

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Ardgillan Community College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Castlelands Balbriggan County Dublin
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	76129H

Date of Inspection: 20-02-2018



WHAT IS A SUBJECT INSPECTION?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in History under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

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.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	19-20 February 2018
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principals and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principals and relevant staff

School context

Ardgillan Community College is a multi-denominational and co-educational secondary school under the auspices of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board. The school caters for 860 students currently. The following programmes are available; Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the lessons observed.
- Students learning was strongly supported by very high standards of behaviour and high levels of student concentration.
- Good differentiation for students of varying abilities was evident in some lessons; however, in the majority of lessons, students experienced the same learning and assessment activities.
- The overall quality of assessment was good with some effective use of directed and open-ended questions to monitor student progress; however, in the majority of lessons, there was an overuse of teacher-led questioning and explanation of content.
- The quality of whole-school provision and support is very good, History is very well provided for on the school timetable and uptake levels at senior cycle are very good.
- The quality of subject planning and preparation is very good; the history department has developed a number of very good co-curricular and extra-curricular initiatives to enhance student engagement with the subject.

Recommendations

- In order to cater for the varying needs and abilities of students, teachers should use more differentiated teaching approaches.
- The history department should implement assessment practices that foster deeper historical understanding.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the lessons observed.
- In all instances, classroom interactions were very respectful and affirming with clearly established routines evident. Students learning was strongly supported by very high standards of behaviour and high levels of student concentration.
- Deliberate efforts were made to link new material to previous learning. For example, students were supported to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of topics through the use of mind maps, post-it activities or well-designed teacher worksheets.
- Learning intentions were communicated clearly to students in all lessons. This approach was most effective when the learning intentions were expressed in terms of what students should know or be able to do and progress was assessed either during or at the end of lesson. Very effective practice was noted in one lesson, where learning intentions were aligned to teaching and learning strategies that were differentiated appropriately to challenge all learners.
- In most lessons, there was good use of information communications technology (ICT) to guide, structure and bring a visual dimension to class work. Student engagement was most effective when electronic presentations or video clips were used to prompt discussion, for example around political cartoons, and to consolidate learning.
- Access to lesson materials and additional resources through a virtual learning platform is a further resource to support learning. To build on this approach, a stronger emphasis on encouraging students to make notes themselves, discerning what is important or relevant, is also worth considering.
- In the majority of lessons observed, a good range of collaborative student activities promoted very good student engagement with the material under study. For example, high-quality learning was facilitated when students were given sufficient time to process, apply and discuss the assigned tasks on topics such as feudalism or key battles during World War II. In some instances, however, there could have been a better balance between teacher talk and student activity. It is recommended that teachers in all instances plan for student active engagement in their learning.
- Good differentiation for students of varying abilities was evident in some lessons through the oral questions teachers posed and in one-to-one interactions with students. In a few lessons, good use was made of a must, should and could approach to differentiate homework. However, in the main, students experienced the same learning and assessment activities regardless of ability. Teachers should be very mindful to differentiate content and tasks in a manner that will support and challenge all students.
- The overall quality of assessment was good with some effective use of directed and open-ended questions to monitor student progress. However, in the majority of lessons, there was an overuse of teacher-led questioning and exposition addressed to the whole class.
- In a few lessons, questioning was used very effectively to explore important historical concepts, terms and word origins. It is recommended that the department implement assessment practices that foster deeper historical understanding such as allowing an appropriate wait time for students to think before answering a question.

- It was evident from reviewing students' copybooks that student progress was well monitored in all lessons. Examples of good-quality feedback to students was evident in some copybooks, where directional feedback on areas for improvement were provided or a marking code was used to support students to make improvements. The use of these types of formative assessment should be extended.
- Good attention was paid to the development of literacy and numeracy skills in all lessons. For example, this was highly effective when students had to work collaboratively to decipher a numerical code to identify key words or organise historical information using a variety of graphic organisers.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of whole-school provision and support is very good. History is very well provided for on the school timetable. Lessons are also spread appropriately across the week to ensure good-quality teacher-student contact opportunities. Lessons are delivered in well-resourced teacher-based classrooms.
- In senior cycle, subject option bands are generated around students' choice and the uptake of History is very good.
- In a few lessons, additional support for students is provided through team teaching. To support the development of this approach, the subject department, in collaboration with senior management, should evaluate the benefits of team teaching for students' experiences and outcomes. Guidelines around planning, and monitoring, for team teaching could be developed.
- A very good range of whole-school in-service opportunities has taken place. Management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers are members of their subject association and very good engagement with subject-specific professional development was noted.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning and preparation is very good.
- A comprehensive subject department plan has been developed and high levels of collaboration are evident, particularly in relation to sharing resources and devising and reviewing common schemes of work.
- Department meetings are held regularly and senior management provides guidance for the agenda for subject meetings to ensure an alignment with whole-school priorities. It is good practice that teaching and learning is on the agenda for all department meetings and the decisions and actions arising are recorded and reviewed regularly.
- Two very interesting historical modules have been developed for TY and students' enthusiasm and interest was clearly evident in the lesson observed. There are opportunities to also integrate the development of key skills into the planning of these modules.
- Commendably, the history department analyses examination outcomes, and positive trends in participation rates at higher level and attainment were noted. There is scope to conduct a deeper analysis of student attainment in order to agree specific teaching and

learning actions that will provide for on-going improvements in learner outcomes and experiences.

- Over the past two years the history department has developed a number of very good co-curricular and extra-curricular initiatives to enhance student engagement with the subject such as a history club and regular history trips organised for most year groups.

4. CHILD PROTECTION

During the evaluation, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The school principal is aware that revised child protection procedures for primary and post-primary schools came into effect on 11 December 2017 and arrangements are in place to begin the process of implementing these procedures.
2. The name of the designated liaison person for child protection matters was prominently displayed near the main door of the school.
3. The school has a child protection policy in place.
4. All teachers are aware that they are mandated persons and of their responsibilities in that regard.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;