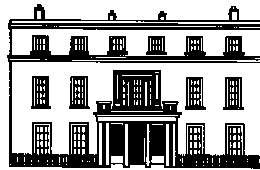


A Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Saint Dominic's College
Cabra, Dublin 7
Roll number: 60731F

Date of inspection: 24 November 2015



A N ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	23 & 24 November 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principals and teachers• Interaction with students• Meeting with coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during ten class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principals and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed with aspects of excellent practice in evidence.
- While some very good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, the main pedagogical approach was teacher centred.
- Very good attention was paid to the development of students' literacy skills.
- There is a comprehensive high-quality subject department plan for History.
- Junior Cycle students of History are placed in lower and upper bands based on information that is gathered at entry and on standardised test results.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Further integration of cooperative learning strategies and differentiated approaches to teaching and learning are required.
- Questioning strategies that are inclusive of all, and actively engage and challenge students, should be implemented.
- Consideration should be given to mixed-ability groupings for junior cycle History in line with the mixed-ability settings in senior-cycle classes.

INTRODUCTION

Saint Dominic's College is a voluntary secondary school for girls catering for 892 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed with aspects of excellent practice in evidence.
- All lessons were taught in a supportive learning environment characterised by very good teacher-student relations.
- Teachers have base rooms that are richly decorated with examples of students' project work on topics such as Ancient Egypt and World War II, key words and relevant historical posters. In addition, some corridors and rooms had displays of historical models created by students, such as crannogs, medieval castles, monastic structures and pyramids, creating a positive learning environment.
- In all lessons, the learning intention was shared with students. This was most effective when expressed in terms of what students should know or be able to do and reviewed at the end of lessons in order to assess students' progress.
- Very imaginative ideas featured in some lesson development with students role-playing as historical characters and paired activities where they used different types of sources to answer historical questions, to offer explanations and to make judgements around the advantages and disadvantages of using these types of primary sources. This type of approach to teaching and learning engaged students of all levels, facilitating very good development of higher-order historical thinking, and should be more widely used.
- Some good strategies associated with assessment for learning were observed in a minority of lessons, with the use of mini-white boards to check on prior learning and paired vocabulary tasks being used to reinforce students' understanding of subject-specific terms.
- In the majority of lessons, the use of directed and global questioning was employed by teachers to assess students' overall understanding of topics. However, in some lessons a few students answered multiple questions while others answered none and, at times, there was a need for questions to delve more deeply to challenge students, particularly in middle and upper banded classes. More variation of questioning strategies that are inclusive of all, and actively engage and challenge students, is recommended.
- Very good use of electronic presentations, maps, photographs and video clips brought an important visual dimension to lessons when introducing new topics such as the role of women during the 1916 Rising and in examining the impact of the Ulster Plantation. In order to maximise student learning and engagement with the content, consideration should be given to the incorporation of tasks and activities based on the visuals being utilised.
- A selection of students' copybooks and journals was reviewed. In the majority of cases, homework was assigned frequently. In some instances, supportive formative comments from teachers were evident and this good practice should be extended across the

department to support on-going improvement and to place the responsibility for learning a little more firmly with students.

- In the majority of lessons, there was an emphasis on keywords to support the development of students' literacy skills and content knowledge. Keywords should also incorporate terms and concepts that facilitate historical discussion. Students' note-making skills could be further developed by asking them to reflect and discern what is important, particularly after reading long pieces of text.
- Excellent practice was observed in a minority of lessons where a writing frame was used by students to plan, draft and work collaboratively on extended writing tasks. This practice should be shared and incorporated into lessons across the department.
- Numeracy skills were promoted through an emphasis on marking schemes. Teachers are encouraged to continue developing methodologies that support literacy and numeracy development, as these skills are very relevant to the mastery of History.
- While some very good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, the main pedagogical approach in the majority of lessons was teacher centred. The sharing of teaching and learning approaches across the department is recommended with an emphasis on the further integration of cooperative learning strategies and differentiated methodologies, particularly with the banded junior-cycle classes.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a dedicated team of nine teachers within the history department. The school management is very supportive of teachers' continuous professional development and department members regularly attend their subject association conferences.
- All students take History for junior cycle, it is a core subject in TY and an optional subject for Leaving Certificate. Weekly timetable provision for History is very good.
- The school has procedures in place for identifying and providing support for students with additional educational needs. Incoming students are placed in upper, middle and lower bands based on information gathered at entry and on standardised test results. Management is encouraged to review the practice of banding junior-cycle history classes and consideration should be given instead to mixed-ability groupings.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual preparation of lessons and resources by teachers was very good. There is a comprehensive high-quality subject department plan that includes schemes of work which, in line with good practice, are time-bound and laid out in terms of learning outcomes, assessment and resources.
- The history department works collaboratively, as evidenced by the rotation of the position of subject co-ordinator, shared folders of resources and regular department meetings that are appropriately documented.
- History department members review State examination results annually and agree actions for the year ahead. While there is a clear commitment to improvement, a greater focus on teaching and learning approaches should be taken into account when formulating these actions.

- Very good co-curricular planning for History was evident with regular history trips organised for most year groups to places such as Glasnevin cemetery, Derry and Belfast.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals 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; a response was not received from the board.