An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Ballinamore Community School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Ballinamore County Leitrim
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	91519H

Date of Inspection: 18 October 2017

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

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

Date of inspection	18 October 2017
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and subject coordinator • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during two class periods • Review of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Ballinamore Community School is a co-educational school which currently caters for 320 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. History is one of a number of optional subjects offered in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good.
- Very high levels of student concentration and engagement evident in all lessons were enhanced by a very supportive teacher-student rapport.
- All lessons observed incorporated a variety of teaching and learning methodologies to support learning and the development of students' literacy skills.
- The overall quality of whole-school provision and support for History is good though there is currently no Leaving Certificate class and uptake for History at junior cycle is low.
- The quality of planning and preparation for History is very good with a comprehensive subject plan in place which is actively used to guide teaching and learning.

Recommendations

- The history department should review and monitor student uptake and liaise with senior management in relation to the more effective promotion of History.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good.
- Students clearly enjoyed learning History in all lessons. Very high levels of student concentration and engagement were evident, and were enhanced by a very supportive teacher-student rapport.
- The History room is richly decorated with historical posters and examples of students' project work on topics such as Ancient Rome. These displays create a positive learning environment.
- All lessons had a planned developmental approach that incorporated a variety of teaching and learning methodologies to support learning and the development of the students' literacy skills.
- Learning intentions were shared with students at the outset of lessons. This approach provided a clear outline of the intended areas of study. To encourage students to reflect and asses their own progress, teachers should consider expressing learning intentions in terms of what students should know or be able to do and assess progress either during or at the end of lesson.
- Good introductory strategies that engaged students by recapping on prior knowledge and supported student learning of the lesson material were used in all lessons. Such strategies included effective oral questioning, the correction of homework or the use of think-pair-share activities.
- Good opportunities were provided for students to work collaboratively during lessons. For example, a placemat activity provided the basis for students to record, discuss and build on their knowledge of the rise of Fascism in Europe. Appropriate time was allocated for students to engage in a meaningful discussion and develop their sense of historical enquiry as they identified questions on areas they wanted to learn more about.
- Effective use of resources to enhance students' knowledge and understanding was observed. These resources included electronic presentations, selected images, video clips, the whiteboard and textbooks. To provide students with time to process and analyse visual sources, there is scope to combine a worksheet task with the viewing of a video clip.
- Students in one lesson were encouraged to reflect on a recent learning experience they had as part of a historical tour. The learning task required them to write a review of the experience and effectively supported them to make meaningful connections between the learning from this tour to the module on local history they were engaged with.
- In a TY lesson, there was a good focus on local History with an emphasis on historical research using a variety of online sources. Some students commented during the observation that they enjoyed this type of approach to learning History, in particular investigating information from the 1911 census about their family.
- Good differentiated learning was supported by prepared resources, the types of oral questions used and the monitoring of students' progress while completing a written or paired task.
- The quality of in-class assessment was good. There was an effective use of lower-order questions to check previous knowledge and understanding of the topic using a mix of global and targeted questions. In one very good lesson, higher-order questions were used

effectively to prompt students to think more deeply about the context, cause and consequences of the historical event being studied. This practice of using higher-order questions should be extended to all year groups.

- A selection of students' copybooks and journals was reviewed and it was evident that there is regular monitoring and assessment of students' work. It is very good practice that positive comments were provided along with written formative feedback which gave students directional advice on improvements.
- There was a good emphasis on developing students' historical literacy skills as students recorded key words and concepts as they emerged throughout the lessons. In addition, students were asked to read aloud while the teacher explained important information which students highlighted. When taking this approach to the development of historical skills, methodologies that facilitate students to discern by themselves what is important should be integrated into lessons.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall quality of whole-school provision and support for History is good. History is an optional subject with very good timetabling for students who opt to study the subject.
- Subject option bands are generated around student choice before entry to junior cycle and Leaving Certificate. Currently, there is no Leaving Certificate class and uptake for History at junior cycle is low. In an effort to address this, the history department should review and monitor student uptake and liaise with senior management in relation to the more effective promotion of History. For example, the history department could review how information about the subject is provided to students.
- Deployment of teachers is in line with their qualifications, skills, knowledge and interests.
- Senior management actively promotes a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning. A good level of engagement with whole-school continuing professional development (CPD) is evident.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning and preparation for History is very good and minutes of meetings are appropriately documented.
- A comprehensive subject plan is in place, with schemes of work developed for all year groups. It was evident in lesson observations that these schemes are actively used to guide teaching and learning. As part of an annual review of planning, there is scope to make clear links between learning outcomes, methodologies and assessment practices.
- A very interesting scheme of work has been prepared for TY with a good emphasis on local history. To support self and peer-assessment methodologies, the history department should link the assessment of oral presentations and research tasks with success criteria developed in conjunction with students.
- The history department is commended for its analysis and review of certificate examination results. It is very good practice that observations are recorded and actions are identified in relation to teaching and learning to support ongoing improvements in student attainment.
- Good co-curricular planning for History was evident with regular history trips organised to places such as the Family History Centre, Collins Barracks and the Famine Museum.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal 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 *very good* 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;