

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of History  
REPORT**

**Deansrath Community College  
Clondalkin, Dublin 22  
Roll number: 70040H**

**Date of inspection: 15<sup>th</sup> March 2010**



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

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

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Deansrath Community College. 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 some members of staff. The board of management of the school 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.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

There is very good curricular provision for History in Deansrath Community College. In junior cycle, two classes in every year group study History and have a satisfactory allocation of three periods each week. The remaining class in each year group studies Environmental and Social Studies (ESS), which combines History and Geography. This group follows the Junior Cycle Schools Programme (JCSP) and is allocated five class periods each week for ESS. This is in line with guidelines for the subject. Senior cycle history classes are allocated five periods each week. Timetabling is generally very good, with a good spread of lessons across the week.

There are very good arrangements for student access to History at Leaving Certificate level. Students, in keeping with good practice, are offered an open choice of subjects prior to entry to senior cycle and the option lines are then arranged to accommodate as many student choices as possible. Students receive good support when making their choices. A career guidance morning is organised for students and parents. The head of the history department speaks to students about the subject at senior level. Third-level students, some former students of the school, are also invited to the school to speak about subject and career choices.

There are some resources available for the teaching and learning of History in the school. Classes are student based and available resources are mostly stored in the teachers' workroom. A small amount of history books is available in the school library. There are some information and communications technology (ICT) facilities available including a computer room and it is planned to extend the range of ICT facilities from next year. This is to be welcomed. A history notice board in one of the senior social areas is a commendable aid to the promotion of the subject. It is recommended that the range of history support materials available, including history periodicals, be extended and that resources be catalogued and included in the history planning folder. Furthermore, it is recommended that a history room with ICT facilities, adequate storage and historical maps and posters, be made available as a support to the subject, as resources allow.

A well-qualified and dedicated team of seven teachers are involved in teaching History and ESS. Teachers are facilitated in teaching across all programmes and levels thus building capacity in the

department. Teachers have been facilitated in their attendance at a range of in-service courses, including history in-service courses. Very good whole-school professional development has also taken place in the school, including sessions on literacy across the curriculum.

In addition, management and teachers have commendably facilitated a range of cross-curricular and extracurricular activities.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

An effective history department, to include ESS, is in place in the school, ably led by two separate coordinators, one for History and one for ESS. Members of the department meet regularly and minutes of these meetings are available for the current school year. Minutes of meetings show collaboration and discussion on a range of issues. It is highly commended that differentiation and *Assessment for Learning* (AfL) were on the agenda for one meeting of the school year and that teachers attending in-service courses reported back to the department on the course. This is evidence of a good level of reflective practice within the department.

Good collaboration between teachers in the department has been noted and teachers actively share resources. A folder of teacher resources is available to all history teachers in the teachers' workroom. It is recommended that available resources be stored electronically in a folder on the school's ICT system for easy access by all history teachers.

It is commendable that the analysis of certificate examinations results, undertaken by management, is discussed within the department. This focus on attainment is underlined by the appointment of a member of staff as Academic Year Monitor for each year group, in order to raise standards. It is recommended that, in order to promote increased involvement of teachers, the analysis of history results is devolved to the history department and that the outcomes of the analysis be used to set targets and contribute to team planning for the subject.

A good range of materials, including the subject plan, schemes of work and a range of other documents, is available in the subject planning folder. Good planning for students with additional educational needs was in evidence, with a commendable emphasis on co-operative teaching, whole-school literacy and teaching methodologies. It is recommended that the schemes of work for junior cycle classes, available in the department folder, be revisited and a termly schedule of delivery be decided upon in order to facilitate the holding of common examinations.

Very good planning for extracurricular and cross-curricular activities was in evidence in department documentation. Field trips take place regularly for both ESS and history classes. Good links between the history and Physical Education department were evident in relation to an essay competition on the history of the Gaelic Athletic Association. There is evidence of collaboration between the history and art departments in relation to a local environmental project. These commendable measures serve to increase the profile of History in the school.

Very good planning for lessons was in evidence, including planning for resources. In all instances, teachers had prepared a number of resources to enhance teaching and learning in the classroom.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in the majority of lessons visited during the course of the inspection. In most lessons observed the learning objective was written on the

board at the start of the lesson and, in some lessons, time was made for review at the end. It is recommended that these good practices be extended to all lessons. The use of teacher questioning to advance the lesson was seen in most lessons observed. In most instances the questioning was inclusive, with a good spread of higher order and lower order questions in evidence. At times it is suggested that global questioning be balanced with directed questioning, in order to involve the more reticent student, and that questions be framed chronologically to assist students in their understanding of the timeline involved.

In all classrooms visited good pace and timing were observed and all teachers introduced a number of activities into the course of the lesson. The use of co-operative learning methodologies, seen in a number of classrooms visited, is highly commended as these give students opportunities to enhance their oral communication skills and thus promote student learning. For example, in one junior cycle classroom visited, students were invited in pairs to come up with two sentences on Hitler. The teacher then took feedback from the class and noted the main points on the board. In some classrooms, students were invited to take down notes from the board or to copy a visual from the textbook. It is recommended that these activities be supplemented with independent learning opportunities, including independent writing activities, wherever possible during the course of lessons.

The use of visuals, including acetates, in evidence in many lessons, is highly commended as it caters for students with a visual learning style. For example, in one junior cycle lesson on the history of Northern Ireland, the teacher showed acetates of a number of photographs during the lesson, including pictures taken before and after the bombing of Belfast. In another lesson, a photograph of a Northern Ireland mural was used to develop understanding of the reasons for the collapse of the Sunningdale agreement. Other appropriate resources, including ICT resources, were also used. In a junior cycle lesson, students were shown a PowerPoint on the famine. An audio clip of President De Valera's radio broadcast speech to Churchill after World War II was played in another classroom. In many senior cycle lessons, students were introduced to additional resources such as history books and magazine articles. Very good use of documents was seen in many classrooms visited.

Good emphasis was placed on the use of differentiated teaching methodologies in many lessons visited. A commendable emphasis on key words and literacy development was in evidence in many lessons observed. For example, in one senior cycle lesson, the teacher asked students to underline the difficult words in a historical document and then asked students in pairs to explain the words to each other. Key word posters were on display in many classrooms. In some lessons observed teachers made good use of the board to emphasise key words and to outline the main points of the lesson. These good practices should be extended to all classrooms.

Good quality work was seen in copybooks and folders examined. The use of extended writing tasks, seen in many copybooks examined, is commended as it prepares students well for examinations. It is recommended that students be given the opportunity to do extended writing at regular intervals from first year. The use of word frames is recommended for students at all levels who experience difficulty in this area.

Very good pupil-teacher relations were observed in all lessons. A safe and secure environment was evident in all classrooms visited. Students were comfortable asking and answering questions and were knowledgeable about their courses.

## **ASSESSMENT**

A good range of assessment modes was apparent during the course of the inspection. Project work was in evidence in many classrooms visited. The use of a mini-research project in fifth year is noted and commended. Homework is given regularly and is frequently monitored. The commendable use of AfL strategies was seen in most copybooks examined. It is recommended that these strategies be extended to all classrooms and that, in line with AfL principles, assessment criteria be shared with students. More information on marking schemes and examination criteria can be found at [www.examination.ie](http://www.examination.ie). The use of extended writing as an assessment strategy should be extended to all classes.

Formal examinations take place twice each year. It is recommended, in order to facilitate movement across classes and levels, that common examinations be held at junior cycle.

Good records are kept of students' progress. Assessment outcomes are shared with students' homes by means of parent-teacher meetings and reports sent to their homes twice each year.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is very good curricular provision for History in the school
- There are very good arrangements for student access to the subject at Leaving Certificate level.
- Good collaboration between teachers in the department has been noted and teachers actively share resources.
- Very good planning for extracurricular and cross-curricular activities was in evidence in the department.
- Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in the majority of lessons observed during the course of the inspection.
- The use of co-operative learning methodologies was observed in a number of classrooms visited.
- Very good planning for lessons was in evidence, including planning for resources.
- The use of AfL strategies was seen in most copybooks examined.

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 range of history support materials available, including history periodicals, be extended and that resources be catalogued and included in the history planning folder.
- It is recommended that a history room with ICT facilities, adequate storage, historical maps and posters, be made available as a support to the subject.
- It is recommended that common examinations be held at junior cycle to facilitate movement across classes and levels.

At the conclusion of the evaluation the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed informally with some members of staff.

*Published, December 2010*

# **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, Principal and the History Department found the inspection process a very positive experience. The report provides an excellent affirmation of the high standards traditionally exercised by the History Department in the college. All members of the college community particularly welcome the recognition within the report of the “safe and secure environment” for students, the “very good planning” and “dedication of teachers” as well as the observation of “very good quality teaching and learning”. The college looks forward to building on these strengths by implementing the key recommendations of the report

### **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 History Department are delighted to utilise this report to enhance future planning and development of the subject in the college and have agreed a framework for the adoption of common examinations at junior cycle. The observations and recommendations in the report regarding the facilities and provision of equipment and resources are currently being implemented with the aid of a newly refurbished library, which has been moved to a larger space. Additionally, a dedicated subject room equipped with ICT facilities including an interactive whiteboard has been made available in order to store resources and further support the subject.