

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Athy Community College,
Athy, Co. Kildare.
Roll number: 70650L

Date of inspection: 9 and 10 May 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:	9 and 10 May 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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed ranged from good to very good and included examples of highly commendable practice.
- Students were informed of the focus of the lesson at the outset of all lessons observed but the learning outcomes were less frequently reviewed at their conclusion.
- A good range of collaborative and active learning methodologies was in evidence in all lessons observed but, in a minority of cases, the effectiveness of group tasks could have been improved by adopting a more structured approach.
- There was very good focus on familiarising students with key words and concepts.
- Commendable levels of teacher preparation were noted during the inspection.
- School management and the history department supports the development of History in the school.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Effective cooperative learning strategies should be discussed, reviewed and shared at subject department level.
 - Students should receive further opportunities to complete extended writing pieces throughout the year and should receive formative feedback on this work.
 - In further developing the provision of History in the school, management and history teachers should collaborate in exploring the means by which the uptake of History at junior cycle can be enhanced.
 - Teachers should ensure that differentiated teaching methods are included in the planning of lessons to ensure the learning needs of all students are met.
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INTRODUCTION

Athy Community College is under the auspices of Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board with an enrolment of 395 students. The school is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) initiative. History is provided as an optional subject at both junior and senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good with instances of excellent practice.
- A positive learning atmosphere was supported in all classrooms by displays of history subject materials that included examples of students' work. The arrangements of desks in all classrooms was conducive to collaborative learning.
- Most lessons were based on a clearly defined lesson topic and identified learning intentions. This good practice, that included student input, provided a good understanding of the purpose of the lesson.
- At the conclusion of the best lessons observed, there was a review of the learning intentions for the purpose of consolidating learning. This good practice should be extended to all history lessons.
- In the best lessons, there was very good engagement with primary historical sources such as film clips or quotes from key personalities. Students were invited to discuss the sources in groups and to draw inferences as to their historical importance. Such good practice, which encourages critical thinking, should be shared across the department.
- Teacher interaction with students involving exposition, questioning and the monitoring of students' progress as they completed set tasks was used effectively to assess and support learning.
- In all lessons, students had the opportunity to undertake independent learning in the form of pair or group work. For example, some lessons made very good use of the *Placemat* exercise to encourage students to work collaboratively.
- In the majority of lessons classroom atmosphere and classroom management were very good. Where there was some scope for improvement, strategies to ensure student engagement with the lesson needed to be implemented.
- When learning was most effective, the teacher had prepared a number of high quality resources to support learning and engage students. This good practice should be extended to all lessons.
- Collaborative learning strategies could be enhanced to include co-operative group-work where students are given clear instructions and individual roles for a specific task within an explicit timeframe. This structured approach to collaborative learning can help maximise student learning potential.
- The area of differentiated teaching methodologies is in need of development. Teachers should ensure, when devising resource material such as presentations and hand-outs, that the reading level is matched to the ability of the students. Teaching methodologies that accommodate differentiated learning should be adopted in all history lessons.

- Homework was assigned in all lessons observed. Moreover, the history teachers regularly set and correct students' homework. However, students, across all year groups, should be given more opportunity to undertake extended writing exercises throughout the year and ought to receive formative feedback on this work.
- Overall, the degree to which History is used by teachers to help build on students' literacy is very good. For example, keywords, subject-specific vocabulary and terms were highlighted and discussed with students.
- There is an energetic and hardworking history team in place that is interested in promoting and developing History in the school. This is commendable.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- History is not a mandatory subject at junior or senior cycle. Increasing curricular provision of the subject is worth considering so that all students are given an opportunity to study local, national and international heritage at second level. This is in line with the *Statements of Learning* in the new Junior Cycle.
- Timetabling of history is generally very good. However, a first-year group has currently one double and a single class per week. In the interest of student engagement in learning, three single periods of History in the week would be more appropriate.
- Management facilitates and encourages teachers of History to participate in continuous professional development (CPD) training and there is also evidence of good attention to CPD at a whole-school level.
- Traditionally, the uptake of History in senior cycle in the school has been low, however, there has been a welcome increase in recent times. To build on this, the history team is encouraged to consider ways in which the subject could be further promoted and celebrated in the school, for example, inviting past pupils to share their experiences of History with the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A well-structured subject plan is in place. The plan includes very good schemes of work for each year. By way of supporting this good work, a section on methodologies should be incorporated into the template for the teachers' annual coursework plans.
- The good level of effective collaborative planning that is undertaken by the history teachers is evidenced, for example, by the regular convening and minuting of department meetings and the setting of common papers for house examinations.
- High levels of individual lesson preparation were in evidence in the majority of lessons.
- Team members should ensure that discussions about teaching, learning and suitable classroom resources for different parts of the course take precedence at subject department meetings. The outcomes of these discussions should be included in the department plan for History.

- It is positive that a homework policy has been created at department level. To build on this, members of the department should collaboratively agree and document a more systematic approach to how homework is stored and presented.
- The history team is encouraged to maintain links with the History Teachers Association of Ireland.
- Some very good co-curricular and cross-curricular planning was in evidence.

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.