

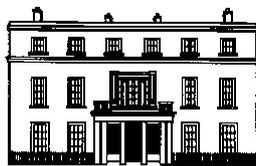
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Christian Brothers Secondary School
New Ross, County Wexford.
Roll number: 63600F**

Date of inspection: 16 September 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 Christian Brothers Secondary School (CBS) New Ross. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The curricular programmes provided for the students of CBS Secondary School are the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and Transition Year (TY). History is a core subject for all junior-cycle students and is offered to senior-cycle students undertaking the established Leaving Certificate as an optional subject choice. The timetabled allocation and distribution of the lesson periods support the teaching and study of History. There is no designated history module offered to TY students. Management is asked to consider the inclusion of a TY history module in the programme provided for the students.

The history subject team comprises three teachers, all of whom are deployed to teach History. Individual history teachers may be assigned to first-year class groups for one year only but the history teachers deployed to teach second-year class groups remain with the same class group until the students sit their Junior Certificate history examination. This good practice enables the history teachers to bond with their students, acquire knowledge about their learning and maintain continuity in their delivery of the coursework. One member of the team is deployed to teach the senior-cycle history class groups. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed in order to build capacity within the team.

The provision of teaching resources supports the teaching and study of History. The range of teaching aids that the history teachers have at their disposal includes information and communication technology (ICT), audio-visual equipment, and photocopiers. There is a data projector in each classroom and teachers have access to the school's computer room for lessons. Resources are also shared by the members of the history team. Two members of the history team have in effect base classrooms for their timetabled lessons. The development of an effective history library and a notice board for the subject in a prominent place would further support History.

Management supports the collaborative work of the history department. Formal meetings of the history teachers are facilitated and an annual budget is allocated to the department. The organisation of outings to places of historical interest is sanctioned. The importance of in-service professional development is recognised and the attendance of members of the history team at in-service courses is accommodated.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The history department makes a positive contribution to History in the school as evidenced by the appointment of a coordinator, the recorded collaboration of the history teachers at their departmental meetings, the documentation of the history department plan and the organisation of co-curricular outings for the students. It is recommended that the position of coordinator be rotated at agreed intervals. The responsibilities of the coordinator should also be discussed and documented. The current practice of convening one formal meeting annually needs to be reviewed and the scheduling of more regular formal meetings introduced. A formal meeting of the history team should be scheduled once per term within the calendar of the school year. The greater frequency of formal meetings will support continuous progress being made in curricular planning. The template used to record the business of the meetings should also be modified to include details of the outcomes of actions agreed at the previous meeting.

The history department plan informs the teaching and learning of History. Effective planning documentation is always best viewed as work in progress rather than a finished product so it is very important that the department plan be further developed over a period of time to include more information about the aims and objectives of the history coursework, the key skills that the students will acquire, the assessment practices of the history teachers and the strategies adopted to support students with special educational needs. The extended schemes of the coursework contained in the departmental plan only indicate the names and order of the topics to be taught and the timeline for their coverage. It is recommended that details of the proposed resources, methodologies and learning outcomes be incorporated into the coursework plans.

The study of History has an important contribution to make to the school's TY and the breadth of education that TY seeks to provide for the students. The history team is asked to secure through discussion with management and the TY coordinator the inclusion of a history module in this programme. The members of the history team should collaborate in the preparation of the history module and become involved in teaching the module. The participation of the history team in TY will help to maintain the students' contact with History, develop their interest in the subject and provide opportunities to explore a variety of teaching and learning methodologies in a context free from the pressure of certificate examinations.

The setting up of an electronic departmental planning folder for History on the school's intranet system should be actively considered. The folder would provide a useful means of developing a bank of history resources such as PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, handouts, and examination papers. The electronic format of the departmental planning documentation would make tasks such as the development of coursework plans and recording the minutes of department meetings less onerous than the maintenance of hardcopy versions of the same documentation.

The delivery of the lessons observed was underpinned by the planning and preparation that were completed beforehand. The teachers displayed a good grasp of the relevant syllabuses and in keeping with good teaching practice chose a defined topic for each lesson. Planning for the

lessons included the preparation and selection of appropriate resources to support teaching and learning.

The teachers' practice of displaying history materials in the classroom is noted and encouraged as a means of visually stimulating students' interest in History. The participation of the teachers in the planning and organisation of co-curricular outings for the students that include outings with a historical dimension is also noted and encouraged in order to support the development of the students' interest in History.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The observation of teaching and learning involved classroom visits to five history lessons. The lessons commenced with a roll call and the students quickly settled into the study of their respective lesson topics. The teachers' practice of informing their students of the focus of the lesson at the outset was noted on a number of occasions and it is recommended that this practice be universally adopted. Having a defined focus for lessons enabled the teachers to steadily impact on student learning and provide the students with a deeper understanding of the subject of their study. In the case of one lesson however, the choice of lesson topic was too ambitious for the limited time available and required continuation in a subsequent lesson in order to achieve the intended learning outcome.

The checking or correction of homework took place during the initial stage of some lessons. This activity helped overall to establish links with prior learning and prepare the context for the study of the lesson topic. Individual students were called upon to read aloud the written answers they had given to particular questions and this gave the teachers the opportunity to enhance learning by posing questions and providing additional comment. However, the potential of the checking and correction of homework to impact on student learning could have been more fully explored by eliciting contributions from a greater number of students during this activity and noting important points of information on the classroom board.

The recapping on material from a previous lesson by addressing questions globally and to named students was another effective means used to engage students at the outset of the lesson. Similarly a teacher's reading of relevant material from the class's textbook prior to the students' study of primary source documents helped to provide the class with a greater understanding of the background to their study of the documents. The identification of key words for a lesson topic that emerged under the guidance of the teacher's questioning and the noting of them on the classroom board at the start of the lesson were also effective. In place of a handout which presented new material to students, the distribution in the final phase of the lesson of a worksheet that incorporated the key words would have impacted more strongly on student learning. There was insufficient time remaining in the lesson period for the students to study the new material fully whereas the worksheet would have reinforced learning by facilitating a recap on the lesson topic.

There was good use made of visual resources to support and consolidate student learning. The PowerPoint presentation to a junior-cycle class on the lesson topic, Artefacts, impacted strongly on the students' enjoyment of their study of the topic and frequently prompted their contributions to the lesson. The presentation also facilitated note-taking and feedback on a class activity where the students were divided into small groups and set a task relating to their study of artefacts. The map illustrations and pictorial images in the class textbook were effectively incorporated into the lesson on Christopher Columbus's pioneering voyage of discovery to the New World. A DVD clip relating to the fall of Japan in 1945 and handouts containing map illustrations that were

relevant to the lesson supported the student's study of that topic. There was scope, however, to make greater use of visual resources including wall maps and overhead transparencies in a number of lessons.

The teachers guided and supported student learning throughout the lessons observed. There was strong interaction with the students usually through questioning and comment that supported the students in acquiring a greater understanding of the lesson material. The reading of relevant sections of the class textbook by members of the class in a number of lessons was also another effective means among the range of teaching and learning strategies employed by the teachers to engage the students and increase their knowledge of the lesson topic. Affirmation of the contributions of individual students during the lessons was frequently expressed. There was however, limited use made of active learning strategies such as a written task or group work in order to consolidate student learning apart from the setting of homework assignments. The inclusion of a specific task to be undertaken by the students would have helped establish a better balance between the teacher and student inputs to some lessons.

The teachers' encouragement and support for student learning was also evident in the students' copies and their coursework that were perused during the course of the inspection visit. The practice of including a written comment at the end of a student's homework was noted and is encouraged. It is a supportive and worthwhile strategy that enables students to receive constructive feedback about their work.

ASSESSMENT

The history teachers monitor the progress of their students and the quality of their learning both informally and formally. During the course of the history lessons the teachers gauged their students' application and understanding of the lesson material through a variety of strategies that included questioning, discussion, group work and the correction of homework tasks. With regard to the latter it is always important to establish that the students clearly understand the questions to be answered when the homework is being assigned in order to avoid the situation similar to the one that occurred with one class group in which a number of students indicated difficulties relating to a lack of understanding of the questions that they were required to answer in completing their homework assignment.

The students' achievements in the formal school examinations namely the Christmas tests, summer term examinations and the trial certificate examinations that are organised for the examination classes during the spring term provide further informative indicators of the progress of students. School reports are sent to the students' homes following each of the school's formal examination sessions. The parent-teacher meeting that is organised annually for each year group gives parents and guardians the opportunity to meet with the history teachers and discuss the progress of the students.

Management analyses student performance in the certificate examinations and compares it to national norms. It is recommended that the history team document the data relating to History and the strategies used to optimise student attainment in the assessment section of the history development plan. The laudable school practice of publicly affirming meritorious students for their progress in History during the course of their secondary school careers is noted and should also be documented.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Whole school support for History is demonstrated by the accessibility of the subject to the students pursuing the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate.
- The timetabled allocation of the lesson periods, the deployment of the three history teachers to teach the subject, and the provision of teaching resources support the teaching and study of History.
- The teachers displayed a good grasp of the relevant syllabuses. Prior planning informed the development of the lessons and the teachers' delivery of the lessons steadily impacted on student learning.
- There was good use made of visual resources to support and consolidate student learning.
- Assessment and the monitoring of student progress are actively pursued.

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

- The history department plan, including the agreed year plans, should be further developed as described. The setting up of an electronic departmental planning folder for History on the school's intranet system should be actively considered.
- The history team should secure through discussion with management and the TY coordinator the inclusion of a history module in TY and collaborate in the preparation and teaching of the module.
- A formal meeting of the history team should be formally scheduled once per term within the calendar of the school year to support their collaborative work.
- The practice whereby one member of the history team is deployed to teach the senior-cycle history class groups should be reviewed and the capacity within the team to teach senior-cycle history should be increased.
- More widespread use of learning activities such as written assignments and group work that can be undertaken by the students themselves during the lesson is recommended.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers 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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