

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Holy Family Community School
Rathcoole, County Dublin
Roll Number: 91301D**

Date of inspection: 4 October 2011



**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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	3-4 October 2011
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 good to very good.
- A variety of effective teaching and learning methodologies were observed.
- History is strongly supported and well resourced.
- The progress of the students is monitored by both management and the history teachers.
- The history department fulfils a key role in supporting collaborative planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- School management and the history department should explore means of realising the attendance of the full complement of the history team at departmental meetings.
 - The history department plan should be further developed.
 - The template used for coursework plans should include a section on learning outcomes.
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INTRODUCTION

Holy Family Community School is a voluntary, co-educational secondary school with 811 students. History is a core subject for all junior cycle students and is provided as an elective subject for students pursuing the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Transition Year (TY) is optional and the TY students' contact with History is maintained in the Social, Economic, Environmental and Political Studies (SEEP) module.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.
- Students were informed of the lesson topic and the intended learning outcomes at the start of most lessons. This good practice provided the students with a clear understanding of the purpose of the lesson and should be adopted by all teachers.
- Teacher interaction with the class was utilised effectively to facilitate learning and contributed to the good quality of the lessons. The teachers' interactive techniques included exposition, questioning, brainstorming, the displaying of items related to the lesson topic and the monitoring of progress while students completed assigned tasks. There was scope to make greater use of directed questions to named students and higher-order questions in some lessons.
- The PowerPoint presentations and the display of selected images used in a number of lessons enhanced the students' understanding and knowledge of their lesson topic. Some PowerPoint presentations extended throughout the lesson and were used very effectively in combination with teacher interaction with the class and the setting of assignments such as note-taking to consolidate learning.
- The setting of independent and/or pair tasks for the students occurred in most lessons and provided opportunities for them to further consolidate their learning. The inclusion of this strategy would have strengthened the lessons where it was omitted.
- The development of students' literacy skills was supported by methodologies such as familiarising them with key words relating to the subject of their study, and the provision of opportunities for them to contribute orally to the lesson and to develop their writing skills.
- The good quality of student learning was evidenced by the engagement of the students. Moreover, most of the sample of students' copybooks that was reviewed during the inspection visit contained neat and good quality work. The teachers' practice of providing written constructive feedback comments on students' assignments ensures that the students are provided with clear direction on how to improve the quality of their answers.
- The teachers effectively track the progress of their students by noting their participation in lessons, homework correction, and their results in class tests and school and certificate examinations.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The accessibility that students have to History and the timetabled provision are supportive of the subject. In the case of a small number of junior cycle class groups, the timetabling of the three weekly history lessons on consecutive days has resulted in a long interval occurring between the last history lesson of one week and the first history lesson of the following week. There are also some instances where the majority of the three history lessons are timetabled for afternoon time slots. It is advocated where practicable within the constraints of the timetable that such occurrences be avoided.
- History is very well resourced. The history teachers have their own base classrooms, one of which is the designated history room where a bank of supplementary teaching materials is maintained. Each room has an integrated multimedia personal computer (PC) system and a fixed data projector.
- All the history teachers are deployed to teach History and this good practice enables the teachers to actively support the development of the subject. The provision of opportunities for an increased number of teachers to teach TY and Leaving Certificate History is encouraged.
- Management facilitates formal meetings of the history department. However, owing to logistical factors such as the relatively large size of the history team and the fact that the history teachers may be required to attend meetings of the other subject departments to which they belong at the same scheduled time, the attendance of the entire team at history department meetings has proved difficult to achieve. Management and the history department should identify how this objective may be realised.
- In-service training is accommodated; mentoring support is provided for student teachers and co-curricular outings to places of historical interest are sanctioned.
- Management systematically tracks students' performances in the formal school and certificate examinations.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The history department works collaboratively as evidenced by the rotation of the position of subject co-ordinator, the regularity and records of formal meetings, the shared electronic folder, the organisation of student projects and the subject department plan.
- The subject department plan informs the work of the history teachers. For example, the plan contains sections on effective teaching methodologies, history resource materials, planning for students with special needs and the teachers' coursework plans.
- The reviewing and updating of the plan is an ongoing departmental practice. By way of supporting this good work it is recommended that the format of the coursework plans be expanded to include an additional column detailing the learning outcomes achieved and the assessment strategies employed. The new format should also be utilised in planning the history coursework that forms part of the TY SEEP module.
- The development of the students' literacy and numeracy skills is an inherent aspect of the aims of the history department. A literacy and numeracy policy based on the good work of the history department in this regard should be formulated and included in the department plan.

- The analysis of the students' performances in History in the certificate examinations 2009-2011 that are contained in the plan further reflect the commitment of the history teachers to teaching their students well. In addition to the statistical information provided, details of the outcomes of the analysis of the trends should be documented. The good performances of the history students that are achieved annually are noted. The suitability of the higher level paper in the Junior Certificate History examination for a very small minority of students should be kept under review.
 - Good quality planning was undertaken for the lessons observed.
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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, 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

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The Board of Management welcomes the very positive History inspection report. The Board is pleased with the strengths identified.

The Board is examining the recommendations with a view to their implementation.

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 school management is reviewing the arrangements for whole school subject planning meetings with a view to facilitating full attendance at departmental meetings. The existing arrangement whereby subject departments can meet by request will continue to be supported by school management. The History Department is investigating means of communication between History teachers apart from formal meetings such as ICT solutions.
- The History Department plan is a constantly evolving document and will continue to be updated in accordance with national initiatives and the needs of the school.
- The History Department will provide a section detailing learning outcomes on the coursework plan template