

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of History**  
**REPORT**

**Blakestown Community School,**  
**Blanchardstown,**  
**Dublin 15**  
**Roll number: 91316Q**

**Date of inspection: 12 December 2014**



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

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	11 and 12 December 2014
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with elements of excellent practice observed in some lessons.
- Homework is assigned and corrected regularly and some very good examples of formative feedback on this work were evident.
- Curricular provision for history is very good and students get very good support when choosing subjects at Leaving Certificate level.
- A very good programme of co-curricular support for History is in place.
- There are almost one hundred students studying History at Leaving Certificate level which is a testament to the quality of history teaching in the school.
- A reflective, collaborative approach to department planning is adopted. However, there has been no co-ordinator for the subject in place for a number of years.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- There should be a balance between teacher instruction and student activity in all lessons to allow students opportunities for collaborative or independent learning.
  - All students should get frequent opportunities to practice their extended writing skills.
  - A history subject co-ordinator should be chosen from within the team teaching history to bring the school into line with the practice in other schools across the country.
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## INTRODUCTION

Blakestown Community School (Pobalscoil Éanna) is a post-primary co-educational school. All junior cycle students study History as do all students in the optional Transition Year (TY) programme. History is available as an option to Leaving Certificate students. At the time of the evaluation there were 516 students enrolled. The school participates in the Delivering Equality in Schools (DEIS) initiative.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with elements of excellent practice observed in some lessons.
- All teachers had prepared well for their lessons. This was evident in the good quality resources prepared, including PowerPoint presentations, handouts and film clips. Teachers are encouraged to use maps when relevant to help students contextualise information given.
- All lessons were well structured and had good pacing. A feature of almost all lessons observed was that the learning intentions of the lesson were presented clearly in writing to students and in many cases a review of the learning achieved took place at the end of the lesson. These good practices should be extended to all lessons.
- Good connections were made to prior learning and student experience at the start of many lessons. For example, in one senior cycle history lesson the teachers made interesting links between current events and the historical period being studied. This very good practice is commended.
- Teacher instruction was clear and supported by student questioning in all lessons observed. Some very searching higher order questioning was noted which developed students' critical thinking. However in many cases not all students were included in the questioning process. The use of *think, pair, share* is recommended to ensure that all students have a chance to develop their oral skills and to actively participate in lessons.
- Students had a chance to undertake independent learning and to practice their learning in some classrooms visited. For example, very good practice was evident in one classroom where students were invited to use a sorting exercise which helped develop their thinking. However, direct teacher instruction was the dominant methodology used in many classrooms visited. Students should get the opportunity to undertake collaborative or independent tasks in lessons and there should be a balance between teacher instruction and student activity in all lessons. Teachers should ensure that the tasks set are suitably challenging.
- It was evident that good quality learning was taking place in classrooms visited as evidenced by the quality of student answering. A teacher emphasis on the key words of the lesson was evident in all lessons observed. Students were often invited to read aloud. Teachers should be careful when assigning pre-reading tasks in the classroom or at home that the pieces assigned are not too challenging for the students.
- Homework is given and corrected frequently in classrooms visited. All teachers give students formative feedback on their work, which is very good practice and the vast majority of copybooks examined were well-kept and contained comprehensive samples of students' work. In some cases students are given frequent opportunities to practice their extended writing skills but in other classrooms visited this is an area for

development. The use of writing frames to structure students work can be useful in cases where students need additional support.

- Student uptake of higher level in certificate examinations is generally good but members of the department indicated that they would like to see an increase in the numbers achieving high grades in these examinations. It is suggested that an additional emphasis on independent learning, student oracy and extended writing tasks could support this objective.
- There was a very supportive atmosphere in all lessons observed and respectful relations between students and teachers were evident. Teachers dealt firmly with any incidents of inattention. Lessons observed were taught in a stimulating learning environment with many examples of student projects, history posters and timelines on display.

### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- There is very good curricular provision for History. All junior cycle students have three periods a week for History. Leaving Certificate students have five class periods of History per week. TY students have two class periods per week.
- There are good arrangements for students' access to the subject at Leaving Certificate level. Students get very good support when choosing subjects. They are given an open choice of subjects and the option bands are arranged to accommodate as many students' choices as possible. There are almost one hundred students studying History at Leaving Certificate level. This is a testament to the quality of history teaching in the school.
- There are good resources available to teachers of History. Lessons are generally taught in teacher-based classrooms which facilitates the storage and display of resources. Most classrooms visited have ICT resources. Some teachers indicated that additional resources like a visualiser or data projectors in some classrooms visited would be a good additional support for student learning.
- While teachers have developed a range of electronic resources there is at present no shared folder for history on the school system. It is suggested that a history folder be set up on the school system and that teachers should upload any resources prepared onto the shared folder.
- There is good whole school co-curricular support for History. History students across the school get the opportunity to go on tours to places of historical interest. A number of history noticeboards provide additional co-curricular support for the subject.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Very good department planning was evident in the department folder. Of particular note was the emphasis on short medium and long-term planning for the subject and target setting for examination attainment and literacy and numeracy in line with DEIS and School Self-Evaluation planning objectives. With regard to areas for development members of the department should agree a number of teaching and learning strategies that would support examination attainment in the subject.
- Department meetings take place a number of times a year and minutes of meetings are available. A reflective, collaborative approach to department planning was evident in the history department's documentation. However, there is at present no subject department

co-ordinator. A history subject co-ordinator should be chosen from within the team teaching history to bring the school in line with the practice in schools in the rest of the country. This position should be frequently rotated.

- Schemes of work are available for each year group. A coherent and balanced coverage of the course was evident in these schemes. Very good practice was evident in relation to the innovative schemes of work for TY History where the topics are allied to teaching resources methodologies, skill development including literacy and numeracy skills and assessment. This good practice should gradually be extended to the other schemes of work to facilitate planning and common assessment. Many teachers adopt this methodology in their individual planning documentation. This could be adapted for department use.
- The department is gradually introducing common assessment into all year groups. This very good practice is a positive support for student attainment. The good practice present in some instances where students are given credit for projects, copybooks and oral presentations should be extended across the department at junior cycle.
- Individual planning of a very high quality was evident. All members of department presented their planning documentation and it was evident that all teachers carefully monitor students' progress. Very good self-evaluative practices are in place across the department.
- Planning for TY is comprehensive and a very interesting TY history programme is available for students.
- Parents are kept well informed of student progress and very good teacher record keeping was evident.

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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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.