

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of History  
REPORT**

**Newbridge College  
Newbridge, County Kildare  
Roll number: 61680T**

**Date of inspection: 24 November 2010**



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

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

---

**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Newbridge College, carried out as part of a whole-school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in History and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

History is a core subject in Newbridge College in junior cycle and is offered as an optional subject at Leaving Certificate level. Uptake at Leaving Certificate level is good.

There are very good resources for History in place. Information and communications technology (ICT) provision in the school is particularly good. All classrooms visited were equipped with a desktop computer, data projector, DVD player, TV and adequate storage. Some history resources are stored electronically in a shared folder on the school system. This is commended as a very good support for teachers of History. A good range of history books and periodicals are available in the well-equipped school library. It is laudable that these resources have been catalogued.

Provision for History is very good in senior cycle. All Leaving Certificate classes have five class periods per week. The provision of one class period per week in Transition Year (TY) across the full year is very satisfactory. Time allocation for junior cycle History is inadequate. Students have only two class periods per week across all junior cycle year groups. There was evidence to suggest that this impacts negatively on attainment for students taking the Junior Certificate higher level History examination. The time allocation of two class periods a week for junior cycle classes should be reviewed, especially in second and third year.

There are good arrangements in place for student access to the subject at Leaving Certificate level. History is always available on at least one option line and a second history class is created if student demand exists. To ensure that student needs drive the creation of the option bands, it is recommended that students be surveyed with an open choice of subjects prior to the creation of these bands and that the bands be adjusted so that the maximum number of students get the optional subjects of their choice. Students are well supported in making their choices. Staff and senior history students promote the subject to prospective students on Senior Options night. It is suggested that the provision of a history notice board in a prominent area of the school would be an additional help to the promotion of History in the school.

Staffing for History is very good. There is a committed team of seven teachers, many of whom have been facilitated in their attendance at history in-service. It is laudable that some teachers also

attend continuing professional development sessions for History in their own time, including sessions organised by the History Teachers' Association of Ireland. Two members of the department are experienced examiners in the certificate examinations. It was reported that their expertise has been useful for the whole team. Recent changes in staffing mean that at present only one teacher is involved in teaching Leaving Certificate History. To build capacity in the department, it is recommended that a greater range of teachers be involved in teaching the Leaving Certificate History syllabus.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Department planning is well advanced in the school. It is commendable that most of the recommendations of the previous history inspection have been addressed. Minutes of meetings show reflection on a range of planning issues. The department is well co-ordinated and meetings take place regularly. The co-ordinator holds a post of responsibility for this position. Teachers collaborate frequently and share resources on a history teacher-share folder on the school's intranet system. This is praiseworthy. To progress the good work that has taken place, it is recommended that teaching and learning be put on the agenda for at least one department meeting per year, that discussion take place at this meeting on suitable resources and methodologies for different parts of the course, and that the outcomes be incorporated into the subject plan.

Significant work has gone into subject planning for History. The department folder contains a good range of documents, including the subject plan, which sets out the aims and objectives that serve to inform the teaching of History in the school. In addition, the folder contains schedules of work for class groups, information on history resources available, and other relevant documentation. It is commendable that the history team undertakes an analysis of certificate examination results. It is recommended that the department use this analysis to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and prepare some strategies to address perceived weaknesses.

A new team is involved in teaching TY History in the school. A broad outline plan has been developed and some very good practice was observed in classrooms. However, there is considerable divergence across the team as regards the topics being covered and the modes of delivery. It is recommended that planning ensure a more cohesive delivery of TY History across the five classes, while still allowing for teachers' interests and preferences. To this end it is suggested that a sub-committee of TY teachers of history draw up a TY history programme for the school. Information on assessment should be included. Ideally, the programme should incorporate some element of local or family history. The programme should be integrated with the overall TY plan.

Teachers were very well prepared for the lessons observed, and exemplary planning was seen in some cases. Most teachers made their planning documentation available to the inspector. Planning for resources, including ICT was very good.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in the course of the inspection. In all cases, the learning outcomes were introduced by the teacher, sometimes orally, sometimes in writing on the board and the students settled down quickly to work. It is recommended that all teachers state the proposed lesson outcomes clearly at the start of class and write them on the board.

A good range of teaching methodologies was observed in the classrooms visited. Questioning was used to make links with prior learning and to check understanding. Good use of higher order questioning was seen in many lessons. In some classrooms a mix of general questioning, directed questioning and wait time ensured that the more reticent students were included. This approach is commended and should be adopted by all teachers. Directed questioning should be differentiated to suit the ability of the students.

Good pace and timing were seen in most of the lessons observed. Lessons in general were teacher-led. However, in some lessons students were given the opportunity to work independently. For example, in one classroom visited students worked diligently and independently on a document about Henry VIII while the teacher moved around the classroom checking on progress. To maintain an appropriate balance between teacher-talk and independent learning, it is recommended that some time be given to independent, pair or group work in lessons where possible. This work should be differentiated so that all students get the opportunity to work at their own level. The “must, should, could” style of worksheet is one way to cater for differentiation in lessons. It allows for self-directed learning and gives the teacher time to offer additional help to students experiencing difficulty. The emphasis on key words, as seen in some lessons observed, should be more widely used.

All teachers are to be commended for the excellent range of resources that were used to support their teaching. Very good use of ICT was observed in all lessons. In some, short film clips were used to introduce the topic. Teachers also used PowerPoint presentations and handouts projected onto the whiteboard. Good use of visuals, including maps, was seen in every classroom visited. For example, a diagram of the feudal system, used in one classroom visited. Teachers are encouraged to save handouts, visuals, *PowerPoint* presentations and worksheets onto the school’s history folder for use by all members of the department.

An atmosphere of mutual respect, calm and order was a feature of every lesson observed during the course of the inspection. Teachers dealt courteously and sensitively with their students. Students were engaged with the learning process and knowledgeable about their courses.

## **ASSESSMENT**

It is school policy that homework is assigned daily. An examination of students’ copybooks and journals indicated that homework is assigned frequently in some classrooms visited. In others, homework is given infrequently and, for the time of year, there was very little written work in students’ history copybooks. It is imperative (especially in the light of the current time allocation to junior cycle History) that written work, including homework, be given frequently to prepare students adequately for the certificate examinations.

Good assessment modes are in use. Good use of project work was in evidence at both junior and senior cycle. The use of formative assessment correction strategies seen in some students’ copybooks is commended. Peer correction was seen in one classroom visited. The history department has recently adopted the good practice of setting common papers in the summer examinations. The department should consider extending this practice to all in-house examinations.

Good preparation for examinations was seen in the certificate examinations classes visited. While students generally achieve well in certificate examinations, especially in senior cycle, care should always be taken to enter students for examinations at a level commensurate with their ability.

Assessment results are communicated to parents by means of the journal, parent-teacher meetings and reports home twice a year for most year groups.

#### **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in the classrooms visited.
- Resources for History are very good and ICT provision in the school is particularly good.
- Staffing for History is very good and the teaching team is committed and hard-working.
- The department is well co-ordinated and meetings take place regularly.
- Significant work has gone into subject planning for History.
- All teachers are to be commended for the excellent range of resources that were used to support their teaching.
- Good use of project work was in evidence across all year groups.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The curricular provision of two class periods a week for junior cycle classes should be reviewed, especially in second and third year.
- Planning for TY History should ensure a more cohesive delivery across the five classes, while still allowing for teachers' interests and preferences.
- Written work, including homework, should be given frequently to junior cycle students to prepare them adequately for the certificate examinations.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.