An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History and Environmental and Social Studies (ESS)
REPORT

Riversdale Community College,
Dublin 15

Roll number: 70081V

Date of inspection: 11 May 2012
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES (ESS)

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in lessons observed. Lessons were purposeful and teacher exposition was clear.

• There was an orderly atmosphere in all classrooms visited. Good student-teacher relations were evident.

• Curricular provision and timetabling are very good for both History and Environmental and Social Studies (ESS).

• There are very good information and communications technology (ICT) resources in the school. Many classrooms have interactive whiteboards.

• The provision of a history section on the school’s website showcasing resources and student work is highly commended.

• Homework practices were very good in some instances but varied across the department. There is scope for development in this area.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Homework should be assigned and monitored regularly. Students should be given helpful oral and written feedback on their work.

• The journal should be used to its full capacity to support teaching and learning in the subject.

• At senior cycle students should be given an open choice of subjects and the subject bands should be arranged to accommodate as many student choices as possible.

• Regular team meetings for ESS should take place. ESS teachers should work closely together to produce common schemes of work, based on the ESS syllabus, and common testing should take place.
Riversdale Community College is a co-educational post-primary school under the patronage of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). At the time of the evaluation there were 442 students enrolled. All students study History in junior cycle, either the established history syllabus or Environmental and Social Studies (ESS), a combination of History and Geography. All students undertake Transition Year (TY) where they have access to History. History is available as an option at Leaving Certificate level. The school is included in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) action plan.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in lessons observed.
- In almost all cases the teacher introduced the intended structure of the lesson in writing and referred to it as the lesson progressed. This is commendable. In a few lessons teachers made time for review. These good practices should be extended to all lessons.
- Lessons were purposeful and teacher exposition was clear. There was effective use of key word strategies and a good emphasis on oral expression in most lessons observed.
- Very good use of resources such as film clips, word documents and maps was noted in many lessons. The interactive whiteboard was used to very good effect in some lessons.
- There was a balance between teacher exposition and student activity in most lessons. In many lessons teachers had planned a range of activities and inputs which helped to maintain student interest and enthusiasm.
- In some instances, the planned activity was not sufficiently challenging. Extended periods of note-taking are not recommended. If possible, students should be encouraged to undertake independent written work instead of copying notes or agreed answers from the white board.
- In one classroom visited there was very little teacher-student interaction evident as the teacher had planned an assessment task for the lesson.
- There was an orderly atmosphere in all classrooms visited. Student-teacher relations were respectful. Teachers dealt sensitively with student difficulties.
- In some classrooms visited teachers give regular homework. In most of these cases this homework is well monitored. In other classes very little homework is given. In a small minority of lessons observed teachers prompted students to take down their homework in their journals. This good practice should be extended.
- In a minority of classrooms visited teachers gave students helpful written feedback on their work. It was noted that the standard of student work was consistently high in these classes. It is recommended that homework is given regularly in all classrooms and that students are given helpful oral and written feedback on their work.
- Regular testing was a feature in some classrooms visited.
- Good project work for ESS and TY was evident. It is commendable that student work is displayed in the school and on the school website.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Students in junior cycle are divided into streamed classes. Two classes study History and the other two class groups follow the Junior Certificate School Programme and study ESS. It is recommended that this streaming arrangement is kept under review to ensure that it is meeting the needs of all students.

• Curricular provision and timetabling is very good for both History and ESS. TY students have four periods per week while Leaving Certificate students have five class periods per week. In junior cycle history students have three class periods per week and ESS students have the very good provision of six class periods per week.

• At present at Leaving Certificate level students choose subjects from pre-arranged subject bands. It is recommended that students be given an open choice of subjects and the subject bands arranged to accommodate as many student choices as possible.

• There are very good ICT resources in the school. Many classrooms have interactive whiteboards. Some teachers indicated that they would appreciate additional training in the area of ICT.

• The JCSP library in the school is a significant support for students and is also used to good effect by students undertaking project work. For example, during Titanic week in the school in May 2012 the library hosted the Titanic exhibition and many class groups worked on related projects at this time.

• It is suggested that an additional storage area for ESS resources would prove helpful.

• Teachers have had good access to a range of continuing professional development sessions including history in-service. Good induction for teachers new to the ESS department was noted.

• A review of student journals indicated that the journals of many students were in poor condition and that many students did not note their homework in their journals. Few examples of parent or tutor signatures were evident. It is recommended that a school-wide review of journal practices takes place and that the journal is used to its full potential to support student learning.

• It is positive that a homework policy has been formulated. This documents the duties of students in relation to homework. It is recommended that it be reviewed to include details of the duties of teachers and parents in relation to homework.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The history department has a co-ordinator and regular meetings take place.

• Good collaboration among members of the department was noted including very good attention to DEIS planning for attainment. Members of the department are highly commended for the inclusion of a history section on the school website which includes notes, resources and student essays.

• The subject plan for History is handwritten and dates back to 2007 with review notes annotated. It is recommended that it be converted to electronic format and that the schemes of work therein be expanded and laid out for each term to contain suggested learning outcomes per topic allied to appropriate methodologies and resources. This will facilitate common assessment in junior cycle which is recommended.
- Very good planning for TY was evident which resulted in an interesting and varied TY programme.

- The co-ordinator for ESS is not a teacher of the subject and regular formal meetings of the ESS team do not take place. It is recommended that a co-ordinator is appointed from within the team of teachers teaching ESS and that formal meetings of the ESS team take place regularly.

- There was evidence, in some ESS classes visited, that a considerable amount of class time is being spent on the teaching of topics outside the ESS syllabus. Teachers’ individual schemes of work should be revised to ensure that the majority of material covered in ESS classes concurs with the content of the syllabus. Teachers in the ESS department should work closely together on common schemes of work to facilitate common testing for the subject.

- Members of the ESS department are commended for producing high-quality school versions of materials for the subject which form a useful aid to teachers when planning their lessons.

- Teachers in both the ESS and the history department were well prepared for lessons, including planning for resources.

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

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