

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of HISTORY

REPORT

**Comprehensive School
Tarbert, County Kerry
Roll number: 81006S**

Date of inspection: 9 October 2014



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HISTORY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	8-9 October 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents and facilities• 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, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- A satisfactorily high standard of teaching and learning was evident in all lessons observed during the inspection.
- Classroom atmosphere was noted as being very positive and enhanced by impressive student attentiveness and concentration.
- Access to the study of History at all levels is very good, with the subject being a core one in both Junior Cycle and Transition Year (TY), and available in a very fair options system for Leaving Certificate.
- History is well timetabled and resourced.
- Individual teacher planning and preparation for lessons is very good, with a significant emphasis on the generation of student handouts and work templates.
- Departmental planning is very comprehensive and well organised, including a common folder of resources on the school's intranet and an imaginative TY programme delivered with geographical and local studies.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A greater emphasis on self-directed learning should include pair and group tasks which are challenging and which encourage dialogue a little more.
 - In some instances, development of formative assessment practice is needed. Some good examples of peer-assessment and self-assessment were seen but some further use of structured commentary on student work is desirable in some cases.
 - History in TY is delivered with Geography in a combined total of two periods weekly, and extending the time allocation for what are essentially two subject areas by even a period per week merits consideration.
-

INTRODUCTION

Tarbert Comprehensive School is a stand-alone co-educational school with a wide catchment area of rural north Kerry and west Limerick. The school has an enrolment of 623 students. After Junior Certificate, senior cycle programmes include the established Leaving Certificate, with options of TY, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- A high standard of teaching and learning was evident, through different teaching styles and in all class contexts.
- Lesson aims and objectives were presented in a very clear manner. At optimum level, these incorporated sharing learning intentions which were revisited as lessons proceeded. All topics were syllabus-relevant and suitably pitched for mixed ability contexts.
- A feature of lessons was the smooth integration of a variety of stimuli and resources through information and communication technology (ICT), and teachers are highly commended for their use of the school's intranet system to store and access resources.
- Very good work was done in letting the students learn from engagement with primary sources. Opportunities for self-directed work were generally well provided for, though occasionally students were a little shy. The use of drama and student presentations in some lessons was helpful in fostering confidence and participation.
- Clarity of explanation was a feature of teacher practice in all lessons, and in several instances really effective links were drawn for students to real life, via music, football, mass media and current affairs.
- Classroom atmosphere was very positive and most teacher-based classrooms were enhanced by excellent History-specific classroom décor, maps and time charts.
- Students' attentiveness and concentration were very good. They could be given some further ownership of their learning by use of a greater variation of open and targeted questioning at times, pair or group tasks which enhance students' use of discursive language, and asking students to make discerning notes for themselves.
- In stimulus-driven assessment tasks, it was very good to see pre-reading of the questions on such materials, and literacy was strongly supported by some excellent pre-teaching of difficult terms from videos and documents before students engaged.
- Handouts and differentiated templates were well used for informal assessment tasks. With students now using class text sets rather than individual books in junior lessons, it is important to encourage good filing and retention of such loose materials.
- Homework was assigned in all lessons and was suitably varied to include written, crossword and diagrammatic tasks, among others. Good oral monitoring of such work took place in all lessons, and some very good peer-assessment and self-assessment were promoted. In some instances, however, there was significant scope for more structured commentary on students' work.
- General promotion of literacy through History was very good, with key words and other strategies overtly used. In senior lessons, some excellent further use of statistical material

and documents with numerical data was noted as a strong support to linking History and numeracy in relevant ways.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Commendably, History is a core subject in both junior cycle and for students who select TY. It is very good to see three periods per week for junior groups. The relatively low time provision for History in TY, where it shares two periods with Geography periods, merits re-consideration, if possible. However, the course linkage to geographical and local studies in TY is a very good idea otherwise.
- Leaving Certificate provision is good, based on open subject choice, and the allocation of two double periods and a single period each week is satisfactory.
- The school is commended for tracking formal assessment outcomes and uptake levels against national norms. The recent examination of the relationship between LCVP uptake and the percentage of students taking senior History is commendable, as is the tracking of the number of TY students who ultimately continue with History. Such measures can inform future provision and help to maintain the current high numbers in senior History.
- There is an overarching school policy on assessment, although it has not been feasible to date for common formal assessments to be prepared in History due to staggered examinations at Christmas, for example.
- History is very well resourced and the provision of teacher-based rooms in general and availability of ICT hardware and intranet resources are very supportive of the teaching and learning of History.
- The school has a good-sized team of qualified history teachers though lesson allocation can be tempered by the needs of other subjects.
- Other whole-school supports for History include an events board and a fine library facility. Continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, in areas such as special educational needs, assessment for learning and literacy, have been provided for all teachers. Subject-specific support for teacher involvement in History Teachers Association of Ireland (HTAI) and other external CPD is also very impressive.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Teachers and particularly the convenor are highly commended for very thorough departmental plans in History, promoting an appropriate degree of individual flexibility for teachers too.
- Departmental and individual teacher involvement in developing the varied and stimulating TY course and the common electronic resource folder merit particular praise.
- Structural supports to planning are many and impressive. These include the holding of regular departmental meetings, teachers' attendance at in-service and CPD events, deployment of materials from the Professional Development Service for Teachers and active membership of the HTAI.
- The department has proactively considered many imaginative ideas to promote History, including dressing up in historical costumes at open nights, supporting students'

historical awareness before they go on exchange trips, ‘detective of the year’ and autobiography projects and, potentially, a History club.

- Departmental and individual planning materials showed a keen awareness of special educational needs where relevant, and cognisance of the school’s self-evaluation themes.
- Visits to local sites such as the nearby bronze plaques, war memorial and ‘Knight’s Walk’, and the facilitation of visiting speakers from third level or with specific foci on historical themes are also evidence of a vibrant and proactive department of History at the school.

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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board wishes to acknowledge the positive findings of this History Inspection.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board acknowledges the recommendations of this report. These recommendations are currently under review and the school will consider carefully their implementation into the future.

However in the context of the final recommendation, namely increasing the time allocated for History in Transition Year, the Board is conscious of its responsibilities and desire to offer students in this programme as wide a variety of the Transition Year curriculum as possible. Nevertheless the Board will be cognisant of this recommendation in future planning.