REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- Good quality teaching and learning featured strongly in the lessons observed.
- The teachers employed a variety of effective methodologies to consolidate student learning.
- The assessment of the students’ progress is an inherent aspect of the teachers’ practice and school policy.
- Whole-school support for History is very good.
- The history department is a proactive forum that promotes collaborative planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The capacity among the history team to teach TY and Leaving Certificate history should be increased.
- The history department plan, including the yearly coursework plans, should be further developed.
INTRODUCTION

Rathdown School is a voluntary secondary school for girls that offers History as a core subject in junior cycle and as an option in senior cycle and in the school’s compulsory Transition Year (TY). History is taught in mixed-ability class settings. The school’s current enrolment is 325 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• Good quality teaching and learning were observed during the evaluation. The teachers used a variety of effective methodologies to guide and support student learning.

• At the outset the teachers informed their students of the focus of their respective lessons and in almost all cases outlined the learning outcomes. Individual teachers also noted the learning outcomes on the board. In the case of one lesson the initial engagement of the students’ attention included the communication of clear directions regarding the class project that the students were about to undertake. The various class groups thus commenced their particular history lesson with a clear understanding of its purpose.

• The teachers interacted effectively with their class groups during the lessons through questioning, clarification and informative comment. The interaction observed also included the teachers’ emphasising of important points of information that emerged during the course of the lesson by noting them on the board, responding to students’ questions and monitoring the completion of assigned tasks.

• The questioning techniques of the teachers included open and closed questions that were addressed globally and to named students. The teachers’ questions facilitated student learning. There was some scope to make greater use of higher-order questions.

• Good use was made of prepared resources such as a PowerPoint presentation, worksheets, and subject materials to enhance student learning. The more widespread usage of the data projector or overhead projector at opportune times during lessons is encouraged.

• The quality of student learning was good as evidenced by the attentiveness of the students, their engagement with set tasks and their active and willing participation in their lessons.

• The setting of tasks occurred in most lessons and provided the students with the opportunity to consolidate their learning. The tasks encompassed a broad range of activities that included pair work, group work, the completion of a written assignment by the individual members of the class and note-taking.

• Assessment during lessons mainly involved a combination of observation, questioning and the monitoring of students’ progress while engaged in the set tasks. Teachers’ opinions of their students’ progress are also informed through their correction of homework assignments, the results of class tests and the students’ performance in the formal school and certificate examinations. The teachers’ practice of providing constructive feedback comments on homework assignments is commended.

• The history subject team analyses the performances of the students in the certificate examinations as does management. The data are used to reflect upon and maintain best practices in relation to the teaching and study of History in the school. The level of success achieved by the students is commended.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The timetabled provision for History is supportive of the subject. However, it is advocated that the timetabling of history lessons on consecutive days for junior cycle class groups should avoid, where possible, the occurrence of a long interval between the last history class of the week and the first history class of the following week.

- The three members of the history team are deployed to teach History. This good practice enables the teachers to remain actively involved in teaching the subject. Currently one member of the team has responsibility for teaching History to the senior cycle students. It is recommended that this situation be reviewed and capacity within the team to teach the TY and Leaving Certificate history coursework be increased.

- Whole-school policies on homework and assessment are in place. These policies inform the teaching and study of History.

- History is well resourced. The history teachers have been allocated a designated history room that through the commendable efforts of the subject coordinator and the support of management is stocked with a wide range of resources. The school library has also a well-maintained history section and the school’s two computer rooms may be booked for lessons. Fixed digital projectors are available in most classrooms and the use of a portable data projector can be sourced. All teachers have been provided with a laptop and wireless broadband is available throughout the school.

- Management facilitates formal meetings of the history department; the department is provided with an annual budget; in-service training is organised and accommodated.

- Co-curricular outings to places of historical interest are sanctioned by management.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The history department actively supports the development of the subject. The department has an appointed co-ordinator, regular meetings are convened and the business of the meetings is recorded.

- The history department plan attests to the commendable collaboration of the history teachers. The plan is in effect a framework policy document that details subject aims and objectives, organisation of class groups, effective teaching methodologies, assessment procedures, planning for students with special educational needs (SEN) and coursework plans as well as many other topics pertinent to the teaching and study of History in the school.

- The department plan should continue to be developed by documenting the agreed duties of the history co-ordinator and expanding the section of planning for SEN students to include details of the support provided for gifted students. The annual invitation of a member of the learning support department to attend a meeting of the history department in order to support the history team in meeting the needs of students with additional needs might also be considered.

- The teachers’ annual coursework schemes again attest to the importance given to planning and ensuring that the students’ are taught well. As a means of building on the good work that is evident in the coursework plans it is recommended that the plans incorporate details of the team’s recommended methodologies and resources for teaching the various topics and the learning outcomes that will be achieved in relation to the topics studied.
• The development and provision of the modular TY history programme is commended. The module provides students with the opportunity to become more informed about world issues and to develop their critical thinking and research skills.

• There was careful preparation for the lessons observed that included planning the structure and pace of the lessons and the advance readiness of supplementary materials and technical equipment.

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 evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

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