

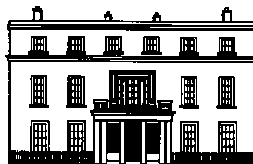
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Scoil Phobail Bhéara
Castletownbere, County Cork
Roll number: 91387Q**

Date of inspection: 26 November 2013



**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

Dates of inspection	26 and 27 November 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents, including the departmental plan• Discussions with principal and teachers• Meeting with joint coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction with students• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall standard of teaching and learning observed was very high and in several instances was excellent
- Although time provision for History in first year is somewhat constrained due to the need to facilitate subject sampling, in all other years the time provided for the subject is good
- Resourcing for History is very good and typified by the provision of a designated history room and a range of practical supports
- It is commendable that all students in Transition Year (TY) study History, while subject choice mechanisms for Leaving Certificate are fair and flexible
- Teachers of History are highly commended for their engagement with advanced study and also for the many initiatives and supports which they have employed in delivering History at the school
- Overall departmental planning and teacher planning and preparedness for lessons is at a very high level.

MAIN RECOMMENDATION

- Occasionally, classroom strategies needed a little more emphasis on promoting student discussion and the encouragement of discerning note-making by students.
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INTRODUCTION

Scoil Phobail Bhéara is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 327 students. It is under the joint trusteeship of the Cork Education and Training Board and the Mercy Order. The school caters for a student cohort coming from a broad geographical area of west Cork. The school offers a wide range of subjects and curricular programmes, including the Junior Certificate School Programme and an optional Transition Year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall standard of teaching and learning observed was very high and in several instances was excellent.
- All lessons were well structured, with an appropriate focus on learning outcomes and lesson aims, presented either on the classroom whiteboard or on a designated board for lesson objectives when classes were based in the history room.
- Teaching strategies in most lessons included considerable and very effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to present materials as diverse as comic film clips, family trees, still photographs, recruiting posters, songs, charts, graphs and review notes. The fact that senior students can access lesson materials via a 'dropbox' when required is a further excellent resource which supports learning.
- Teachers made very good use of visuals from textbooks, handout materials focusing on key words and timelines, laminated visuals, student portfolios, placemats and worksheets to stimulate student interest and enhance learning opportunities.
- In general, very good opportunities were given to students to express themselves, through short in-class activities seeking responses to key questions, developing cross-curricular thinking about historical literature, and teachers seeking responses to stimulus material.
- Occasionally, there was a need to place the responsibility for their own learning a little more firmly on students' shoulders. This could include areas like peer reviewing of each other's work, slightly longer group activities and the encouragement of reflection and discernment through making notes for themselves.
- Innovative touches were employed by teachers in all lessons, to foster and maintain student enthusiasm, and included good instances of humour, a guess-who competition, forms of 'crime-scene-investigation' approaches to evidence gathering and drawing local historical links where possible.
- In all lessons observed, there was a natural, unforced atmosphere which focused strongly on learning while always being pleasant and enjoyable for students. The overt encouragement of students' social skills in answering questions, listening to each other and achieving consensus in group discussion was particularly impressive when applied.
- Students' historical literacy was strongly reinforced by teachers through a deliberate focus on key words in relevant contexts, reminders of dates and the categorisation of centuries, discussing historical concepts like bias, objectivity, causes and consequences, and sometimes fostering graphic literacy through analysis of charts and historical data.
- Questioning in class was very good, and teachers were adept at spreading lower and higher-order tasks across the class, while taking good cognisance of students' particular capabilities and interests. The involvement of members of the school's learning support team in delivering History has also supported such good awareness of students' aptitudes.

- Teacher correction of students' work is of a good standard, with both comment-based and summative marking used on major exercises and tests, depending on the intention of the task. Homework is also suitably varied, ranging from wordsearch and cloze tasks with younger students to portfolio completion and enquiry-based questions in senior cycle.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Although time for History in first year is somewhat constrained, at two periods per week, in order to facilitate subject sampling, in all other years the time provided for the subject is good and it is highly commendable that all junior cycle students study History.
- Management has been very supportive of history department initiatives, including the allocation of a history room and subject-specific notice board, staff involvement in the Learning School project and facilitating school trips and history-related events at the school, thus fostering the links between the school, the locality and its history.
- It is commendable that all students in Transition Year (TY) study History, while subject choice mechanisms for Leaving Certificate are fair and flexible, changing annually on the basis of students' preferences.
- While formal assessment procedures at the school are in line with good practice, including the fact that students attend parent-teacher meetings with their parents, the school is also commended for its commitment to assessment for learning, which has included the history department issuing questionnaires to students and parents.
- The staff handbook is very supportive of teaching and learning, containing very good ideas on mind mapping, concept maps, think-pair-share and other innovative strategies.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The departmental plan for History is excellent and is a credit to the joint coordinators, and to all teachers of the subject, who follow through with the plan at individual level.
- The department is highly commended for its ability to reflect on its challenges, such as promotion of the student voice, effective programme planning and developing literacy and numeracy through History. Equally impressive has been the commitment of department members to advanced study to help them meet such challenges.
- The history department has consistently augmented the profile of the subject across the school, through the subject room and notice board and initiatives like the 'Make a Book' project on ancient Rome, a creative engagement project on fishing history, the 'Bealtaine' oral history project, competitions, visiting speakers and a 'History Alive' Day. Strong links have also been forged the Cork branch of the History Teachers' Association of Ireland and with University College Cork History Department.
- Exceptional work has been done at departmental and individual teacher level to generate a substantial stock of books and DVDs, including oral history recordings, and to organise historical trips locally and to Northern Ireland. The degree to which electronic resources have been pooled and shared despite challenging internet connectivity is equally impressive and supports a collaborative approach to teaching and assessment.
- Student numbers taking History for Leaving Certificate, taking higher level History for all examinations, and the eventual outcomes in certificate examinations are a credit to the history department.

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 of the school 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 is very pleased with the exceptional report of the History inspection. The Board wishes to express its gratitude to the History Department for their commitment to the teaching of History in the School.

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 History Department will continue to work on the recommendations of promoting student discussion and discerning note-making by students.