Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Ballybay Community College
County Monaghan
Roll number: 72170H

Date of inspection: 25 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection:</th>
<th>25 October 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- There was a very high standard of teaching and learning in the lessons observed.
- Positive use of learning objectives and outcomes was in evidence in all classes.
- A wide variety of media, including imaginative use of information and communications technology (ICT), was observed in classes inspected.
- Excellent classroom management with good use of stimulus materials was in evidence.
- Senior management actively supports the development of History in the school’s curriculum, which has recently been reviewed.
- History teachers, who meet regularly as a department to plan and develop the subject, have a coordinator appointed in rotation.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should continue to avail of continuous professional development (CPD) especially in assessment, where a positive start has been made.
- Developing History as a subject should be continued, including all years as planned.
- Subject choice options and timetable allocation for History should be kept under review.
INTRODUCTION

Ballybay Community College is a coeducational, multi-denominational school of 277 students under the auspices of Monaghan Vocational Education Committee (VEC). Built in 1967, it expanded in the 1980s and is currently undertaking a building programme. The school provides Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate programmes. It is the only post-primary school in Ballybay.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There was a very high standard of teaching and learning in all classes inspected. Lessons were well prepared and delivered, using multi-media presentations and involving students in the process.
- In all lessons the topic and learning objectives were discussed at the outset, and students were encouraged to note these. Recap on previously covered material was dealt with quickly and effectively, with well-differentiated questions being posed.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was used to good effect in all lessons inspected, engaging students directly in the material being covered. Some teachers develop their own software for History, which gives greater impact to teaching and learning.
- History displays on the walls were often integrated into the topics being taught. This is very good practice and ensured that students kept focused during the lesson. Classrooms are mostly teacher-based which facilitates the use of visual material in this manner.
- In all classrooms visited, a cooperative learning atmosphere was in evidence. Students were invariably well behaved and collaborated positively in the educational process.
- In the lessons inspected, there was good use of parallels and examples from present-day experience. This reinforced the subject material and encouraged students to become involved in, and contribute to, the class. In some lessons students were encouraged to ask questions of one another, which enhanced the learning process. Extension of this practice into pair and group work is recommended.
- Excellent classroom assessment was in evidence, for example in the use of differentiated questioning of students. Great care was taken to include all students, and to ensure that the learning objectives were being successfully achieved. Careful and gradual introduction of new concepts, foreign-language phrases and cause-and-effect as part of History, particularly in senior cycle classes, was successfully and sensitively accomplished. This helped students of all ability levels to understand the topic better. Homework, both written and learning, relevant to the work covered in class, was carefully explained to students.
- Assessment of students’ homework was systematic and good, with formative assessment used in many instances. Assessment for learning (AfL), a theme in current teacher CPD, is bearing fruit. Further extension of this assessment is encouraged.
- Literacy and numeracy were supported in teaching, learning and in assessment of student work. Again, differentiation was in evidence, with careful encouragement of all students in the learning process. Most lessons concluded with reviewing learning outcomes which is good practice.
Subject Provision and Whole School Support

- Until 2009 History was offered as an optional subject. It had a very limited uptake with a widely varying number of students presenting for Certificate examinations. Following recommendations made in the Whole School Evaluation (2008), management has adopted a revised policy for History, which is commended.

- History is now a core subject in junior cycle, taken by all first-year and second-year students. Next year, all junior cycle students will study History and third year will take the Junior Certificate examination in the subject. Provision at present is two class periods per week in first and second year. It is appreciated by History teachers and management that three periods a week is optimum provision, and there are plans to achieve that. As class periods last thirty-six minutes, teachers, aware that time to cover the syllabus is limited, plan their classes accordingly.

- TY, a compulsory programme, offers History as an option which is taken by about one quarter of the students at present. Teachers hope that, as students complete their junior cycle, more will opt for History in TY.

- Uptake in History at Leaving Certificate is good at both ordinary and higher levels. The senior cycle cohort in History is predominantly male, and there are plans to address this imbalance. Subject choice blocks for Leaving Certificate change annually, and are kept under review. Fifth-year and sixth-year History classes have five class periods per week, some of them double periods, which is working effectively. Syllabus coverage was well advanced in the classes inspected, which is good.

- Assessment is an integral part of the classroom teaching and learning process, with topic tests and other assessments in use. There is an emphasis on differentiation, and progress by each individual student is monitored by teachers. There are in-school examinations at Christmas and summer, after which parents receive written reports. Parent-teacher, programme and subject-choice information meetings are held each year. The student journal is used well by both teachers and parents for communication and as an assessment record, which is commended.

- All teachers of History are appropriately qualified. Many have taken CPD courses provided by the school, VEC (IVEA), Department of Education and Skills’ Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST), Peace III Programme with Northern Ireland and Scotland, and courses run by the History Teachers Association of Ireland. Some of these courses are subject-specific, others address skills and assessment methods. Management is commended for supporting the CPD process, which should be continued and expanded.

- Co-curricular, cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities are strong features of the History programme. There are good links with other departments for activities and themes. This process is ongoing and positive.

Planning and Preparation

- History teachers meet regularly, have developed department plans and keep records of their meetings, which focus on ways of improving teaching and learning in the subject. The team reviews its plans and expands connections with other subjects, which is to be encouraged.
• Classrooms are well resourced, including stimulus material, ICT and other equipment. History books are available in the school library, which is moving to the extension currently under construction.

• Planning and preparation for lessons by individual teachers is good, thorough and often imaginative. This is particularly so in relation to software creation.

• Good records of attendance and progress are kept by all History teachers. Common-level papers for each junior cycle class year are being developed, which is good practice. The team also analyses certificate examination results, comparing these with national statistics, and this informs planning meetings.

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 report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Published April 2012
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 would like to express their appreciation for the professional manner in which the Inspection of History was conducted.

The Board of Management is very pleased that the excellent work of the History Department is recognised and affirmed.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

History will continue to be promoted and developed in the school.

All the History teachers will be facilitated in attending CPD relevant to the subject.