

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

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

**Castleknock College**  
**Castleknock,**  
**Dublin 15**  
**Roll number: 60100Q**

**Date of inspection: 26 March 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**

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| <b>Dates of inspection</b>  | 25 and 26 March 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 excellent in the lessons observed.
- Teacher instruction was clear in all cases and teachers had high expectations of students.
- Innovative and effective use of collaborative learning methodologies was observed in almost all cases.
- Very good assessment practices were evident such as common testing, frequent corrections with formative feedback, peer assessment and the inclusion of project work assessment components into formal assessments.
- Co-curricular support for History is very good; it includes a History and Arts week, history tours, a small college museum and a fine library with a good history section.
- Department planning for History is of very good quality and a professional team of teachers is involved in teaching the subject.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Teachers should observe each other's lessons to share the many good teaching practices in evidence.
  - There should be an appropriate emphasis on the key vocabulary of the lesson, active learning methodologies and visuals in order to promote the inclusion of all students in the learning process.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Castleknock College is a boys' fee-paying post-primary school. All junior cycle students study History as do all students in the compulsory Transition Year (TY). History is available as an option to Leaving Certificate students. At the time of the evaluation there were 584 students enrolled.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to excellent in the lessons observed.
- Most lessons were well structured and with good pacing and timing. 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, connections were made in one lesson between the Irish famine and more recent famines. Very good lesson starter activities such as "This day in History" or a "rock, paper, scissors" exercise brought energy and vitality to the start of some lessons and set the tone for the learning that followed.
- There was a good balance between the teacher voice and student activity in nearly all classrooms visited. In one case it was recommended that independent student activity should be incorporated into lessons so that students have the opportunity to consolidate and practice their learning.
- Teacher instruction was clear in all cases and supported by student questioning in most lessons. In individual cases wider use of questioning to assess student learning was recommended. The use of "think, pair, share" exercises, as observed in some lessons is commended as it ensures that all students have the opportunity to engage with the material.
- A key feature of this evaluation was the very good and innovative use of collaborative learning methodologies observed such as pair work or group work in many classrooms visited. Students, working in groups, in one classroom visited produced posters to illustrate the main points in a historical document. In another, students interviewed each other about their research study and presented to the class. Another interesting methodology used involved student collaboration on an electronic project. It is recommended that teachers observe each others classes to share and widen the many good practices evident.
- Student enthusiasm for learning was evident in most classrooms visited and teachers had high expectations of students. Students were comfortable asking and answering questions and often asked very interesting and searching questions. The use of peer learning as seen in many classrooms is highly commended. In many lessons observed very good development of historical and higher order thinking was evident.
- Teachers had prepared a number of high quality resources to support learning such as film clips, PowerPoint presentations and high quality worksheets. In many cases there was a good emphasis on the key vocabulary of the lesson but in others opportunities to develop student literacy were missed. Students should be encouraged to pronounce, write down and review difficult vocabulary in lessons. Teachers should ensure when choosing resource material that the reading level is matched to the ability of the students and to

keep in mind the students with additional learning needs when planning lessons. The use of visuals, such as a set of photographs shown in one lesson, can further support student inclusion.

- Homework is given and corrected frequently in classrooms visited. All teachers give students formative feedback on their work, which is very good practice. Good use of peer assessment was evident in many classrooms. Common testing is used across the department. This is good practice. Project work is used as an additional assessment component. There was good preparation for certificate examinations where appropriate and very good student outcomes are evident.
- There was a very supportive atmosphere in all lessons observed and respectful relations between students and teachers were evident. Lessons observed were taught in a stimulating learning environment with many examples of student projects, history posters and historical models 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.
- There are good arrangements for students' access to the subject at Leaving Certificate level. Students are given an open choice of subjects and the option bands are arranged to accommodate as many students' choices as possible.
- It is very encouraging that the numbers doing History have grown and there are now two classes of History in both fifth and sixth year. This is a testament to the quality of history teaching both in junior cycle and in TY.
- All students study two well-chosen modules of TY History presented by different teachers. Thus they get to experience contrasting eras and different styles of history teaching. This arrangement is commendable. TY history students have three periods a week which is very good provision.
- There are good resources available to teachers of History. Lessons are taught in teacher based classrooms which facilitates the storage and display of resources. Teachers have uploaded electronic resources to the history school drive. The good school library and a small history museum on site offer helpful additional resources. The school buildings and grounds are of significant historical interest and are used by teachers to illustrate different historical periods.
- The six teachers on the history team are professional and hard-working and have availed of a number of subject related and generic in-service opportunities.
- There is very good whole school co-curricular support for History. A History and Arts week held each year features a number of history-related events. All history students have the opportunity to go on history tours, for example, the annual tour to visit the walls of Derry.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Department planning for History is of very good quality and the department is well co-ordinated.
- Department meetings take place a number of times a year and minutes of meetings are available.
- Good collaboration between team members was evident. For example, the department have agreed procedures in relation to supporting students writing skills and have prepared a policy document in relation to literacy development.
- The subject plan is laid out in a thoughtful and reflective manner with a number of very good indicators such as department objectives relating to knowledge, skills, concepts and attitude. A very good section on methodologies and an impressive department improvement plan is included.
- Schemes of work are available for each year group laid out appropriately with topics and learning outcomes linked to methodologies, resources and assessment.
- Good use of ICT was evident to showcase materials and to communicate with students. For example, students are encouraged to use a TY website to post and view materials. With regard to areas for development the department should investigate the use of other open-source learning platforms, website or blog development to further support student learning,
- Planning for TY is comprehensive and a very interesting TY programme is available to students.
- Parents are kept well informed of student progress and they receive assessment-related feedback four times a year for most year groups.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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.