are being carried out and that the policy itself is being implemented in all cases.

There is a strong emphasis on summative assessment through tests and formal house exams and outcomes are communicated to parents on a very regular basis through a good variety of mechanisms. It is commendable that a statistical analysis of examination outcomes is carried out and that there is internal comparison between the outcomes of those who take the subject within and outside the timetable. Since some discrepancies were noted in this regard, it is suggested that such data be further analysed and interpreted with the object of feeding into organisation and planning for the subject and the teaching and learning process itself. The quality of record keeping was good.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole-school support for the subject is very good, the subject is well resourced and the school library makes a very good contribution to student learning in the subject area.
- The school has an innovative approach to curriculum design that is student focused.
- Through its flexible approach to subject provision, the school attempts to meet the needs of all students.
- The teaching team works in a collaborative manner and teachers are very enthusiastic and committed to the classics.
- There is a very good level of engagement with continuing professional development among the teaching staff.
- Lesson planning and content is good and a variety of activity engages student interest.
- Student achievement is very good.
- A good range of extra and co-curricular activities is available to students.
- Classrooms are well managed and students are encouraged and affirmed in their learning.
- A good homework policy has been written up.

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

- The Transition Year plan should be redesigned to reflect the spirit and aspirations of the programme.
- Outcome based learning should inform subject planning in all programmes.
- A coherent plan should be developed that bridges first-year Latin, second-year Classical Studies and the entire senior cycle in a holistic and progressive way that eliminates overlap.
- Questioning strategy should be reviewed in areas such as targeting individuals and allowing time for student reflection and formulation of responses.
- There should be more emphasis on independent learning, the promotion of critical enquiry and the development of creative thinking.

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

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