

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Mountrath Community School,
Mountrath, Co. Laois
Roll number: 91550B

Date of inspection: 30 April 2013



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	29 and 30 April 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods including one double period.• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good in the lessons observed.
- Classroom management was good and lessons took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- A variety of teaching methodologies was used in lessons observed. In some cases there was a good balance between teacher input and student activity but in many lessons the teacher voice predominated.
- Many teachers had sourced interesting resources to support lessons including information and communications technology (ICT) resources such as film and audio clips and PowerPoint presentations.
- Curricular provision for History is very satisfactory, there is good provision of resources for the subject and student access to the subject in senior cycle is good.
- Department planning is advancing, regular meetings take place and a coordinator has been appointed.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The proposed learning outcomes of the lesson should be made clear at the start of lessons and a review of learning should take place at the end.
 - There should be an appropriate balance in lessons between the teacher voice and student input and an emphasis on active learning methodologies.
 - Discussions should take place at department meetings about long-term planning for the subject, targets should be set in areas identified for development, and actions agreed to reach those targets.
 - A review of the history TY module should take place and should include an agreed format for assessment.
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INTRODUCTION

Mountrath Community School is a co-educational post-primary school in the town of Mountrath Co. Laois. History is core at junior cycle. Transition Year (TY) is optional in the school and all TY students study a half year module of History. History is available as an option to leaving certificate students. At the time of the evaluation there were 715 students enrolled.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good in lessons observed.
- Classroom management was good and lessons took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- The outlining of proposed learning outcomes at the start of lessons which are returned to in a review of learning at the end was used in a few lessons to structure the lesson and communicate planned learning to students. This methodology is an integral part of Assessment for Learning and should be extended to all lessons.
- A variety of teaching methodologies was used in lessons observed. Where very good practice was evident teachers used a range of methodologies, including active learning methodologies, to present the material and engage students. For example, in one lesson observed the teacher revised the key words associated with the topic before introducing group work. The teacher then used the textbook to introduce more in-depth learning of the topic. The lesson concluded with an interesting review of learning using a graphic organiser.
- In many cases, however, the teacher voice predominated and the students did not have the opportunity to participate in the lesson and demonstrate their learning to any significant extent. In some instances, teachers read out materials on PowerPoint presentations to students, in others teachers continued to talk and give instructions when students were attempting independent work. In one case students were invited to present project work to the class but teacher interruptions meant that the students' voices were not heard. Teachers should ensure an appropriate balance between the teacher and student voice in lessons.
- Many teachers had sourced interesting resources to support lessons including a broad range of information and communications technology (ICT) resources such as film and audio clips and PowerPoint presentations. These brought interest and variety to many lessons. In some instances better use could have been made of the visuals in these resources to consolidate learning. It is recommended, as was the case in some classrooms visited, that teachers set students short listening tasks when ICT clips are being shown, to promote student engagement. Another useful strategy recommended is to set students a higher-order question that is discussed by students in pairs before giving whole-class feedback. This ensures that all students are included in the learning process and get the opportunity to develop their analytical thinking.
- Homework is regularly assigned in most classrooms visited and frequently corrected in many with some teachers providing regular helpful comments to students on their work. This good practice should be extended. There was evidence of frequent testing in many classrooms visited. Teachers, in general, set common tests. This is commendable. Teachers should agree in advance the topics to be covered for different year groups each

term. It is positive that project-work is undertaken by first year students and that this work forms part of the assessment for the summer in-house examinations.

- In the TY class visited some students had submitted a research study but most did not keep copybooks or folders with evidence of other work completed. This should be addressed.
- Students are encouraged to undertake higher level courses in most instances and junior cycle uptake of higher level history is in line with national averages, with good results evident in many class groups. However, student uptake of History is significantly below the national average at leaving certificate level. The history department should monitor the level of uptake and agree actions to ensure that students have a positive experience of History in junior cycle and in TY. An emphasis on active teaching methodologies should be progressed.
- Lessons were taught in rooms equipped with good ICT equipment. Many examples of history posters and student project work were evident.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Curricular provision for History is very satisfactory. Students in junior cycle have three class periods a week in all year groups, TY students study a half year module of two class periods per week. Fifth year students have five class periods per week while sixth year students have the very good provision of six class periods per week.
- Timetabling in the subject for senior cycle students is good. However, some junior cycle history classes have History only twice a week as they are timetabled for two class periods on the same day. If possible, the three history junior cycle periods should be timetabled across the week.
- There are good arrangements for students' access to the subject at leaving certificate level. Students are given an open choice of optional subjects and subject bands are created to ensure the maximum amount of students get the subjects of their choice.
- There is good provision of resources in the school. It is positive that a history notice-board has been made available. Management is open to the purchase of resources and a history resource press is available in the staffroom. Teachers are commended for creating a history drop-box for the storage of electronic resources. This is at an early stage and in time, should be expanded to include the subject plan, examination papers and resources for each year group.
- A whole-school approach to the development of student literacy has been adopted with a good emphasis on the acquisition of key words and reading comprehension strategies evident.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Department planning is advancing and teachers collaborate well. A coordinator has been appointed, meetings take place a number of times a year and minutes of meetings are available. Efforts should be made, when planning meeting times, to accommodate all members of the department in the meeting schedule.

- Minutes of meetings show that discussions regularly take place on a range of administrative and assessment matters, such as in-house examinations. There was also some evidence of medium-term planning for the subject, for example, discussions about the history drop-box and history awards have taken place.
- While an analysis of examination results was evident in the department folder minutes of meetings showed no review of these results or no discussions of how student attainment could be raised or how to increase the number of students studying History to Leaving Certificate. These are discussions that should take place at department meetings.
- To further develop subject planning in the department it is recommended that the subject plan contains a section on review and planning for improvement. Members of the department should analyse areas of strength and weakness within the department, set targets for improvement in identified areas and agree strategies based on reaching those targets.
- Schemes of work have been agreed for most year groups. Teachers follow the schemes in some instances. However, there is no agreed scheme of work for TY History and the material covered and assessment strategies used by teachers of TY vary from year to year. A review of the TY history module should take place. Schemes of work and assessment arrangements for TY History should be agreed among members of the department. The programme should incorporate active and experiential learning in line with the philosophy of TY.
- Teacher planning for lessons was good and most teachers keep good records of student attainment.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.