

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**St. Mel's College
Longford,
County Longford
Roll number: 63750B**

Date of inspection: 8 November 2012



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	8 November 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good.
- A positive atmosphere for learning and a good relationship between teachers and students characterised all lessons.
- Very good use was made of visual resources to support learning in most lessons.
- Methodologies that facilitated differentiated learning were incorporated into all lessons.
- Whole-school support for History is strong.
- There is scope for further development of the history department's organisational framework and subject plan.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More widespread consistency in informing students of the intended learning objectives at the start of the lesson and where relevant, further exploration of the potential of questioning, role play and the usage of written formative comments to support student learning are recommended.
 - In any future review management should explore means of increasing the time allocated to History for junior cycle and Transition Year (TY) students.
 - A subject co-ordinator should be appointed and formal history department meetings held termly.
 - The history department subject plan should be further developed and include an agreed new common template for the teachers' annual coursework plans.
-

INTRODUCTION

St. Mel's College is a secondary school for boys with a current enrolment of 462 students. The bishop of the diocese of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise is the trustee. The curricular programmes provided are the Junior Certificate, TY, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). TY is optional.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection visit was good.
- The good relationship between teachers and students and the engagement of the students were indicative of the positive atmosphere for learning during the lessons. The displays of subject materials, which included examples of the students' work, also contributed to the positive atmosphere.
- The teachers introduced their students to the subject of their study at the outset. In some lessons the students' interest was also initially stimulated through linkage of the subject to relevant current affairs or a quotation. There was less consistent practice observed regarding informing students of the intended learning objectives at the commencement of the lesson. This should also be consistently undertaken.
- The teachers frequently interacted with their students to guide and support learning. The asking of questions was most effective where lower and higher-order questions were used and the period of questioning was neither too prolonged nor too brief with insufficient questions asked to clearly gauge the students' learning.
- There was very good use of visual resources in most lessons to support learning. These were effectively used in a variety of ways such as to introduce students to the subject of their study, to recap on prior learning, to enhance students' knowledge and understanding as the lesson developed and to familiarise students with key terms.
- The active learning methodologies that were incorporated into all lessons facilitated differentiated learning. The activities included reading prepared handouts and discussion of key points, role play, pair work and note-taking. There was scope to include a greater amount of historical detail in the role plays observed.
- The development of the students' literacy skills was supported well by the range of methodologies employed.
- The recapitulation on learning that took place during the lessons further consolidated learning. The recapitulation, however, was sometimes restricted by the time allocated to this activity before the lesson concluded.
- The students were attentive to their teachers, willingly participated in their lessons and were frequently affirmed for their contributions. The quality of the students' written work was also good in the vast majority of the sample of copybooks reviewed. Moreover, regular history homework entries were made in most of the students' journals perused. Increased usage of spot checks should be undertaken to ensure that all students note their homework.
- The teachers' regular setting and correction of homework also attests to their good work in supporting learning. The provision of written, formative comments on homework assignments that was noted is commended. Greater usage of such comments is

recommended because they are an important means of providing students with clear direction as to how to improve the quality of their written work.

- The teachers monitor their students' progress formally and informally through classroom activities, homework assignments, class tests and the students' performance in the formal school and certificate examinations.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Students are provided with the opportunity to study History in all the curricular programmes provided by the school.
- The three members of the history department are deployed to teach History to junior and senior cycle classes. They remain with the class group to which they are assigned for the duration of the curricular programme, whenever practicable within the constraints of the timetable.
- The timetabled provision for History is most supportive in the case of the leaving certificate history class groups, which have six lesson periods weekly. The junior cycle class groups have two history lesson periods weekly, which is lower than average. TY students have one history lesson period weekly. It is recommended that in any future review management explore means of increasing the time allocated to History for junior cycle students. The weekly provision of a double class period for TY History should also be included in any future review as a single period can be a limiting factor when determining the extent to which coursework can be explored in any given week.
- History is well resourced. Further progress in providing a shared electronic history department folder for the history department is encouraged.
- Management actively supports the teaching staff in undertaking continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers' attendance at in-service training relating to their subject specialisms is accommodated.
- Management systematically tracks the students' progress in their formal examinations. Analysis of the students' achievements in the certificate examinations is distributed to inform subject departmental discussion of the results and to support reflection on teaching practices.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The history department meets formally biannually and a subject department plan has been developed that supports the teaching and study of History in the school. Notwithstanding the relatively small size of the history team, it is recommended that a subject convenor be chosen and that the position be rotated. Department meetings should also be organised termly to further support the collaborative work of the history teachers.
- The subject department plan, although an informative document, lacks sections on the history team's reflection on their analysis of the students' history results in the certificate examinations and an outline of proposed future planning relating to subject areas identified for improvement. These sections should be included in order to further inform the development of History in the school. It is also recommended that a new common template be devised for planning the annual schemes of the coursework. The template

should detail the methodologies, resources and learning outcomes in respect of each topic and replace the current long-term plan that mainly outlines the course content for each year group.

- The lessons observed were underpinned by purposeful planning that included the preparation of good quality resources.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. 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.

Published May 2013