

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of History  
REPORT**

**Firhouse Community College  
Firhouse, Dublin 24  
Roll number: 70140L**

**Date of inspection: 16 October 2012**



**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**

<b>Date(s) of inspection</b>	15-16 October 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Overall, the quality of the teaching and learning of History observed was good to very good albeit with scope for greater consolidation of learning in one lesson.
- The planned development of the lessons incorporated a variety of teaching and learning methodologies to support learning.
- A good relationship between teachers and their students was an inherent aspect of the lessons.
- History is supported well within the school's organisational framework.
- The history teachers are a proactive group and collaborate effectively.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Where relevant, greater use should be made of strategies such as targeted questioning in order to gauge and consolidate learning.
  - A common template that includes specific reference to the methodologies selected for each topic should be devised for the teachers' annual coursework plans.
  - A review should be undertaken of the appropriateness for a recurring sizeable minority of students of sitting the higher-level Junior Certificate history paper rather than the ordinary-level paper in their Junior Certificate history examination.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

Firhouse Community College is a co-educational post-primary school under the auspices of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee. Current enrolment numbers 662 students. The curricular programmes provided include the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a mandatory Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of the teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was generally good to very good.
- All lessons had a planned development that incorporated a variety of teaching and learning methodologies to support learning and development of the students' literacy skills.
- The teachers informed their students of the purpose of the lesson at the outset or at a pre-determined point during the initial phase. The intended learning objectives were noted on the board or displayed on screen in most lessons.
- The teachers also initially engaged their students by recapping on prior learning through activities such as questioning, the correction of homework or by introducing them to a particular aspect of their study. These strategies supported learning and were good means of drawing students into the study of their lesson material.
- Effective use of resources to enhance students' knowledge and understanding was frequently observed. These included PowerPoint presentations, selected images, video clips, the board and textbooks. There was scope in a minority of lessons to combine a worksheet task with the viewing of a video clip as an additional means of consolidating learning.
- The teachers' interaction with their classes was a notable feature of the lessons and reflected their good relationship. Questioning of students was most effective where it included targeted and global questions.
- Differentiated learning was supported by prepared resources, the emphasising of key words, the setting of written assignments and the monitoring of students' progress while completing a written task. There was however, scope for greater exploration of collaborative learning than was observed.
- The setting of written assignments provided an opportunity for students to consolidate their learning. However, in one lesson, some students displayed a limited knowledge of what they had been studying when directed to complete a worksheet assignment. Greater use of targeted questions, a focus on the reading of selected material from the textbook or a prepared handout and the use of collaborative learning strategies as additional means of supporting learning merited consideration.
- Homework was assigned in most lessons. The teachers' good practice of regularly setting and correcting homework assignments was also evident in the sample of students' copybooks that was reviewed. Greater usage of written formative feedback comments, such as those noted, is encouraged. This is in order to give students clear direction as to

how to continually improve the quality of their work, especially in relation to extended pieces of writing.

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

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- History is provided as a core subject for junior cycle students, as an optional module for TY students and as an elective subject choice for leaving certificate students.
- History is well resourced and the overall timetabled provision for History is supportive of the subject. It is recommended however, that the timetabling on the same day of two of the three history lessons that are provided weekly to junior cycle class groups be avoided. It is acknowledged that such incidences relate only to two first-year class groups.
- The eight members of the history department are all deployed to teach History. There are established procedures in place for history teachers, who are interested in teaching the subject to senior cycle students, to have that opportunity. These good practices enable the teachers to remain actively involved in the teaching and development of History in the school. It is recommended however that, where feasible, every member of the history subject team be deployed to teach more than one class group in order to have more frequently recurring contact with the full extent of the history coursework.
- Management actively supports the professional development of the teaching staff and attendance at subject-specific in-service training is accommodated; mentoring support is provided for student teachers.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Commendable collaboration underpins the good work of the history department. The position of subject co-ordinator is rotated; formal meetings are organised termly and the teachers have collaborated in producing a good quality subject department plan. The teachers also work together in setting common examinations for the junior cycle year groups, contribute to the bank of resources in the electronic subject department folder and co-operate in organising visits to places of historical interest.
- The subject plan informs the work of the history teachers and much good work has been invested in its development. It is recommended however, that an agreed common template be devised for the teachers' annual schemes of the coursework rather than having a number of formats as is currently the case. The methodologies selected for teaching each topic should also be indicated in the annual coursework plans in addition to the generic list of methodologies that are outlined at the start of some of the annual plans.
- The analysis of the students' history results in the certificate examinations again attests to the good practices of the history department. In this context and notwithstanding the school's very commendable policy of encouraging students to aim towards sitting higher-level in their subject examinations, the appropriateness for a recurring sizeable minority of students of sitting the higher-level Junior Certificate history paper rather than the ordinary-level paper should be reviewed in light of their history examination results.

---

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and two representatives of the 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.