

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of History
REPORT**

**Ballymahon Vocational School
Ballymahon, County Longford
Roll number: 71690F**

Date of inspection: 26 April 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

Date(s) of inspection	25-26 April 2013
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 overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good to very good.
- The teachers engaged their students from the outset of the lessons and the methodologies employed enhanced students' learning effectively.
- Differentiated learning was well supported during the lessons.
- The history teachers keep well informed about their students' progress.
- There is good whole-school provision for History.
- The history teachers collaborate effectively as a subject team.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater consistency should be established across the history department with regard to the precise identification of the lesson objectives at the start of the lesson and recapping on the objectives before the lesson concludes.
 - The usage of written, formative comments on homework assignments should be developed further.
 - History lesson periods should be distributed more proportionately between morning and afternoon time slots.
 - The history teachers should develop an agreed common template for planning their annual coursework schemes and progress the development of their department's e-folder.
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INTRODUCTION

Ballymahon Vocational School is a co-educational secondary school with a current enrolment of 319 students. The school's curricular programmes include all Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes. Transition Year (TY) is not provided. The school is under the patronage of Co. Longford Vocational Education Committee and participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons evaluated was good to very good.
- Classroom management was uniformly good. The good relationship between teachers and students was evident. The displays of subject materials and examples of students' work enhanced the classroom settings.
- Lessons began with students being informed of their lesson topic and the intended learning objectives. The homework assignment, which was based on the lesson, was sometimes noted on the board at the outset too, and added importance to the lesson's objectives because of its clear link with them. More precise identification of the learning objectives was warranted in some lessons and more time should have been given to recapping on the learning objectives at the conclusion of a number of lessons.
- Differentiated learning strategies were used effectively in the initial engagement of students in the study of their lesson topic. These strategies included brainstorming, directing the students to select and note points of importance while viewing well chosen video clips and slides, and reading from the textbook in combination with good teacher exposition.
- Differentiated learning continued to be well supported as the lessons developed. For example, the teachers' ongoing interactions with their students involved questioning, informative comment and the monitoring of students' progress while they completed set tasks. It is recommended however, that more widespread use be made of questioning to prompt class discussion and greater use be made of targeting questions to individual students than occurred in some lessons.
- The variety of methodologies employed ensured that students' knowledge and understanding of their lesson topic were steadily increased. For example, the selected methodologies included very good use of visual resources to enhance students' learning, which in some lessons included relevant aspects of local history. There was also a strong focus on key words and concepts in all lessons. Moreover, the development of the students' literacy skills was supported by the methodologies utilised.
- The setting of written tasks during the lessons and the pair work activities that were undertaken in some lessons contributed to the good balance between teacher input and student activity in the lessons observed.
- Homework was assigned in all lessons to enable students to further consolidate their learning. The teachers' good practice of regularly setting and correcting homework was clearly evident in the sample of students' copybooks reviewed. It is recommended, however, that the use of written, formative comments be developed further in order to provide students with clear direction as to how to maintain ongoing improvement in their work.

- Students were attentive and their interest in the study of their lesson topic was quite evident in their interactions with teachers in most lessons. The students' good application to their coursework was also reflected in their history homework and notes copybooks.
- The history teachers are well informed about their students' progress and analyse student attainment in History in the certificate examinations annually. This analysis helps to inform subject planning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- History is a core subject for the current first-year students and an optional subject choice for the students in the other year groups. Fifth and sixth-year history students form one class group as this was the best means of providing the subject for the relatively small number of senior cycle history students. The continued provision of History as a core subject for junior cycle students is strongly advocated given that it is a very important means of supporting the uptake of History in senior cycle.
- The timetabled allocation of lesson periods for History is supportive. The majority of the lessons however, have afternoon time slots and two of the five lesson periods for the senior cycle history class group are timetabled as the first and last lessons of one particular day. It is recommended that history lesson periods be distributed more proportionately between morning and afternoon time slots and that a class have a double period instead of two single lessons on the same day.
- The school's three history teachers are deployed to teach the subject and continuity is maintained, where feasible, in the assignment of teachers to their respective class groups. This is good practice.
- History is well resourced. Most of the history team have their own base classroom equipped with information and communication technology (ICT). The teachers have a bank of resources including a shared subject folder on the school's server, a history noticeboard and easy access to school facilities such as the computer room.
- Continuing professional development is well supported by school management. Attendance at history in-service training is facilitated. Membership of subject associations is encouraged.
- There are established procedures in place for formally assessing students' progress and reporting to parents.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The history teachers collaborate effectively as evidenced by the good quality history department subject plan, their rotation of the duties of the subject convenor, the minutes of their department meetings and their planning of history outings for students.
- The subject plan informs the work of the history teachers and contains the teachers' annual schemes of work for each year group. It is recommended that an agreed common template with a clearly designated section outlining the methodologies used to teach each topic be adopted for planning the coursework for all year groups. Details of the teachers' reflection on students' attainment in History in the certificate examinations should also be included in the plan in the section on examination results.

- The teacher's development of their history department e-folder is ongoing. It is recommended that optimal use be made of this valuable resource for sharing useful materials including handouts and worksheets and for providing easy access to the minutes of departmental meetings.
 - A good standard of individual planning underpinned the lessons observed.
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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 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.

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