

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Heywood Community School
Ballinakill, County Laois
Roll number: 91427C**

Date of inspection: 11 February 2014



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	10-11 February 2014
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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.
- All lessons had a clearly planned development that included good use of selected resources to enhance learning.
- The development of students' literacy skills was supported well during the lessons.
- Students were attentive and engaged willingly in all lesson activities.
- There is strong whole-school support for the teaching and study of History.
- Effective subject planning for History is strongly supported by the commendable collaboration of the history teachers.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater usage of pair work and increased provision of written formative comments for improvement on students' written work are recommended.
 - Where feasible within the constraints of the timetable, teachers should be deployed to teach History to more than one class group and capacity within the team to teach Leaving Certificate History should be increased.
 - The history department subject plan should be developed further.
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INTRODUCTION

Heywood Community School is a co-educational post-primary school with a current enrolment of 685 students. The curricular programmes provided are the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). TY is optional for students. The school's trustees are the Brigidine Sisters, Salesian Fathers and Laois-Offaly Education and Training Board.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.
- The planned pace and structure of the lessons engaged students and supported learning well. Teachers' instructions and explanations were clearly communicated.
- The very good practice that was observed in a number of lessons of highlighting the focus of the lesson and the intended learning objectives on the board or screen at the outset of lessons is commended. In a small minority of lessons, however, the intended lesson objectives could have been more precisely indicated to the students at the outset. The review of the lesson objectives before the conclusion of the lesson was most effective where opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning were included in this activity.
- The supportive learning environment of all classrooms visited was evidenced by the good rapport that teachers have with their students, the affirmation of students during the lessons and the classroom displays of history subject materials that included examples of students' work.
- Following the commencement of lessons, teachers used a variety of effective methodologies to support learning and to establish the context for the subsequent study of new lesson material. These included recapping on prior learning, teacher exposition and the correction of homework. Brainstorming merited inclusion as an additional learning activity during the introduction of the lesson topic at the start of one lesson.
- Resources such as information and communication technology (ICT), the classroom board, textbook and hand-outs were used well to increase students' knowledge of the topic and to consolidate learning. In some lessons students were set a task such as a worksheet or note-taking when these resources were being used. This good practice is recommended as a means of enhancing learning.
- There was good emphasis placed on supporting the development of students' literacy skills during the lessons. For example, teachers' good interactions with students encouraged students to contribute orally to the lesson; key words and terms were highlighted; opportunities for students to read aloud or silently were provided and students undertook a written task in most lessons observed.
- Students remained attentive and willingly participated in all lesson activities, including pair work in some lessons. Opportunities to include pair work that would have further supported learning were overlooked in some lessons. It is recommended, therefore, that greater usage be made of this good practice than was observed.
- Teachers use a range of good assessment modes to monitor students' progress, for example, classroom observation and the correction of homework. Some very good

individual practices regarding the provision of written formative comments for improvement on students' written work were noted in the sample of students' written work reviewed. It is recommended that this commendable practice become more firmly established within the history department.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Students have very good access to History. All junior cycle students study History as a core component of their Junior Certificate programme; TY students are provided with an elective year-long history module as part of their programme and Leaving Certificate students can continue their study of History as an optional subject choice.
- The timetabled provision for History is supportive of the subject. However, the current allocation of two class periods per week for History for first-year students should be kept under review as a weekly allocation of three history lesson periods per week is the norm.
- The subject is very well resourced. Teachers have their own base classrooms which are equipped with ICT. They also have a designated history room, a bank of supplementary resources and easy access to facilities such as the school library.
- The full complement of the history teaching team is deployed to teach the subject. This good practice enables all members of the team to remain actively involved in the development of History in the school. In the current academic year however, a number of teachers teach History to only one class group. It is recommended that, where feasible within the constraints of the timetable, teachers be deployed to teach History to more than one class group in order to have more frequent recurring contact with the coursework. It is recommended also that capacity within the team to teach Leaving Certificate History be increased.
- There are established whole-school procedures for monitoring and reporting on students' attainment.
- Whole-school in-service training for the teaching staff is organised. The attendance of the history teachers and their colleagues at in-service training for their particular subject specialism is also facilitated.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Effective subject department planning is strongly supported by the commendable collaborative practices of the history teachers. These include the convening and minuting of formal department meetings termly; the setting of common Christmas and summer examinations for each of the first and second-year year groups; planning for the school's annual "History Week" and the organising of co-curricular outings for students to places of historical interest.
- The history department has an appointed co-ordinator and a good quality subject department plan has been developed. There is ongoing review and updating of the plan at subject department meetings. With regard to this important work, it is recommended that that the plan include additional sections on areas identified for subject improvement, how History is promoted in the school, the mentoring of trainee teachers and the history department's literacy and numeracy policy. The methodologies section of the teachers'

annual coursework plans should also be reviewed in order to provide a more accurate reflection of the range and varied use of the methodologies employed to enhance teaching and learning of the coursework.

- Students' attainment in History in the certificate examinations is reviewed annually and the results of the teachers' analysis are used to inform classroom pedagogy. Details of the teachers' reflections including the setting of student attainment targets should also be included in the subject department plan.
- The good standard of the individual teacher's planning for the lessons observed underpinned the good quality of the lessons.

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.