

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**St. Kevin's Community College,
Clondalkin,
Dublin 26
Roll number: 70042L**

Date of inspection: 27 January 2010



**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 St. Kevin's Community College, Clondalkin. 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

St Kevin's Community College is in the vocational sector and has an enrolment of 337 students. Students, upon entry to first year, are placed in banded classes. There are four class groups in each junior cycle year group, including one which follows the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP). Management is to be commended for making team teaching available to JCSP classes.

All students have access to History at junior cycle. Most junior cycle class groups study Environmental and Social Studies (ESS), which combines History and Geography. ESS students have a satisfactory provision of five class periods per week. From 2008, following a review of the curriculum, History and Geography have been introduced to junior cycle for one class group per year. The decision has been made not to timetable History and Geography as stand-alone subjects but to band them together and to timetable them against the five ESS classes. This has some advantages as it facilitates movement between classes in the first term of first year. However, it has implications for time allocation for both History and Geography at junior cycle. For example, while the first-year history class has a satisfactory provision of three timetabled class periods per week, the second-year history class is timetabled for only two periods per week. This is not ideal as it makes it difficult to cover the course in the three years. It is suggested that management and teachers monitor the success of this banding arrangement over the coming years and review if appropriate.

History is an optional subject at Leaving Certificate level and has a satisfactory provision of five class periods per week. While students are surveyed as to subject choice in most optional subjects, it has been the practice in the school to place History against Business in a pre-arranged subject band. This situation narrows the choice for students who might want to study both subjects or neither subject. It is recommended that the student survey carried out prior to entry to senior cycle, includes all optional subjects and that the option bands be organised using this information, in order to accommodate as many student preferences as possible, while keeping in mind the demands of the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Provision of resources for History is good. There is no fixed budget but management is open to the purchase of resources as requested by the subject coordinator. It is suggested that a history-resource press in a central area of the school could serve as a good storage point for common resources. Classrooms are teacher-based in the main, although the JCSP class groups are classroom-based. Classrooms are bright and airy, have good storage facilities and most are decorated with subject-specific materials, including history posters and student project work. The school library, supported by the JCSP, has a dedicated librarian, computers with internet access and a good range of history materials, including teacher resources. This library is a very good support to students studying History at all levels, especially those students working on their Leaving Certificate Research Study.

Information and communication technology (ICT) resources include two interactive whiteboards, a dedicated computer room and a number of data projectors. It is suggested that additional training is needed to enable all staff to take full advantage of the interactive whiteboards. Given the emphasis on visual sources in the history syllabuses, it is recommended, where resources allow, that a laptop and data projector should be made available for use by members of the ESS and history departments.

Management is supportive of teachers' professional development and facilitates teachers in their attendance at history in-service. School-based history in-service has also been availed of. Extracurricular and co-curricular activities such as fieldtrips to places of historical interest and guest speakers are also facilitated by management. This is praiseworthy.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Very good departmental structures are in place in the school. At present there are two subject coordinators, one for History and one for ESS. This works well as there are two separate teams of teachers teaching History and ESS. Good liaison has been noted between the two departments in terms of resources and organisation. For example, History and ESS teachers teach a joint programme for the first few weeks of first year. This facilitates movement between classes. Meetings of both subject teams take place very regularly and minutes are available. Minutes show discussion and collaboration on a range of issues with many good examples of reflective practice in evidence, such as teachers adjusting schemes of work to suit a particular class. Very good procedures for mentoring teachers new to the department were also evident.

Teachers are to be commended for building up a very good range of resources, many of them teacher-produced, and for cataloguing these resources to allow for sharing within the department. It is recommended that these resources be saved electronically, where possible, and stored in a folder on the school's intranet system for ease of access by all members of the department. It is also suggested that a set of laminated maps could prove a useful teaching resource in classrooms in which History or ESS is taught.

Considerable work has gone into the compilation of a department plan. The subject folders in both History and ESS contain schemes of work, syllabuses, lists of resources, organisational details and other relevant documentation. Teachers are to be commended for developing a set of learning outcomes for some sections of the course and should expand this venture over time to include all sections. Good co-curricular planning was also evident. For example, Holocaust Memorial Day was marked in one senior cycle classroom visited. Good planning for history and ESS field trips was also apparent.

Very good individual planning was in evidence during the course of the inspection. All teachers were highly organised and had individual planning documentation, folders of resources and class plans available for inspection. Many teachers are members of the History Teachers Association of Ireland (HTAI). This shows a good level of commitment to the subject

Good practices in relation to ESS and Leaving Certificate research projects were in evidence, including some very good examples of cross-curricular planning in ESS. Very good links between both departments and the team supporting students with additional educational needs are in place in the school. For example, the ESS team works with the literacy coordinator in relation to key words for the subject. This is commendable.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very good quality teaching and learning was seen in all classrooms visited in the course of the inspection. Classroom management, student behaviour and engagement were very good in all of the lessons observed. The good practice of introducing the main topic to students at the start of the lesson was apparent in all classrooms.

The pace of all lessons observed was appropriate to the needs of the students and in all instances timing was very good. In all classrooms visited, teachers had prepared a range of resources to support teaching and learning. For example, in one junior cycle lesson on the topic of the Industrial Revolution, the teacher had prepared a handout, which included good use of documents, visuals and an exemplar examination question. The teacher supplemented this handout with line drawings of children working in the mines and in factories. It was noted that, when visuals were used, student engagement and interest was high. It is recommended that visuals, including maps, be used as a teaching tool wherever possible and that visuals in handouts be utilised to their fullest extent. ICT can also be a valuable tool in this regard. While some use of ICT was seen in the course of the inspection, it is recommended that teachers investigate strategies to extend their use of ICT in the classroom

A good range of methodologies was in use in classrooms visited. Student activity was built into every lesson observed. For example, in one classroom visited, a student was invited to present on Vasco da Gama to the class and students were then asked, in pairs, to come up with two points on each of four areas connected with the voyage. In another classroom, students were divided into pairs to work on an account of the life of a Roman soldier. These cooperative learning strategies are to be commended as they encourage students to be responsible for their own learning.

Very good preparation for students with additional educational needs was a feature of many lessons. Teachers, in many instances, had adapted materials to suit the needs of their students. In one classroom, a PowerPoint presentation on the life of St. Patrick, followed by a cloze test, was used to engage students. In another classroom, a teacher-produced poster on ancient Egypt was a good visual prompt for students. This was supplemented by an independent writing activity using a word frame. Good use of the board was seen in most lessons, with a commendable emphasis on key words. Students were encouraged to read aloud in most classrooms. This is praiseworthy as it encourages literacy across the curriculum. However, to maintain student engagement, care should be taken to ensure that too much of the lesson is not taken up with reading from textbooks or hand-outs as was the case in one lesson observed. Some very good strategies to help students organise their learning were observed. In some classrooms, student folders were in use to store

hand-outs and work-sheets. It is suggested that this good practice be extended to other classrooms, where relevant.

A positive learning environment prevailed in all classrooms visited. Teachers were affirming of students' efforts and students were knowledgeable about their courses.

ASSESSMENT

Good modes of assessment were in evidence during the course of the inspection, including questioning, homework, written work, project work and formal examinations. Questioning was a feature of all lessons observed and some very good strategies, such as wait time and directed questioning, were in use in some lessons observed. To ensure that the quieter or more reticent student is always included, it is recommended that these good strategies be extended to all classes. There have been some moves towards common assessment practices in ESS and it is recommended that this be built upon in the coming years. The use of self-assessment strategies observed in many cases, adapted from the JCSP template, is highly commended.

Teachers keep very good records of student progress. Very good preparation for examinations was observed in classes visited during the inspection. For example, in one classroom visited, the use of record cards was demonstrated to students as an aid to revision.

Good quality work relevant to the syllabuses was seen in copybooks and folders inspected. Homework is given regularly and frequently monitored in most classrooms visited. This good practice should be extended to all classrooms. It is suggested that some students may need to be reminded of the importance of recording their homework in their journals. To give students an opportunity to do independent written work, it is recommended that extended writing tasks be given to students as homework and class work at all levels. The use of writing frames, as seen in some lessons, is recommended as an aid to students who have difficulty with these tasks. Good use was made of *Assessment for Learning* strategies in some classrooms. It is recommended that this be extended to all classrooms.

Reports are issued to students' homes twice a year. Parent-teacher meetings are held once a year for most year groups and twice a year for sixth years.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good provision for History in the school.
- The school library, supported by the JCSP, is a very good support to students studying History at all levels.
- There is very good support for students with additional educational needs.
- Very good individual planning was in evidence during the inspection.
- Teachers are to be commended for building up a very good range of resources and for cataloguing these resources to allow for sharing within the department.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was seen in all classrooms visited
- Good modes of assessment were in evidence in the course of the inspection.

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

- It is recommended that the student survey, prior to entry to senior cycle, include all optional subjects and that the option bands be organised using this information so as to accommodate as many student preferences as possible.
- Visuals, including maps, should be used as a teaching tool wherever possible.
- It is recommended that teachers investigate strategies to extend their use of ICT in the classroom
- The use of *Assessment for Learning* strategies should be extended to all classrooms.

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

