An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History

REPORT

Rosemont School
Temple Road, Blackrock
County Dublin
Roll number: 60930L

Date of inspection: 4 March 2011
SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Rosemont School, Blackrock. 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 one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teacher, examined students’ work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject teacher. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Rosemont School offers students the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate. TY is compulsory for the students upon completion of their Junior Certificate. History is a core subject of study in the curricular programmes provided for both junior cycle and TY students and is provided as an optional subject choice in the Leaving Certificate programme. The accessibility that students have to History is very good.

Class groups are organised in mixed-ability settings. There is one class group in each of the three junior cycle years and one TY class group. There is also one history class group in both fifth and sixth year. History and Chemistry are concurrently timetabled in fifth year and History, Art and Accountancy are concurrently timetabled in sixth year in order to facilitate the students’ choice of subjects. The popularity of History among current Leaving Certificate students is evidenced by the fact that 44% elected to continue their study of the subject.

The teaching and study of History is well resourced. The history department has at its disposal a wide range of equipment such as data projectors, overhead projectors and a set of class laptops. Internet access and a Moodle online learning platform are also available for coursework purposes. The department’s bank of resource materials includes PowerPoint presentations DVDs, CDs, videos, books, magazines, newspapers, artefacts and subject materials. Additional purchases are sanctioned as they are required.

The time allocation to History is supportive of the subject. Each of the junior cycle class groups has three single history lesson periods per week. TY students have two single lesson periods per week. The fifth-year history class group has a weekly timetabled allocation of five lesson periods that comprises one double period and three single periods. Sixth-year history students have six lesson periods, two double periods and two single periods.

The distribution of the history lesson periods in the current academic year, 2010/2011, shows that two of the second year group’s three history lessons are timetabled in the afternoon, the third year
group’s three lesson periods have afternoon time slots and five of the sixth-year history class group’s lessons including the two double periods are timetabled in the afternoon. A more equitable distribution of lesson periods between morning and afternoon is recommended.

Management is very supportive of the participation of the history students in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. For example, the organisation of school trips to places of historical interest at home and abroad is facilitated. TY students also take part in a heritage programme as part of their coursework. The issuing of invitations to guest speakers to address history class groups is approved by management.

The continuous professional development of the teaching staff is supported and encouraged. Management notifies teachers about in-services and relevant publications are brought to the attention of staff. Attendance at history in-service training is accommodated. The proactive stance of management in organising whole-school events such as seminars, workshops and presentations to support the professional development of the teaching staff has also contributed to the supportive environment for History.

PlANNING AND PREPARATION

The history department places a very strong focus on subject planning and an impressive amount of planning documentation has been produced to support the teaching and study of History. The importance, time and attention that are given to planning are highly commended. Indeed, the reflective and evaluative practices that are an inherent aspect of the planning process fulfil a key role in supporting and informing the ongoing development of subject planning. For example, the review of History that is conducted at the end of each academic year informs pedagogy and coursework planning for the following year. Similarly, monitoring of the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of History takes place through assessing adherence to the planned schemes of the coursework and examination of the results obtained by students in monthly class tests. Reflection and evaluation were also demonstrated in the implementation of the recommendations of a previous subject inspection of History in September 2002.

The department’s subject folders contain a wide range of documentation that includes the coursework plans for the various year groups. The plans again reflect the time and attention given to ensuring that the students are taught well and develop their interest in History. The format of the template consists of four columns that provide details about the timeline, topics to be studied, specific aspects of the named topics, for example, Mussolini’s foreign policy, resources and the location of the resources. The inclusion of specific reference to the learning outcomes and greater detail regarding assessment would enable the template to encapsulate more fully the planning that underpins the teaching and study of the history coursework outlined in the year plans. Given the mixed-ability composition of the history class groups it would also be worthwhile documenting the history department’s policy regarding students with additional learning needs, who include both gifted and less able students. This too, would enable the planning documentation to give a fuller expression to the work that actually takes place in the classroom.

The TY history module is a well planned, year-long course that is enabling History to make a valuable contribution to the TY programme. Commendably, the planning of the module and the history department’s own course booklet that was produced to support and consolidate learning were informed and continue to be informed by feedback received from the students. The course content encompasses a broad range of interesting topics such as the First World War, which is studied from a number of different perspectives, China under the empires, Martin Luther King
and the American Civil Rights Movement, the Holocaust, Communism and Twentieth Century entertainment and society. The role of women also forms an important part of the students’ study. The development of independent learning skills is a key objective of the module and during the course of the year the students are required to research and complete projects on topics of choice including one major research project.

The pro-active planning of the history department is further evidenced by the good use that is being made of the school’s ICT facilities to enhance teaching and learning. For example, the use of ICT is strongly embedded in year plans and the department continues to augment the store of PowerPoint presentations that have been prepared for classroom purposes and to source useful websites on the internet. The PowerPoint presentations, files and documentation that are relevant to the teaching and study of the coursework of the various year groups have also been uploaded onto the Moodle to which the students have access.

There was careful preparation for the lessons observed. The prior planning included deciding on the focus and format of the lesson, the teaching and learning methodologies to be utilised, the determination of assignments for the students including homework tasks and the preparation of supplementary resource material.

**TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The quality of teaching and learning during the lessons observed was very good. In keeping with good classroom management practices the roll was taken at the outset. The students settled quickly and the good relationship between teacher and students underpinned the positive ambience of the history lessons. The variety of teaching and learning methodologies that were employed facilitated the planned the development of the lessons and included the students using their laptops for pre-determined activities. Differentiated tasks were also incorporated into the lessons in order to support learning.

Student learning was guided and supported throughout the lessons. For example, the focus of the lesson was clearly outlined to the students and noted on the classroom board before they undertook their study of the lesson topic. In one instance, the students were then directed to use their laptops to access and read relevant documentation relating to their lesson topic which had previously been uploaded to the Moodle. In another instance, the teacher drew the students into the study of their lesson topic by addressing questions globally to the class and to named individuals. In the case of the latter, there could have been greater use made of the classroom board when questioning the students. The recording on the board of the most important facts that were sought and that emerged from the posing of the questions would have placed further emphasis on them. The strategies employed to introduce the students to the subject of their study did however, work well.

ICT was used effectively to impact on student learning. The aforementioned example of the documentation accessed on the Moodle provided the students with interesting insights that enhanced their knowledge of the subject of their lesson. The students’ reading of the documentation was coupled with clear directions from the teacher as to what should be noted and subsequent questioning that included noting important points of information on the board. As the lesson progressed the data projector was used to display a number of images about which the teacher posed questions to consolidate learning. ICT was also used to set tasks for the students. These included a collaborative brainstorming activity using a Wiki on the Moodle platform. The functionality provided by the Wiki allowed students to input their own points while noting those entered by their peers. The students in a junior cycle class were directed to access a named
website on their laptops where they were set the task of finding additional information on the lesson topic.

Role play was another active learning methodology that provided students with a greater understanding of their lesson topic and consolidated learning. Role play was observed in one lesson where the class was divided into groups and each group was assigned a particular role. The students discussed the role assigned to their respective groups before coming together to enact their parts. The teacher monitored and supported the progress of the students during the course of this activity and posed questions to enhance learning.

Interaction with the students was used effectively as an ongoing strategy to guide and gauge learning. For example, the clear directions that were given to the students when they were set an assigned task enabled them to successfully undertake the task. There was variation in the types of questions addressed to the students by including closed questions that usually required factual recall of information and higher order questions that required more considered answers. The teaching of the lesson topic also involved the drawing of the students’ attention to points of detail and clarification through elucidation and comment. In addition, the affirmation of students for their contributions was evident in all lessons and contributed to the positive learning environment.

The quality of the students’ learning was evidenced by their attentiveness, interest and participation in the class lesson. They remained engaged, responded to the questions put to them and cooperatively undertook the assignments that they were set. The sample of students’ copies and essays perused during the inspection visit reflected their application and coverage of the coursework. The students’ written work that was studied was neat and of a good quality.

**ASSESSMENT**

Students’ progress is closely monitored in Rosemont School. During the lessons visited a combination of classroom observation, interaction with the students and the setting of tasks was observed being used to assess students’ learning. It was also evident from the documentation provided during the inspection visit that students’ project work, the correction of homework and the results of class tests inform the assessment of the students’ progress.

The provision of constructive feedback comment on the students’ written assignments is laudable because it is helpful to students in improving the quality of their work. The practice of providing senior cycle students with a print-out of the feedback comments on each of their essays and retaining the comments on file in order to track and support improvement in the students’ written work as well as aid revision of coursework topics at a later date is highly commended.

Formal school examinations are organised for all year groups before the Christmas and summer holidays commence. The third and sixth-year students sit trial certificate examination during the spring term. There are monthly class tests for all students, which in the case of the TY class group can be a written test or a project assignment. Where necessary, the history department prepares differentiated examination papers in order to meet the needs of individual students. Monthly reports are sent to the homes of the students. The students also accompany their parents or guardians to their annual parent-teacher meeting where feedback on progress is received.

The principal and the history department analyse the results of the students in History in the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. This good practice positively informs teaching and learning in the history classroom. The consistently strong performance of the students in the certificate examinations is commended.
SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole-school support for History is very good.
- The teaching and learning of History is well resourced and the participation of the history students in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities is strongly supported.
- The history department places a very strong focus on subject planning and an impressive amount of planning documentation has been produced to support the teaching and study of History.
- There is very good use of the school’s ICT facilities to enhance teaching and learning.
- The TY history module is a well planned, year-long course that is enabling History to make a valuable contribution to the TY programme.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good. Student learning was guided and supported throughout the lessons.
- The progress of history students is monitored and assessed informally through observation, interaction and lesson activities, and formally through systematic analysis of attainment.

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

- The timetabled distribution of the history lesson periods should be reviewed and a more equitable distribution of lesson periods between morning and afternoon time slots provided.
- Means of including specific reference to the learning outcomes and greater detail regarding assessment in the template developed for the yearly coursework plans should be identified.
- The policy of the history department in supporting students with additional learning needs should be documented.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teacher 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.

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