

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Meánscoil Iognáid Rís
Naas, Co. Kildare
Roll number: 61710C**

Date of inspection: 1 February 2011



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | 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 Meánscoil Iognáid Rís. 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, deputy principal and subject teachers. 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

Meánscoil Iognáid Rís is a secondary school in the town of Naas. At the time of the evaluation there were 804 students enrolled in the school.

School management very effectively supports the planned teaching programme for History and History has a high profile in the school. Teacher-based classrooms are in place, most of which are provided with a computer and data-projector. The school reports that it is planned to extend this facility when the building works, in place at the time of the evaluation, are completed. A storage area is provided and a large range of well-organised resources are available to support teaching and learning in the classroom. An annual budget is provided for the acquisition of resources and an inventory of these resources is included in the subject department plan. A history notice-board in a central area of the school is commended as a good support to History in the school. To further support the subject it is suggested that a set of maps is purchased for each room in which History is being taught.

History is a core subject in the school's curriculum in junior cycle. At senior cycle History is included in the optional Transition Year (TY) and is an optional subject for the established Leaving Certificate. Time allocation for the subject is in line with syllabus recommendations and lessons for all class groups are appropriately spread throughout the week. Students are provided with an open choice of subjects for Leaving Certificate and the uptake of History is in a very healthy state. This reflects well on students' positive experience of the subject at Junior Certificate level and in TY. A very student-centred approach to facilitate student access to optional subject choice at Leaving Certificate level is highly commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A very well-qualified and dedicated team of seven teachers currently deliver the history programme in the school. There is very good expertise on local history within the team and this

expertise is well-used in planning the interesting and varied TY programme. Teachers have availed of continuing professional development for the subject including school-based history in-service and attendance at sessions organised by the History Teachers Association of Ireland. Very good links with the local libraries and local historical association are in place and field trips to places of local and national historical importance take place regularly. This is commendable.

Good department planning is well-established in the school. Short formal meetings take place at least once a year. A coordinator is in place and this role rotates frequently in line with good practice. Minutes of meetings are available and show yearly review of the subject plan. This is indicative of reflective practice and is commended. To further advance the good work that is already in place and to allow time to discuss items like suitable methodologies and planning for students with additional educational needs, it is recommended that formal meetings of the department take place at least once a term.

Good collaboration in relation to common assessment and planning for resources was evident. There is good expertise on the history team in relation to information and communication technology (ICT) and some very good electronic resources were in evidence on the days of the evaluation. It is positive that a history folder is now available on the school's network. It is recommended that teachers upload resources, subject planning documentation and samples of common examination papers into the folder as they become available to complement the good range of hard copy history resources in the school.

Subject planning and review is on-going. The subject plan contains a very thoughtful set of aims and objectives that informs history teaching in the school. It is positive that the schemes of work for junior cycle history include a list of key historical terms and a suggested sample of 'People in History' questions for each year of the course. It is recommended that all teachers take cognisance of these when planning their lessons and assessment tasks for students.

Very good individual planning for lessons was seen across the department. Good planning for students with additional educational needs was seen in some instances. Some members of the history department are also members of the learning support department. It is recommended that planning for these students, including the exceptionally able, is kept in mind when departmental and individual planning is undertaken.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very good quality teaching and learning was in evidence across the department in the course of the inspection. Most lessons commenced with the correction of homework and the revision of prior learning. In almost all lessons teachers introduced the lesson topic orally or in writing. This good practice should be extended to all classrooms. In a few cases the teacher had a proposed outline of the lesson sketched on the board and items were ticked off as the lesson advanced. This practice is highly commended as it brings structure and clarity to the lesson.

A good range of methodologies was in use in all classrooms including storytelling, pair work and student questioning. Storytelling was a feature of many classrooms visited and teacher delivery and enthusiasm for the subject was excellent in many cases. Student questioning was used to link with prior learning, to advance the topic and to check understanding. In most instances questions were directed to individual students. This is good practice. It is recommended that global questioning and chorus answering are used sparingly. In one instance in a junior cycle class, teacher questioning was combined with student activity in an interesting way with the use of a

ball game where the teacher tossed a ball at the student chosen to answer the question. The students engaged well with both the questioning and the activity.

Students in many classrooms were actively involved in their own learning. For example, in one senior cycle classroom students completed a work sheet based on a secondary source. In another instance, students were given historical artefacts, divided into pairs and asked to fill out an evidence fact sheet. In a few classrooms students were not presented with adequate independent learning opportunities. To ensure student engagement with the topic being taught and to challenge students to think and write independently, as well as to cater for those students with an active learning style, it is recommended that meaningful independent learning opportunities are made available to students wherever possible.

A very good range of resources was in use in all classrooms visited. There are good ICT facilities in the school and these were used to very good effect in many classrooms. Interesting and informative PowerPoint presentations, with very good use of visuals were used in many cases. For example, a PowerPoint on George Washington that concentrated on military symbols and weaponry evoked much interest. Teacher-produced worksheets also brought interest and variety to the learning experience. In one senior cycle classroom a lively delivery on the subject of local history was supported by a wide range of resources such as a video, DVD and audio clip as well as a class set of a book on local history written by a member of the department. In other classrooms historical artefacts or models were used to good effect to engage student interest.

Good differentiation was seen in some classrooms visited. The use of differentiated questioning to challenge the more able student and to support those students experiencing difficulty was seen in many classrooms. Good emphasis on key words was seen in some classrooms. Good practice in relation to the acquisition of key words was in evidence where the teacher wrote the key words on the board and students copied them, and their meanings, into their copies, as in one lesson on the German Blitzkrieg of World War 11. This was followed later by more challenging work. Thus students at all ranges in the spectrum were well catered for. In another lesson the use of a graphic organiser, used in pairs, encouraged both higher level thinking and cooperative learning in relation to life in a medieval castle. In the same lesson the use of differentiated worksheets later in the lesson promoted inclusion. This is praiseworthy.

Good pace and timing was in evidence in all lessons observed. The very good development of students' historical skills and the emphasis on bias, objectivity and primary source material seen in some classrooms is highly commended.

A very good classroom atmosphere was in place in all lessons observed. Very good student-teacher rapport was in evidence and classroom management was good in all instances. Teachers dealt with their students with good humour and sensitivity and this contributed to the very good learning environment in the school.

ASSESSMENT

A good variety of assessment modes are in place in the department. A homework policy is in place and homework is given regularly and frequently monitored in line with this policy in most classrooms visited. A review of student copybooks undertaken during the inspection indicated that *Assessment for Learning* strategies are in use in many instances. These strategies support learning as it gives students helpful feedback on how to improve their work. It is recommended that this be extended to all classrooms. Furthermore the good practice of giving students frequent extended writing opportunities seen in some classrooms visited should be extended to all

classrooms. Assessment practices for the TY programme vary across the department and were unclear in certain instances. It is recommended that assessment criteria and an assessment schedule for TY history is agreed, formalised in TY planning documentation and integrated into wider TY assessment documentation

Frequent testing is in place in many classrooms. It is commendable that common examinations are in use across junior cycle and some very good quality examples of these were seen in the course of the inspection. Very good preparation for state examinations was noted in exam classes visited. It is laudable that students are encouraged to take the higher level papers in most instances. A review of documentation relating to state examinations revealed that very good outcomes are achieved by students. This is a tribute to the good work being done by teachers.

Very good record keeping by teachers was in evidence. The school communicates with students homes by means of the student journal, parent-teacher meetings once a year and reports twice a year for non-examinations classes.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- School management very effectively supports the planned teaching programme for History and History has a high profile in the school.
- A very student-centred approach to facilitate student access to optional subject choice at Leaving Certificate level is highly commended.
- There is very good expertise on local history on the team and this expertise is well-used in planning the TY programme. Very good links with the local libraries and local historical association are in place and field trips to places of local and national historical importance take place regularly.
- There are good ICT facilities in the school and these were used to very good effect in many classrooms visited.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was in evidence across the department in the course of the inspection.
- A homework policy is in place and homework is given regularly and frequently monitored in line with this policy.
- Very good preparations for state examinations were noted. It is commendable that students are encouraged to take the higher level papers in most instances.

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

- Formal meetings of the department should take place at least once a term.
- It is recommended that assessment criteria and an assessment schedule for Transition Year (TY) History is agreed, formalised in TY planning documentation and integrated into wider TY assessment documentation.
- It is recommended that planning for students with additional educational needs, including the exceptionally able, is kept in mind when departmental and individual planning is undertaken and that meaningful independent learning opportunities are made available to students wherever possible.

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

Published, October 2011

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board welcomes the Report. The Board would wish that each Subject Department should meet at least once a term and facilitate such meetings in the future, especially following the Croke Park Agreement.

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

The Report will be circulated and discussed with the Department during the planning days before commencement of the new term.