

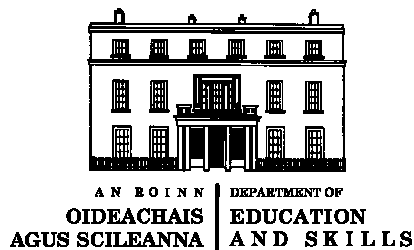
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**St Mary's Secondary School
Edenderry, County Offaly.
Roll number: 65582Q**

Date of inspection: 6th and 7th April 2016.



REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	6th and 7th April 2016.
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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from very good to satisfactory with elements of excellent practice observed in two lessons.
- Good teacher-student rapport, where students were encouraged and their efforts affirmed, was evident in the majority of classes.
- The print rich environment that promoted History and celebrated students' work both in classrooms and on corridors was commendable.
- In many lessons, while learning intentions were displayed they were not sufficiently explored with students throughout the lesson or reviewed prior to their conclusion.
- The uptake of History at senior cycle is strong, which is a testimony to the commitment of the history department.
- A very good programme of co-curricular and cross curricular support for History is in place.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Differentiation of learning intentions, assessment strategies and homework assignments should be included in history lessons so that the learning needs of all students are met.
 - There should be a balance between teacher instruction and student activity in all history lessons to allow students opportunities for collaborative and independent learning.
 - Regular and formative feedback should be an integral part of all history lessons to encourage students to evaluate and improve their own work.
 - More formal meeting time is needed for appropriately recorded meetings of the history department.
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INTRODUCTION

Saint Mary's Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school attended by both girls and boys. The school is under the patronage of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. There are 784 students enrolled in the school. The Junior Certificate and all Leaving Certificate programmes are provided. Transition Year (TY) is provided on an optional basis.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of teaching and learning observed ranged from very good to satisfactory to with instances of excellent practice in two lessons.
- The supportive learning environment was evidenced by the good rapport that teachers have with their students.
- The very good practice that was observed in a number of lessons of highlighting the focus of the lesson and the intended learning objectives at the outset of the lesson is encouraging. However, the revisiting of learning intentions as lessons proceeded and their review at the conclusion of lessons to ensure consolidation of learning, are areas for further development.
- While some very good examples of student-centred approaches were observed; in the majority of lessons, teacher exposition was the main methodology used. Therefore, it is recommended that strategies to achieve a balance between teacher input and student activity be considered so that students may have more autonomy in their learning.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was used effectively to provide visual reinforcement to key topics. In best practice, ICT was used to generate discussion and encourage contribution from students rather than solely as a means of presenting information.
- Good reference to prior learning was in evidence in most lessons and, commendably, many teachers enhanced student engagement with the lesson content by making topics relevant to the students' own lives.
- In two lessons observed, differentiation was facilitated well by peer learning, pair work and cooperative learning activities. It is recommended that such strategies be adopted across the department to optimise learning potential for students of all abilities.
- The addressing of questions directly to named students and globally to the class enabled the teachers to guide and support learning well during the lessons. However, the use of higher-order questions to encourage critical thinking and analysis could have been more widely used.
- Homework was well monitored in most classrooms visited. A template is provided to support senior students in the conventions of essay writing in History. However, in all cases, consistent, regular and individualised formative feedback is required to encourage students' to evaluate and improve their own work.
- While common testing occurs within bands at junior cycle, the history department should agree shared assessment arrangements in relation to common testing, project work and continuous assessment for all students of History across the school. This should be detailed in an agreed history department assessment policy.

- The promotion of literacy through History was evident in over half of the lessons observed with particular emphasis on key words. This good practice is encouraged across all history lessons.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The school has an appropriate provision for History in all curricular programmes and the timetabled provision for History is supportive of the subject.
- More formal meeting time is needed for appropriately recorded meetings of the history department. Ideally, there should be at least one formal, structured meeting of the department per term, with discussion of teaching and learning as the key agenda item.
- There are good arrangements for student access to optional subjects at Leaving Certificate as the option bands are arranged according to student choice. History is a popular subject at this level which is a testimony to the efforts of the subject team.
- All classrooms are well equipped with ICT facilities, including a data projector. A history folder, which has been made available on the school system, is an additional support to teachers.
- The current whole-school arrangement of banding all students at junior cycle should be reviewed in the context of student attainment levels at ordinary level History.
- Currently, two teachers have the responsibility for teaching Leaving Certificate History and consequently, an increase in the capacity is encouraged within the subject team, enabling more teachers to become involved in teaching History in senior cycle.
- Whole-school in-service training for the teaching staff is facilitated by senior management. Membership of the History Teachers Association of Ireland is urged for all history teachers in the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A good subject plan is in place which clearly identifies the learning outcomes for students in each year of the course and the curriculum content of the plan reflects all aspects of syllabus and programme requirements. However, evidence of collaborative discussions at department level regarding homework policy, assessment practices, teaching methodologies and the development for student responsibility for learning should be included in this plan.
- Planning for History in TY is comprehensive and an interesting TY programme is available to students.
- Encouragingly, student attainment in History in the certificate exams is reviewed annually and the outcomes of the analysis are contained in the subject plan. Documented details of how teachers' reflections and analysis are used to inform classroom pedagogy should also be included.
- There is very good liaison with other subject departments to support the study of History and good planning for co-curricular activities was also in evidence.

- The level of preparation by teachers was high, and included a range of resources, hand-outs, ICT-based presentations, props and other supports to student learning.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St Mary's Secondary school welcomes the Subject Inspection of History report. The school will be guided by the recommendations in the report.

The report recognizes incidences of excellent teaching of history supported by a variety of differentiation techniques. It also affirms the high level of participation and the strong rapport between teachers and students.

The report also endorses the strong support of history in the school and the obvious cross curricular links and co-curricular activities all working towards a promotion of literacy and an appreciation of the subject.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board of Management, the History Department and the Senior Management and staff are committed to continuing to improve the quality of teaching and learning as experienced by our teachers.

Having considered the recommendations of the report the History Department, supported by the school's management intends to

- Hold biannual, formal and minuted department meetings
- Revisit learning objectives during the class lesson
- Make greater use of higher order questioning
- Develop a common assessment policy