

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of History
REPORT

Mercy Secondary School, Ballymahon,
Co. Longford.
Roll number: 63710M

Date of inspection: January 13th 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

12th and 13th January 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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in most of the lessons observed was good with some instances of very good practice. In a small number of lessons, practice was also observed that was in need of development.
- Very good interpersonal relationships between teachers and students were apparent in the school and students were attentive and engaged willingly in all lesson activities.
- The determination of the history team to promote the subject was evidenced through the variety of tours and talks organised for the school.
- An attractive and stimulating learning environment was observable in all classrooms visited.
- Best practice was observed when teachers' knowledge of the course content and individual preparedness for lessons was thorough.
- Initiatives that support the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills, such as timelines, keywords and oral language development, were observed in many classes.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students should be given adequate opportunities for independent learning and critical thinking through the provision of opportunities for active learning and use of a variety of questioning strategies.
 - It is recommended that the history team develop a collaborative policy on homework that offers students regular formative feedback and criteria for success in order to maximise their potential in History.
 - The focus of the history department plan should be on planning for improvement and department meetings should include discussions on teaching, learning and models of assessment.
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Introduction

Mercy Secondary school is a voluntary secondary school under the Catholic Education an Irish School's Trust (CEIST). It is one of two second-level schools in Ballymahon and it has been a co-educational school since 1959. The school currently has 594 students enrolled and enrolment is increasing. The school caters for students from diverse backgrounds and abilities. The curricular programmes provided include the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of teaching and learning was good in most of the lessons observed. However, there was significant scope for development in a minority of lessons.
- A supportive learning environment was evidenced by the very good interpersonal relationships between teachers and students.
- In the classrooms visited, History was promoted and celebrated in a print rich environment. Some of the lessons made commendable links between course content and local history and this practice would be worth sharing with the history team.
- In many of the lessons observed there was very good use of primary source images to support, enrich and consolidate learning.
- Where best practice was evident, effective use was made of students' tablet devices to consolidate learning in History. It would be beneficial if this was extended to all lessons.
- In some lessons explicit learning outcomes were introduced at the beginning and used to structure the lesson and review learning at the end. This very good practice should be extended to all lessons.
- In the best lessons, teachers were well prepared for lessons and resources used were carefully chosen to support teaching and learning. It is recommended that this good practice be extended across the department.
- Addressing questions directly to named students and globally to the class enabled the teachers to guide and support learning in the lesson. However, it is suggested that more widespread use be made of higher order questions in order to encourage critical thinking and promote independent learning skills.
- In the majority of the lessons observed, there was limited evidence of written formative comments for improvements on students' written work. Therefore, it is recommended that an assessment policy that includes homework and summative assessment practices be devised at departmental level.
- Opportunities to include pair and group work were overlooked in some lessons and not fully developed in others. It is recommended, therefore, that greater use be made of independent learning activities in order to support and consolidate learning.

- In many lessons there was good emphasis placed on supporting the development of students' oral skills, for example through the oral presentation of projects. This is in line with the whole school plan for improvement in literacy. Good work was also observed in the promotion of basic literacy and numeracy skills through the use of subject-specific key words and time-lines.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Curricular provision for History in the school is good. All junior cycle students study History as a core component of the Junior Certificate programme; TY students are provided with elective modules in History as part of their programme and Leaving Certificate students can continue their study of History as an optional subject.
- There are good arrangements for student access to optional subjects at Leaving Certificate in that the option bands are arranged according to student choice. It is very encouraging that the numbers doing History are growing at senior cycle.
- The subject is well resourced. Teachers have their own base classrooms which are equipped with information and communications technology.
- Also, teachers have uploaded electronic resources to the history folder on the school's network where teachers store and make readily available to colleagues, their individually prepared resources.
- 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.
- Some teachers have availed of subject related in-service opportunities and are members of History Teachers Association of Ireland (HTAI). It would be beneficial to the history team as a whole if these practices were uniformly adopted across the department.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Good structures are in place to support subject department planning in History. A co-ordinator is in place and minuted meetings take place regularly.
 - Some good collaboration between teachers was evident but in general this is an area for development. The subject department plan is largely content-based and should contain a section on planning for improvement. This section should address formative assessment, active learning methodologies and strategies to improve the uptake of, and attainment in, higher-level history in the Junior Certificate.
 - The organisational framework of the history department should facilitate a mentor system for the support and professional development of teachers new to the department.
 - Planning for TY is comprehensive and a very interesting TY programme is in place.
 - Where best practice was observed, individual lesson planning ensured that lessons had a clear developmental pathway and incorporated a variety of effective methodologies and supplementary resources to facilitate learning. Collaborative sharing of ideas and co-professional discussions at departmental level should enable this good practice to be extended across the curriculum.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and history 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 Mercy Secondary school welcomes the Inspection of History and is pleased with the positive affirmations cited in the subsequent report such as:

Very good interpersonal relationships between teachers and students were apparent in the school and students were attentive and engaged willingly in all lesson activities

There are good arrangements for student access to optional subjects at Leaving Certificate in that the option bands are arranged according to student choice. It is very encouraging that the numbers doing History are growing at senior cycle.

Planning for TY is comprehensive and a very interesting TY programme is in place

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

- The school will continue to build on promoting and developing the use of active teaching methodologies in the classroom. As part of our participation in TL21 we are providing training in the use of Google Classroom and it will be used as a strategy to develop active teaching methodologies.
- More CPD will continue to be offered to staff on the use of iPads in the classroom to promote their use as a teaching and learning tool.
- The Homework Policy for the whole school will be reviewed and CPD will be provided in September on AFL. Conversations have already begun.
- The History Department will continue to and build on the support given to new Staff member joining the department and this evidenced in the support given to a new staff member who has joined the department since this report