

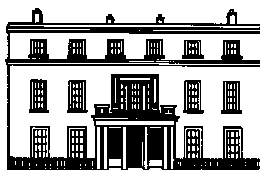
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**St. Joseph's Secondary School
Rochfortbridge, County Westmeath
Roll number: 63310T**

Date of inspection: 13 April 2016



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12 th and 13 th April 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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The teaching and learning ranged from very good to fair with some lessons that featured instances of excellent practice.
- Lesson intentions were displayed in many lessons but often, were overly focused on the delivery of content rather than used to guide learning activities.
- The impressive uptake at senior level is a testimony to the commitment of the history team.
- Most lessons were thoroughly planned and included good use of selected resources.
- There is strong whole-school support for the teaching and study of History.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students should have greater opportunity to undertake independent and collaborative learning in lessons.
 - Wider use of co-operative learning methodologies should be incorporated into lessons to ensure the effectiveness of group-work.
 - All teachers should adapt lesson planning and teaching strategies to accommodate the range of students' learning styles.
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INTRODUCTION

St. Joseph's Secondary School, Rochfortbridge is a voluntary Catholic secondary school with 402 boys and 443 girls. The school offers an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), in addition to the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The teaching and learning in the lessons observed was varied and ranged from very good to fair. There were some lessons where instances of excellent practice were frequently in evidence.
- Good rapport between teachers and students and good classroom management were in evidence in most lessons.
- In most classrooms, a supportive learning environment was evidenced by a print-rich environment that promoted History and celebrated students' work.
- The layout of many of the classrooms, in particular the prevalence of single-seating desks is not conducive to adapting the physical learning environment to the promotion of group-work. However, in some classrooms, teachers and students worked hard to adapt the seating arrangements in lessons for this purpose. This practice is encouraged in all history classrooms in the school.
- In many lessons observed, the learning intention was displayed at the beginning of the lesson. In best practice, learning intentions incorporated a range of learning activities which were shared with students throughout the lesson and reviewed at its conclusion.
- Some examples of collaborative learning were observed. These were effective when characterised by clear teaching guidelines, assigned roles for students, specific timeframes and where the assigned tasks were appropriate to the students' abilities. The adoption of such effective group-work strategies is an area of development for the history team.
- In some lessons observed, teacher exposition was the main methodology used which, in turn, led to student passivity in their learning. Consequently, teachers are urged to ensure that there is a balance between teacher voice and student activity by including ample opportunities for active learning in all history lessons.
- In best practice, the pace of the lesson was well set and the lesson transitions were very well managed by teachers. In some lessons, the pace of lessons was not in keeping with the learning context of the students and therefore, not all students fully engaged with the lesson. Therefore, teachers across the department are encouraged to facilitate differentiation of teaching methodologies to ensure the lesson content and pace is appropriate to the learning needs of all students.
- Teacher-led questioning was used well in all lessons to elicit students' prior knowledge of topics and to assess student learning. The development of more higher-order questioning to facilitate critical thinking and generate discussion among students is encouraged.
- Homework is regularly set and monitored and some very good formative feedback was in evidence in sample copies viewed. However, this was, at times, inconsistent and therefore, an agreed homework and assessment policy at subject-team level is

encouraged. This policy should include sections on formative feedback and how homework is presented and stored.

- It is encouraging to see that the teachers of History are participating in the whole-school initiative on peer observation for the purpose of improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school. The history team are encouraged to continue and develop their involvement in this initiative to ensure that the impressive uptake and popularity of History in the school is sustained.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- School management facilitates access for all students to History and subject option bands are generated around students' choices at senior cycle.
- The subject is very well resourced. Most teachers have their own base classrooms which are equipped with information and communications technology and all history teachers have access to shared electronic resources on the school system.
- It is encouraging to see the impressive uptake of History at Leaving Certificate level. This is a testimony to the dedication of the history team.
- There is good whole-school co-curricular support for History. History students across the school have the opportunity to visit and participate in places and events of historical interest. Recent successes in history competitions are a testimony to this.
- All teachers are encouraged to engage with the History Teachers' Association of Ireland.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject plan for History is of good quality with evidence of collaborative planning among the history team.
 - Subject department planning is facilitated by senior management and there is a subject convenor who actively facilitates the sharing of online resources
 - The position of the subject convenor is rotated by agreed procedures, meetings are minuted and the curriculum content of the department reflects all aspects of the syllabus and programme requirements.
 - Planning should include approaches that facilitates the development of student responsibility in learning and clearly identify ways of differentiating learning
 - A section on the the induction and mentoring of new teachers should be included in the subject plan.
 - Most teachers are well prepared for lessons and make use of a variety of teaching resources. However, individual planning should ensure that lesson pace is appropriate to the needs of all students.
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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 accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wishes to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St Joseph's welcomes this report on the subject inspection of History. The school will be guided by the recommendations in the report. The Board is pleased to see that the report recognised instances of excellent teaching and the good rapport between students and teachers. The report also recognises the History Department's participation in the whole school initiative on Peer Observation for the purpose of sharing expertise and improving the quality of Teaching and Learning in the school. This is an initiative which we find very beneficial.

The Board are very much aware that the physical learning environment restricts the use of group work. Plans are in place for an extensive upgrade of our facilities and in the meantime teachers are adapting the space they have.

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

Having considered the recommendations we intend to:

Develop a strategy where students will have a greater opportunity to undertake both independent and Collaborative Learning in lessons, with a wider use to be made of co-operative learning methodologies.

We will from now on include a section on the Induction and Mentoring of new teachers in the subject Plan. We will formalise what has been the practice informally.

We are at present reviewing our Homework and Assessment Policy on a whole school basis as part of SSE and this work will include sections on formative feedback. The History Department will adopt these policies.