

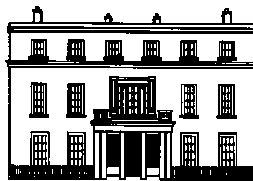
An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Leixlip Community School
Roll number: 91371B**

Date of inspection: 23 April 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 Leixlip Community School. 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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Provision for History on the school timetable is very good for all year groups following certificate programmes and there is effective whole school support from management for the subject. History is a core subject at junior cycle and has a satisfactory time allocation of three class periods per week. Students are grouped in mixed-ability classes. A small minority of students in the designated unit for students with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) study Environmental and Social Studies (ESS), which comprises both History and Geography. History is optional for Leaving Certificate students and has a satisfactory time allocation of five classes per week. There is a good spread of classes across the week and between morning and afternoon periods for all groups studying History.

Transition Year (TY) is optional in the school. TY students have access to historical studies as part of a Social Studies programme. Three periods a week are allocated to Social Studies over the full school year. Provision for History within this programme is low. Only eight class periods, approximately, are allocated to historical studies. This is less than ten per cent of the total time allocated to Social Studies over the full year. It is suggested that it would be difficult for students to adequately complete the ambitious history programme of local and family history outlined in the history plan in the time allocated. It is recommended that the time allocation available to TY History be reviewed.

There are very good arrangements for student access to Leaving Certificate History in the school. Students are offered an open choice when choosing their subjects and are well supported when making their choices. For example, members of the History department speak to classes about the subject. History has a high profile in the school. This is evidenced by the fact that there are two history groups in fifth year and three in sixth year.

There are very good resources for history teaching in the school. Classrooms are well appointed and have adequate storage. Each classroom has been equipped with a data projector and computer linked to the school network. Many classrooms visited had displays of historical posters and

student projects. The display of a historical timeline around the walls of one of the classrooms is worthy of particular mention as it is a good aid to student understanding of chronology and change. A history notice board in a prominent area of the school provides teachers with the opportunity to display history-related resources. Management is open to the purchase of resources. These are stored, for the most part, in teachers' classrooms. Some cataloguing of audio-visual resources has taken place. It is recommended that all resources for History are catalogued, included in the department folder and updated as new resources are acquired.

A team of well-qualified and dedicated teachers are involved in teaching History. There is a good focus on continuing professional development (CPD) activities in the school and teachers have been facilitated in their attendance at history in-service. While some use of ICT was seen in the course of the inspection many teachers feel that they could use further support in this area. It is suggested that management investigate how it can further support teachers in their use of the very good ICT facilities in the school.

The school is to be commended for providing dedicated supports for History students with additional educational needs both at junior cycle and senior cycle. Students at junior cycle experiencing difficulty accessing the subject have additional supports in History and at senior cycle a history class has been formed for students in sixth year who do not study a continental language.

It is laudable that the school facilitates extracurricular and co-curricular activities for History. For example, history field trips are planned regularly at both junior and senior cycle. The department also co-operates in organising history competitions and quizzes. The organisation of a school museum project for first year students is worthy of particular mention. All of these activities help promote History in the school. Teachers are to be commended for organising these activities.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject department planning is well established in the school. The history department is effectively co-ordinated and the position of co-ordinator rotates among team members. Well-planned meetings take place regularly and minutes are recorded. It is laudable that the sharing of resources has been on the agenda for department meetings. This is a testament to the good level of collaboration that takes place in the department. To formalise this collaboration, it is recommended that a history folder be made available on the school's intranet system. This would facilitate the sharing of resources, including PowerPoint presentations, film clips, worksheets and examination papers and be a good aid to teachers new to the department. To facilitate the sharing of good practice in the teaching of History, it is recommended that teaching and learning and differentiation are prioritised for consideration at future department meetings.

Considerable work has gone into putting together the department folder and subject plan for History. The department folder contains a number of documents, many of which provide evidence of evolving planning over the years. This shows a good level of reflective practice within the department. Schemes of work for year groups are included in the folder. To progress this good work further, it is suggested that these schemes of work be reviewed and expanded to include identified learning outcomes linked to curriculum content, suggested methodologies and resources and timeframes for delivery. This review should include the planning documentation for TY History. In the case of TY History, it is recommended that the assessment procedures associated with the Social Studies module be clarified and tied in with the TY programme documentation. This should take place in tandem with the aforementioned review of the time allocation for the history section of the module.

Good individual planning was seen in the course of the inspection with well-prepared classes in evidence. In some cases teachers presented their comprehensive individual planning documentation to the inspector.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning seen in classrooms visited ranged from good to excellent. In all classrooms visited teachers introduced the lesson topic at the start of class. In one instance, at senior cycle, an enquiry-based approach was used where the lesson was framed around a question. This complements the emphasis on enquiry in the Leaving Certificate syllabus. Good links with prior learning were made in most classrooms visited. In one lesson, at junior cycle, the teacher made time for review at the lesson end. This helped to consolidate the learning that took place during the lesson. It is suggested that this strategy should become standard practice across the history department.

A good range of teaching methodologies was seen in the lessons observed with good pace and timing in evidence in all cases. Questioning was a feature of all lessons and was used to good effect, both to review prior learning and to advance the lesson. Where best practice in relation to questioning was seen, the teacher used a mix of higher-order and lower-order questioning to differentiate the lesson and wait-time to give the more reticent student time to frame an answer. Clarity of explanation was a feature of many lessons observed. In some instances teachers drew from students' own experience to explain a difficult concept. This is good practice. For example, in one lesson on the Soviet Union, the teacher used the example of the modern-day banking system to explain the concept of capitalism.

Lessons in which students were given the opportunity to take charge of their own learning, through the introduction of individual or group work, were particularly enjoyable for students. For example, in one lesson on the agricultural revolution, the students were asked to fill out a chart, in their copybooks, detailing the new inventions. This transferred responsibility for learning to the students and ensured that students had an easily accessible aid for revision. In another senior cycle lesson observed, on the subject of the Coleraine University Controversy, well-organised group work, where students were invited to make up their own guidelines as to where a new university should be situated, promoted the development of higher-level thinking and provided a good backdrop to future lessons on the subject. In some lessons observed, there was an over-emphasis on teacher exposition and students were passive in their learning. It is recommended that, when lessons are being planned, teachers ensure that there is an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity.

Good use of resources was seen in most classrooms visited and ICT was well used in some lessons inspected. For example, some teachers had produced their own hand outs or PowerPoint presentations to support teaching and learning. This is commendable. The use of a *Webquest*, as seen in one support lesson observed in the school's computer room, was a good way to focus students' attention on the main causes of the American Revolution. In another lesson the teacher used the school's broadband system to connect to a site detailing examples of places of local historical interest. While some good use of visuals was observed in the course of the inspection, it is suggested, in some cases, that the visuals in textbooks or handouts, or indeed visuals sketched on the board, could add to student understanding, especially at junior cycle.

Good use of the board to introduce keywords or key points which students were invited to transcribe into their copybooks was seen in some classrooms visited. This is a good aid to all

students, but especially to those with additional educational needs. It is recommended that the good practice, evident in some classrooms visited, of placing an emphasis on key-words, visual media and activity-based learning be extended to all classrooms. Activity-based learning should include independent written work as well as note taking. It is suggested that word frames could be used with some students who experience difficulty in completing extended writing tasks. Additionally, it is suggested that students, rather than the teacher, should be given the opportunity to read aloud wherever possible in order to enhance student literacy.

There was a good emphasis on the development of historical skills in many lessons inspected, especially at senior cycle. In one lesson on local history, students were skilfully introduced to the concepts of historical significance and shared experience through the use of student reflection and classroom discussion. In another classroom, students showed clear understanding of the importance of evidence in coming to a historical judgement. The development of these skills is commended as a very good basis for the research study at Leaving Certificate.

Pupil-teacher relations were very good and a positive learning atmosphere was evident throughout. Teachers were affirming of students efforts and encouraged them to achieve at the highest level possible. An examination of documents pertaining to state examinations shows a good percentage of students taking higher level in History. This underlines the good focus on student attainment in the school and is commended.

ASSESSMENT

A good range of assessment modes are in use in the school. Frequent testing is a feature in most classrooms visited and the use of history quizzes as an assessment mode for first-year students is commended. There is a very good emphasis on project work throughout the school and good procedures are in place to assess these projects, including some very good continuous assessment practices. Exemplary procedures in relation to the research study report at Leaving Certificate are in place in the department. Homework is given regularly and frequently monitored. Some very good *Assessment for Learning (AfL)* strategies were seen in many lessons, such as outlining the purpose of the lesson at the start of the lesson and giving constructive feedback to students on where they needed to improve. It is recommended that teachers investigate further AfL strategies with a view to incorporating them into classroom practice. Common end-of-year examinations are in place in most instances. This element of good practice should be maintained if at all possible.

Good teacher record keeping was in evidence in all classrooms visited. Student outcomes are communicated to parents by means of parent-teacher meetings once each year and reports home twice each year.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Provision for History on the school timetable is very good for all year groups following certificate programmes and there is good support from management for the subject.
- The school is to be commended for providing dedicated supports for History students with additional educational needs both at junior cycle and senior cycle.
- The department is effectively co-ordinated. Well-planned meetings take place regularly and minutes are recorded.

- Teachers are to be commended for the good level of planning for extracurricular and co-curricular activities for History.
- The quality of teaching and learning seen in classrooms visited ranged from good to excellent
- Pupil-teacher relations were very good and a positive learning atmosphere was evident throughout. Teachers were affirming of students efforts and encouraged them to achieve at the highest level possible.
- Some very good *Assessment for Learning (AfL)* strategies were seen in many lessons such as outlining the purpose of the lesson at the start of the lesson and giving constructive feedback to students on where they needed to improve.

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 time allocation available to TY History within the Social Studies module be reviewed. This should take place in tandem with a review of the module itself.
- It is recommended that a history folder be made available on the school's intranet system. This would facilitate the sharing of resources, including PowerPoint presentations, film clips, worksheets and examination papers.
- It is recommended that the good practice, evident in some classrooms visited, of placing an emphasis on key-words, visual media and activity-based learning be extended to all classrooms.

Post-evaluation meetings were 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.