

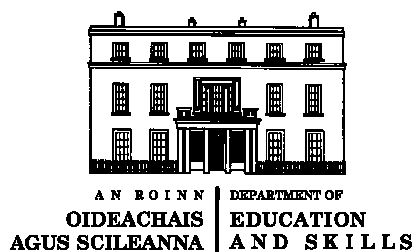
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Saint Louis Secondary School
Carrickmacross, County Monaghan
Roll number: 64760J**

Date of inspection: 11 May 2016



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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	10 & 11 May 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Meeting with Subject Department Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction with students• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with aspects of very good practice in evidence.
- All lessons were characterised by positive teacher-student interactions.
- Opportunities were provided for students in all lessons to work collaboratively.
- It is good practice that information on student progress is based on both continuous and summative assessments.
- While uptake has fluctuated in recent years, there is a clear commitment to continuing to offer Leaving Certificate History; students would benefit from further support to study History for the Leaving Certificate.
- Individual teacher planning and preparedness for the lessons observed were very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The provision for History in Transition Year should be further developed to provide students with a broader range of innovative and stimulating teaching and learning activities which explore historical events from a variety of perspectives and are appropriately focused on developing students' historical skills.
- School management and the history department should monitor and review uptake levels for Leaving Certificate History in order to inform planning for future years.
- Schemes of work should be revised and updated to promote a more developmental approach and shared focus across the department.

INTRODUCTION

Saint Louis Secondary School is an all-girls voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Le Chéile Schools Trust. The school offers a broad range of curricular programmes: Junior Certificate; Transition Year; Leaving Certificate; Leaving Certificate Applied; and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The current enrolment is 588 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good, with aspects of very good practice in evidence.
- An attractive and stimulating learning environment has been created in each of the rooms visited. This included displays of student work and a variety of historical posters.
- All lessons were characterised by positive teacher-student interactions. Student participation was monitored closely and teachers were encouraging and affirming of students' efforts.
- Opportunities were provided for students to work collaboratively. This was most effective when activities were clearly explained, and sufficient time was allocated to allow students to engage with the task and give feedback. For example, in one lesson students were challenged to think individually about their study of the Irish Famine, then to pair with another student and collaboratively extend their answer in response to the teachers' questions.
- Group work was integrated into all lessons; in some instances, however, students undertook the group-work tasks individually or were not given sufficient time to engage with the activity. Student engagement would be enhanced by assigning roles to group members, sharing resources and by scaffolding the task to ensure all students are appropriately challenged.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers reinforced good exam techniques and promoted familiarity with the relevant marking schemes. To support students in developing independent learning skills, there is a need for more emphasis on students being facilitated to discern areas of importance by themselves and to develop their own revision materials to avoid an over-reliance on teacher-prepared revision notes.
- Teachers' questioning in general was very good; most spread oral questions around the class successfully, involving both volunteers and nominated students. Some interesting techniques were used to ensure all students were active during whole-class questioning such as students' nominating of each other to answer or through the random selection of names. This good practice could be broadened to include more use of open-ended questions, peer reflection and discussion to foster deeper historical understanding.
- In some lessons, audio-visual resources, such as a video clip on Rosa Parks, images and maps relating to Ireland in the nineteenth century, were used as prompts and a mix of lower and higher order questions were posed by teachers to support the development of students' critical thinking skills. This type of approach merits further use.
- It was evident from reviewing students' journals and copybooks that homework is assigned and monitored regularly. The use of formative comments, which was seen particularly in written work by examination classes, should be extended to other year groups.

- It is good practice that information on student progress is based on both continuous and summative assessments. The variety of assessment tasks used with some class groups, such as projects or debating, is a positive feature. However, the success criteria for these types of assessments should be agreed across the department and shared with students, to facilitate a common approach and to provide opportunities to incorporate self and peer assessment for students.
- In all lessons, there was a good emphasis on the development of students' historical literacy through a focus on subject-specific vocabulary and concepts, encouraging students to use a dictionary, and providing opportunities to engage with comprehension and extended writing tasks.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- History is a core subject in the junior cycle and is one of a number of subjects offered to students as part of an option system for the senior cycle.
- While it is good that History is offered as part of the TY programme, the subject is an optional choice for students. It would be beneficial to give all students an opportunity to engage with a form of historical or social studies. It is recommended that the provision of History in TY be reviewed.
- There is a clear commitment to continuing to offer History for the Leaving Certificate; uptake levels have fluctuated in recent years. It is recommended that school management and the history department monitor and review uptake levels for Leaving Certificate History as this may provide useful insights and inform planning for future years. For example, management could consult with TY students around why they did or did not choose History.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual planning and preparedness for the lessons observed were very good. Teachers maintain their own high-quality resources ranging from mind maps, worksheets and electronic presentations.
- History department meetings are held regularly with a clear agenda set by senior management to facilitate the incorporation of whole-school initiatives. It is good practice that minutes of meetings are recorded and the position of co-ordinator is rotated.
- A good-quality department plan outlines the provision and organisation of the subject in the school. The yearly schemes of work should be revised and updated to promote a more developmental approach to include links to learning outcomes, teaching and assessment methodologies, and resources. Such an approach will provide a shared focus across the department.
- While the TY plan provided a good indication of the areas of study, this plan requires redevelopment. There should be a focus on learning outcomes that teachers wish their students to achieve. It is recommended that the programme be further developed to provide students with a broader range of innovative and stimulating teaching and learning activities. These activities should explore historical events from a variety of perspectives and be appropriately focused on developing students' historical skills.

- It is good practice that history department members review certificate examination results annually. There is a clear commitment to improvement; a greater focus on how teaching and learning methodologies impact on student attainment should be taken into account when agreeing on areas for improvement.
- Teachers maintain very good records of students' performance, progress and attendance in all lessons visited and this information is communicated to parents formally twice a year.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The history department has met since the evaluation to discuss the main findings of the report and to plan for the implementation of its recommendations.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

1. The history department is currently reviewing their curriculum in Transition year with a view to providing a greater range of learning experiences for students. Particular focus will be on assisting students with the development of the necessary skills e.g. analytical, research, questioning which will aid students in the document based study and research study at Leaving Certificate level.
2. School management and the history department are aware of the challenges posed regarding uptake of History to Leaving Certificate and are working together to improve participation at senior cycle.
3. Schemes of work are currently being redrafted to reflect the recommendations received from the history inspection.