

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Jobstown Community College,
Tallaght, Dublin 24
Roll number: 70141N**

Date of inspection: 10 February 2010



**AN ROINN DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS OF 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 Jobstown Community College. 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 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

There is very good curricular provision for History in Jobstown Community College. History is a core subject at junior cycle. Most junior cycle classes have three periods per week, apart from one third-year class which has four periods per week. This is satisfactory. Leaving Certificate classes have five periods per week. This is in line with syllabus guidelines. Timetabling is very good across all levels with a good spread of lessons between morning and afternoon.

A team of five teachers is involved in teaching History, including one Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) student who has full responsibility for two class groups. There are good whole-school induction procedures in place for teachers new to the school. This is commendable. It is recommended that, in the future, PGDE students are not given full responsibility for any class group. It is suggested that the history department consider the idea of appointing a subject mentor to support teachers new to the department in future years.

At present, classes at junior cycle are divided into streamed groups on entry to first year. Two of these streams undertake the Junior Certificate Schools Programme (JCSP). Good practices are in place regarding JCSP record-keeping and organisation. It is recommended that the system of streaming in place at present be reviewed and that other alternatives such as the placement of students in mixed ability or banded classes be considered.

Good arrangements are in place for students' access to the subject at Leaving Certificate and History has a high profile at senior cycle. Students are surveyed as to subject choice prior to entry to senior cycle and an information evening is organised for parents. Students are well supported when making their choices. The history department has prepared a leaflet promoting the subject to prospective Leaving Certificate students and a member of department presents an information session to each class group in third year.

There is good provision of resources for History in the school. It is commendable that the school has a good stock of history periodicals. Some cataloguing of resources has taken place and teachers are encouraged to add to this as new resources are acquired. There is a very good library in the school, with a fine stock of history books, funded by the JCSP. Very good use is made of this library by history students researching history projects and undertaking the Leaving Certificate research study. Teachers have access to the school's computer rooms and to a mobile data projector. It is recommended that, where resources allow, a data-projector and laptop be purchased for the history department and that training be made available to teachers who wish to up-skill in this area.

There is very good support for teachers' professional development and teachers have been facilitated in their attendance at history in-service. Management is supportive of extracurricular activities and field trips have been organised to areas of historical interest. This is praiseworthy.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The school has a history department structure and a co-ordinator for History is in place. This position rotates amongst the members of the department, which is good practice. Meetings take place very regularly and minutes of these meetings are available. Good levels of informal collaboration are in place and teachers are to be commended for sharing resources across the department.

Minutes of department meetings show that in previous years some discussion had taken place on differentiation to match the needs of all students and very good practice in relation to this area was seen in some lessons observed. It is recommended that teachers set aside time during department meetings each school year to share good practice and successful strategies for dealing with differentiation in the classroom for students with additional educational needs. In light of the very good resources developed by teachers in the department, it is suggested that an effective outcome of such meetings could be the pooling of suitable resources on the school's intranet system.

Some progress has been made in departmental planning. The subject folder contains a subject plan based on the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) template, schemes of work for year groups and other relevant documentation. It was noted that the subject plan itself contained information not relevant to the current school year and that many areas, for example, the suggested methodologies and resources for the subject, were limited in scope. It is recommended that the subject plan be revisited and updated, electronically if at all possible, and that more detailed information on how the subject is organised in the school be incorporated into the plan. This should include suggested resources and methodologies for different parts of the course, as an aid to teachers new to the department. Furthermore, it is recommended that common schemes of work, based on learning outcomes and including suggested timeframes for delivery, be agreed across all year groups to facilitate the holding of common examinations and movement between classes and levels.

All teachers made their individual planning documentation, including lesson plans and folders of resources, available to the inspector. Teachers are to be highly commended for the very high quality individual plans examined and for the very good levels of individual organisation seen. In all instances plans were laid out termly and included expected learning outcomes. Good awareness of the needs of students having difficulty accessing the curriculum was evident in every plan seen. It is suggested that the history department draw on very good individual

documentation already in place in the department in the preparation of common schemes of work. Good planning for field trips to places of historical significance was in evidence. The JCSP and the School Completion Programme (SCP) have been an effective support to planning in this regard.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very good quality teaching and learning were seen in the majority of classrooms visited over the course of the inspection. In most lessons observed the lesson aims were made clear in writing to students from the outset. This good practice should be extended to all lessons. In one instance a student's drawing was affixed to the board to focus attention on the lesson topic. This is a commendable strategy as it introduced a visual element to the lesson to focus students' attention on the topic being taught.

A variety of teaching methodologies was used in the classrooms visited. Almost all lessons were marked by a high degree of clarity of instruction and explanation in which students showed a good engagement with the topic being taught. Questioning was a feature of all lessons inspected and was used to revise the topic being taught and to develop student understanding. Very good examples of the development of higher-order thinking were in evidence in some lessons observed. For example, in a senior cycle lesson, the teacher used questioning and a historical document to deepen students' understanding of the different attitudes to power-sharing in Northern Ireland in the 1970s. The use of analogies and links with student experiences was in evidence in many lessons. For example, in one lesson on the medieval monastery the teacher explained the ideas of abbot and novice by linking them with students' experiences of school life. This is good practice.

A variety of teaching methodologies was observed. In some lessons teaching methodologies were dominated by teacher input, while in others, active learning methodologies were in evidence. For example, in one classroom, the students were asked in pairs to complete a sorting exercise to focus on key terms associated with the Reformation. Later on in the same lesson the students were asked to write a newspaper article on Martin Luther. In another lesson observed students started by completing a worksheet on Christopher Columbus, and used this as the basis of a piece of extended writing. The main points of the topic were then reviewed by means of a quiz. These strategies are commendable as they encourage self-directed learning and add to student participation and enjoyment. It is recommended, to encourage students to be active in their own learning and to reduce reliance on teacher input, that individual, pair or group work be incorporated into lessons wherever possible.

Good use was made of resources available in many classrooms visited. Very good use was made of the board to develop the main points of the lesson. In one instance the use of coloured chalk to highlight key points was a good visual aid to learners. In another lesson a spider diagram was used to revise key words associated with the lesson. The judicious use of the text book was observed in many lessons to focus on short pieces of text, visuals and documents. It is recommended, to encourage literacy across the curriculum, that students, rather than the teacher, be encouraged to read aloud from the textbook. Teachers, in many classrooms, had produced worksheets to support teaching and learning. This is commendable. It is important to keep the needs of the students in mind when planning lessons and to use the most effective resources suited to those needs. In one lesson observed many students were disengaged and not focused on the tasks in hand. It was recommended, in this instance, that additional strategies for whole-class teaching, such as the use of visual material, activity-based learning and worksheets, be developed to ensure the engagement of all students in the learning process.

It is acknowledged that many teachers routinely use information and communication technology (ICT) in lesson preparation. However no use of ICT was seen in the classrooms visited during the course of the inspection. ICT can be an effective tool to support teaching and learning, especially for visual learners. It is recommended that teachers investigate strategies to extend their use of ICT in the classroom.

Good classroom management strategies were in evidence in the majority of lessons inspected. In one classroom visited the teacher had a list of the equipment that students would need on the board beforehand. In another classroom the use of incentives to reward students taking an active part in the lesson was noted. These strategies contributed to the creation of an orderly and participative environment. Most classrooms visited had student work and historical posters on display in many classrooms. All teachers are to be commended for the respectful way that they behave towards their students, dealing sensitively and patiently with student difficulties.

ASSESSMENT

Good modes of assessment were in use across the department including questioning, homework, project work and formal examinations. Homework is given regularly and was frequently monitored in all classrooms visited. In most instances *Assessment for Learning* strategies are in use. This commendable strategy should be extended to all classrooms. At times students presented to class without homework completed and it is recognised that some students may need additional support in this area. The use of a classroom incentive chart to encourage students to produce homework, as seen in one instance, is highly commended. Good quality work was seen in most copybooks and folders inspected.

Formal examinations take place twice each year for most year groups. Examination papers inspected were well laid out and suitable for the needs of students. It is recommended that the department move towards common assessment, differentiated for student access, for junior cycle students.

Very good preparation for examinations was seen in some classrooms. There is good awareness in the department of students' achievement in certificate examinations. It is recommended that an analysis of student results in certificate examinations be undertaken by the department. This should be monitored over time to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement and should be used to inform planning and review.

All teachers made their record books available to the inspector and record keeping of a very high standard was seen. The school communicates with students' homes by means of parent-teacher meetings and reports sent to students' homes twice a year.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is very good curricular provision for History in the school.
- There is a very good library in the school, with a fine stock of history books, funded by the JCSP.

- Good arrangements are in place for students' access to the subject at Leaving Certificate level and History has a high profile at senior cycle.
- Teachers are to be highly commended for their very high quality individual plans and for their very good levels of individual organisation.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was seen in the majority of classrooms visited over the course of the inspection. Almost all lessons were marked by a high degree of clarity of instruction and explanation in which students showed a good engagement with the topic being taught.
- Students work is frequently monitored and in most instances *Assessment for Learning* strategies are in use.
- Record keeping of a very high standard was seen 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 PGDE students are not given full responsibility for any class group.
- It is recommended that the subject plan be revisited and updated, electronically if at all possible, and that more detailed information of how the subject is organised in the school be included in the department plan as an aid to teachers new to the department.
- It is recommended that teachers investigate strategies to extend their use of ICT in the classroom.
- It is recommended that the department move towards common assessment, differentiated for student access, for junior cycle students

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the principal and teachers 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

Following receipt of your report regarding the above History inspection, the members of our History Department would like to record our satisfaction with the content of the report. We were happy with the many positive aspects of the report. We acknowledge the recommendations made, and are undertaking the implementation.

As a Department, we will strive to maintain all the positive aspects. Some of the recommendations have already been implemented;

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

1. No PGDE students have full responsibility for any class group:
2. All History classes will have common examination papers at Christmas 2010. Teachers have exchanged year-plans, and will communicate regularly, to ensure a fair examination paper for all students.
3. Teachers have increased their use of I.C.T. in the classroom. At the time of writing, teachers have applied for timetable use in the computer room.
4. The post of co-ordinator is being rotated on a yearly basis. Over the year, the subject plan will be updated. We hope to do this electronically, and to provide more detailed information regarding the organisation of History in the school.
5. The Department have analysed the results of this year's Leaving Certificate examination, and intend to analyse the result of this year's Junior Certificate at our next Department meeting.

In summary, we found these recommendations to be very fair, both to our Department and to our school in general.