An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Mullingar Community College
Mullingar, County Westmeath
Roll number: 71450I

Date of inspection: 19 September 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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• Review of relevant documents
• Discussion with principal and teachers
• Interaction with students

MAIN FINDINGS

• There is good whole-school support for History.
• The quality of teaching ranged from very good to fair in the lessons observed. The quality of student learning varied also from very good to poor in one lesson.
• The poor quality of learning in one lesson was due to the inattention of some students.
• Student learning was supported by the variety of teaching and learning strategies that were incorporated into the planned development of the lessons.
• The tracking of students’ progress is an inherent aspect of the organisational framework of the school.
• The history teachers work collaboratively to enhance the teaching and study of History.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Strategies should be implemented by management and staff to prevent a recurrence of the negative impact that the inattention of some students had on teaching and learning.
• Management should provide greater opportunities for members of the history team to teach Leaving Certificate History.
• The history department plan should be further developed.
INTRODUCTION

Mullingar Community College is a co-educational secondary school that participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. 368 second level students currently attend the school. History is a core subject for Junior Certificate students with the exception of one second and one third-year JCSP class group, who study Environmental and Social Studies (ESS). History is an elective subject for Leaving Certificate students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- While the overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the majority of lessons observed, the quality of teaching ranged from fair to very good and the quality of student learning ranged from poor to very good.
- The teachers engaged their students at the outset by informing them of the lesson topic and in some lessons the students were also informed of the intended learning outcomes. The practice of informing students of both the lesson topic and the learning outcomes should be adopted in all lessons.
- Interaction with the students was effective as an ongoing learning activity in most lessons. The teachers’ interactions included questions, explanation and the monitoring of the students’ progress during the completion of set tasks.
- The use of targeted and global questions was a feature of activities such as the recapping on prior learning, the correction of homework, and the gauging of students’ understanding. Individual teachers made good use of the classroom board to note information that emerged from the questioning posed and greater use of this practice is encouraged.
- Pair work was used effectively to enhance learning in some lessons. One notable example involved a class group completing an assignment that required the students to demonstrate their understanding of “Chronology” based on an assigned task relating to the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912.
- Good use was made of resources to support learning. For example, the linking of a worksheet assignment to the viewing of a video clip or the reading of selected material in the class’s textbook was usefully employed to consolidate learning. Similarly, the resources facilitated the directing of students to take notes at particular stages of some lessons. However, the written assignment did not always cater for the range of ability in the class.
- Overall the methodologies employed supported the development of the students’ literacy skills. Opportunities were provided for the students to contribute orally to the class lesson, to listen and to develop their reading and writing skills.
- The teachers remain informed about their students’ progress through observation and interaction with the students during their history lessons, the correction of homework assignments and class tests, and the students’ performance in the formal school and certificate examinations.
• Good quality student learning was frequently observed during the course of the subject inspection. The inattention of some students in one class group did, however, impact negatively on teaching and learning during their lesson. The history teacher and senior management should identify means of addressing the lack of engagement encountered.

• Homework is regularly set and was a feature of a number of lessons observed. In one lesson the limited application of individual students to their homework task should have been dealt with more authoritatively. The good practice of providing written, constructive feedback comments on students’ homework assignments was noted and is encouraged.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The students have good access to History. The merits of providing ESS rather than History for the JCSP class groups should be kept under review given that the Junior Certificate History syllabus caters for a very broad range of student abilities.

• The timetabled weekly allocation and distribution of history class periods support the subject.

• 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 has responsibility for teaching History to senior cycle students. It is recommended that the number of teachers deployed to teach Leaving Certificate History be increased.

• History is well resourced. Two history teachers have their own base classrooms that are equipped with a data projector and computer. There is also a shared bank of teaching resources in each of the rooms.

• Management systematically tracks the students’ performances in the formal school and certificate examinations.

• Formal history department meetings, attendance at in-service and the organisation of history outings for the students are accommodated by management.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The good work invested in the development of the history department plan should be continued to include details of the agreed duties of the subject convenor, extension of the section on planning for students with special needs, a section on literacy and numeracy, a section on the future development of history in the school, and details of the mentoring of student teachers.

• The teachers’ yearly coursework plans inform their work. In order to further support collaboration regarding the coursework plans it is recommended that a common template that incorporates a section on learning outcomes should be developed.

• Priority areas for improving teaching and learning are discussed at department meetings. In maintaining the development of this good practice, consideration should be given to devoting one departmental meeting annually to a discussion of a specific topic relating to teaching and learning such as ICT, assessment for learning strategies or differentiation.
• The lessons observed were all planned and the requisite supplementary resources were prepared or sourced in advance.

• The variety of good strategies that the history teachers use to track the progress of their students includes noting the student’s achievements in the certificate examinations. It is recommended that the outcomes of the analysis of the trends observed should be documented in the department plan. For example, the suitability of the higher level paper rather than the ordinary level paper in the Junior History examination for a very small minority of students should be kept under review.

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

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