

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Moyne Community School,
Moyne, Co. Longford
Roll number: 91436D**

Date of inspection: 19th November 2010



**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**

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Moyne Community School, Co Longford. 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, deputy principal and subject teachers. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Moyne Community School is a co-educational school in Co. Longford. The school has recently moved to mixed-ability grouping at junior cycle. This move is commended. There were 600 students enrolled in the school at the time of the evaluation

There is good provision for History in the school. History is core at junior cycle and is offered as an optional subject in the Leaving Certificate programme. History classes have five periods a week at senior cycle and three periods a week at junior cycle. This is very satisfactory. A history module of ten weeks is offered in Transition Year (TY). Timetabling is generally good across the week and spread between morning and afternoon lessons apart from one senior cycle class that has afternoon lessons only.

There are good arrangements in place for student access to the subject at senior cycle. Students receive support from the guidance department and an information night is held to inform parents of choices. It was reported that a recent change to the way that subject bands are organised meant that more students' preferences in relation to optional subjects were being met. This student-centred approach is to be welcomed. It is recommended that the history department discuss how they can best promote the subject to prospective Leaving Certificate students.

There is good provision of resources in the school. Resources are catalogued, well-organised and centrally stored adjacent to one classroom. Rooms visited were well-appointed with good storage. A print-rich environment was in evidence in many rooms. Classrooms were well equipped, some with a computer and data projector. It was reported that information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are to be upgraded shortly. This will broaden the range of resources available. It is recommended that a history folder be placed on the school network to facilitate the sharing of electronic resources. The school library, with an interesting display of historical artefacts, is an additional resource for history teaching in the school.

It is laudable that there is good attention paid to continuing professional development (CPD), both whole-school and subject-specific, in the school. Good arrangements are in place for co-curricular and extracurricular activities such as a visit by a local historian to the school and field trips to places of historical interest. A visit from a survivor of the Holocaust which took place on the day of the evaluation evoked much student interest and participation.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A team of seven teachers is involved in teaching history in the school. A coordinator is in place and formal meetings take place once a year. Minutes of meetings show good collaboration and discussion around issues such as common assessment and the analysis of examination results. To facilitate further collaboration and the sharing of good practice in the department it is recommended that formal meetings take place once per term.

The history planning folder was examined during the inspection. It contains a range of relevant documentation including schemes of work, an analysis of certificate examination results, a list of history resources, syllabus documents and other relevant documentation. While some good planning was in evidence at senior cycle, there was an overemphasis on the textbook as a template for planning at junior cycle. It is recommended that discussions about teaching and learning for the different year groups take place at subject department meetings and that subject planning in the school is expanded on the basis of these discussions. A more horizontal treatment of the subject plan is recommended that will outline topics to be studied, rather than chapter headings, allied to learning outcomes, resources and suggested methodologies for each one of those topics. This will facilitate common examinations and be an aid for teachers new to the department. The draft rebalanced junior certificate history syllabus available on the NCCA website <http://www.ncca.ie/en/> may prove useful in drafting learning outcomes.

While planning for TY History is in its initial stages, some good research into the proposed topic of Hitler's Germany and the Holocaust was in evidence. Planning should be firmed up before the module commences including details of assessment for the module. It is suggested that the commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day or the Crocus Garden project (or both) could be a good co-curricular support to the module. More information is available at <http://www.hetireland.org/>. The module should be reviewed at the end of the year and revised on the basis of that review.

Good individual planning was seen in most cases. Teachers were, in general, well prepared for class and many teachers had prepared good resources to support their teaching.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Very good quality teaching and learning was in evidence in the majority of classrooms visited over the course of the inspection. Most lessons commenced with the correction and checking of homework. In nearly all lessons the teacher introduced the topic, in most instances orally, but in one instance this was done in writing in the form of an enquiry-based question. The teacher also reviewed the learning that had taken place at the end of the lesson. This is commended as good practice. It is recommended that the topic and intended learning outcomes of the lesson is introduced in writing at the start of every lesson and that the teacher takes time to review the learning that has taken place at the lesson end.

Good learning strategies were in place in many classrooms visited. Good links with prior learning was a feature of many lessons as well as links with student experience. For example, in one lesson

on Roman housing the teacher explained the term *atrium* by referring to the theatre in Longford. Good emphasis on the development of historical skills was observed in some lessons. In one senior cycle history lesson a historical cartoon was used to good effect to introduce the topic and to explain the terms *bias* and *propaganda*. Key words were noted on the side of the board. This good practice could have been further enhanced if the students had been asked to note the key words in their copybooks. It is recommended that the practice of noting key words on the board and in student copybooks is extended to all classrooms as an aid to student learning.

A range of methodologies was in use in all the classrooms visited. Teacher exposition combined with student questioning was a feature of many lessons inspected. Storytelling was used to good effect in many classrooms to advance the lesson, for example in a junior cycle lesson on Henry VIII. Where best practice was in evidence, student activity featured strongly in the lesson. For example, in one lesson students were divided into groups. One group presented their project to the class while the other groups took notes. The teacher then presented a worksheet to the groups and students worked together in answering the worksheets. In another classroom visited, where a film clip of Michael Collins was shown, student activity was promoted when students were asked to fill out a worksheet as the film progressed. Students then compared answers before the teacher reviewed the worksheet with students. It is recommended that student activity, individual, pair or group work, is built into every lesson where practicable and in particular in double lessons where student attention tends to wane as the lesson progresses. Team teaching was available in some classrooms visited. Optimum use should be made of the additional teacher to support student activity.

A good range of resources was in use in lessons observed including hand-outs, the text-book, audio and film clips. It was noted that when reading from the textbook took place that students were asked to read. This is a good support for student literacy. Good use of ICT was seen in the course of the inspection. For example in one classroom visited, a very good quality teacher produced PowerPoint presentation on Celtic religions was shown. In another lesson observed the teacher connected to the internet to show visuals of Roman *insulae*. It is recommended that teachers pool the electronic resources they have individually produced and any useful visuals and documents downloaded onto a history folder on the school network.

Good use of the board was observed in some classrooms. In one classroom visited students were invited to write on the board with good support from the teacher in regard to spelling and presentation. This is commendable as it promotes both literacy and self-esteem. In other classrooms better use could have been made of the board to jot down the classroom topic, key words associated with the topic, key points of the lesson and relevant page numbers.

Good use of visuals to support the classroom topic was seen in every classroom visited. For example, a handout with photographs of different forms of transport around 1900 was a useful visual support in a lesson on social change. The use of visuals is commended as very appropriate especially in a mixed-ability setting.

Good quality learning was in evidence in the classrooms visited. Students copybooks examined contained good quality work and students interviewed were knowledgeable about their courses. Classroom management was very good in lessons inspected. A sense of order and an atmosphere of mutual respect were in place in all classrooms visited.

ASSESSMENT

A very good range of assessment modes were in evidence in the school. A homework policy is in place and an examination of student copybooks and journals showed that good practices in relation to the setting and monitoring of homework were in evidence in all classrooms visited. It was recommended in some junior cycle classrooms that students be given more practice in extended writing, to help develop their generic history writing skills. In a minority of classrooms visited, *Assessment for Learning* practices, where teachers gave students helpful pointers on how to improve their work, were in evidence in students copybooks. This commendable strategy should be extended to all classrooms. The use of project work as an assessment mode is well established in the school with some very good assessment practices in place such as assessment of oral presentation skills. A recent move to common assessment in junior cycle is commended.

Very good preparation for examinations was in evidence in classrooms visited. Students are encouraged to take higher level papers. Frequent testing is a feature in most classrooms visited. An examination of documentation relating to certificate examinations showed that most students achieve well in this subject.. It is commendable that the uptake of higher level papers is very good. Comprehensive arrangements around the research study report at Leaving Certificate are in place.

Very good record keeping was in evidence across the department with some excellent record keeping in evidence. Good use is made of the journal to record students' work.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The school has recently moved to mixed-ability grouping at junior cycle.
- There is good provision for History in the school.
- There is good attention paid to continuing professional development (CPD), both whole school and subject specific, in the school.
- A coordinator is in place and formal meetings take place once a year. Minutes of meetings show good collaboration and discussion around issues such as common assessment and the analysis of examination results.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was in evidence in the majority of classrooms visited over the course of the inspection.
- A sense of order and an atmosphere of mutual respect were in place in all classrooms visited.
- A homework policy is in place and good practices in relation to the setting and monitoring of homework were in evidence in all classrooms visited.
- Very good preparation for examinations was in evidence.
- A recent move to common assessment in junior cycle is commended.

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 history department discuss how they can best promote the subject to prospective Leaving Certificate students.
- To facilitate further collaboration and the sharing of good practice in the department it is recommended that formal meetings take place once per term.

- It is recommended that subject planning in the school is expanded along the lines detailed in this report.
- It is recommended that the good practice present in many classrooms of using extended writing as an assessment strategy is extended to all classrooms. Furthermore *Assessment for Learning* should be used as an assessment strategy across the school.

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