

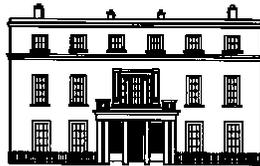
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History

REPORT

Mount Sackville Secondary School
Chapelizod, Dublin 20.
Roll number: 60120W

Date of inspection: February 26 2016.



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	25 th and 26 th February 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- In most lessons observed, the quality of teaching was either good or very good, while there was scope for improvement in a minority of lessons.
- The quality of learning was good in most lessons and students' motivation to learn was strongly in evidence throughout.
- Teacher exposition was the main methodology used which limited opportunities for students to learn independently.
- Greater awareness of, and interest in, History among students is actively promoted and encouraged through an impressive range of co-curricular and cross curricular activities.
- The uptake of History at senior cycle has been notably low but very recent increases indicate this is an area that will improve in the future.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Management and the history team in the school are encouraged to discuss the feasibility of expanding the study of History to all students in Transition Year (TY).
- In order to minimise student passivity in lessons, students should be given more autonomy in their learning by engaging in active learning methodologies.
- All teachers of History should provide regular comments on homework as a formative support to learning.

INTRODUCTION

Mount Sackville Secondary School is a fee-paying school for girls with an enrolment in the current school year of 635 students. The school was founded by the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny in 1864 and is now under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and a compulsory Transition Year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the majority of lessons observed, the quality of teaching ranged from good to very good, while the quality of learning was good. However, in a minority of lessons there was scope for improvement.
- The supportive learning environment of all classrooms visited was evidenced by the very good rapport between teachers and students.
- In almost all lessons, students' efforts were affirmed and they contributed positively to lessons by asking and answering questions.
- In most lessons, teacher-led instruction was the dominant strategy and thus, teachers are encouraged to ensure that sufficient opportunity is given to facilitate effective, independent learning among students.
- Almost all teachers were well prepared for lessons and engaged very well with primary sources such as visuals, multimedia presentations and film clips which supported and consolidated learning.
- Good connections were made to prior learning and student experience at the start of many lessons.
- The explicit use of learning intentions was evident in some lessons. This good practice should be adopted as standard practice across the department. Furthermore, all history lessons should feature a review of the lesson objectives prior to their conclusion in order to maximise learning.
- Many classrooms had attractive, print rich environments that promoted History. However, the displaying and celebration of students' own work in History is an area worthy of expansion for the school.
- There is excellent whole school co-curricular and cross-curricular support for History. History students across the school have the opportunity to visit places of historical interest and get involved in activities that promote History.
- Questioning was used effectively to guide and gauge student learning. However, there was scope to pose more higher-order questioning that would encourage critical thinking and generate discussion.
- Homework is regularly assigned and corrected. Feedback on homework assignments is typically delivered orally with some evidence of formative written comments on students' work. This latter practice should be extended and there is need to discuss collaboratively, at team level, formative assessment strategies across the department.
- In order to address anomalies in the manner in which homework in History is managed, the subject department is urged to collaborate in formulating a homework and assessment

policy that specifies how homework is presented, stored and corrected. The policy should also ensure a consistent system of common house examinations.

- Development of the students' literacy skills was an inherent aspect of the teaching methods used, with good emphasis on key words and directed reading.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- With the exception of TY, History is well timetabled across all year groups in the school. Only one class group has the opportunity to study History in TY. Given the impressive skills set of the history team in Mount Sackville, discussions should be held at department and whole-school level regarding the feasibility of making History available to all TY students.
- Uptake at senior cycle has been notably low but, encouragingly, numbers have increased this year. In addition to increasing access to History in TY, the history team, supported by management, should explore how this increase can be sustained.
- All teachers of History have access to the school's information and communications technology infrastructure and all classrooms are equipped with a data projector. In addition, there is a school set of tablet devices and the history team is encouraged to incorporate their use into lessons.
- The school library and librarian provide very good support to the study of History by encouraging reading and the development of research skills. Moreover, the library is an ideal space to advance effective collaborative learning among students which would improve teaching and learning across the department.
- Management is very supportive of the department. The department is well resourced and management is open to the ongoing purchase of additional resources.
- Management facilitates and encourages teachers to participate in continuous professional development (CPD) training and a very good range of whole-school in-service events have taken place.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The history team has developed a good subject department plan that is indicative of collaboration among the teachers. The plan contains details, including minutes, of formal department meetings and clear yearly curriculum plans. These plans are followed consistently by all members of the department.
- It was evident from the minutes of subject department meetings that the topics discussed are mainly of an administrative nature. Subject department planning should focus more closely on teaching and learning and the subject plan should contain a section on planning for improvement. This should include items such as teaching methodologies, common house examinations and teacher reflections on student attainment in the certificate examinations.
- The history department has an appointed co-ordinator who takes responsibility for departmental planning and record keeping. It is recommended that this position be rotated across the department to provide all members of the team with the opportunity to lead the department's planning process.

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; a response was not received from the board.