An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in History

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Lough Allen College
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Drumkeerin County Leitrim
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	71560P

Date of Inspection: 05-04-2017

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. Learning, teaching 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	4 and 5 April 2017
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal, deputy principal and subject teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and subject teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Lough Allen College is a co-educational post-primary school under the auspices of Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board. At the time of the evaluation, there were 155 students enrolled. The school provides the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Vocational programmes and a number of Post Leaving Certificate courses.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good.
- In all lessons observed, it was evident that students were engaged, motivated to learn and could demonstrate their understanding of the stated learning intentions.
- While some good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, the majority of lessons adopted a whole-class approach, with the same content, tasks and homework for all.
- In all lessons, there was a very good emphasis on the development of students' historical literacy.
- The overall quality of whole-school provision and support is good; TY and Leaving Certificate provision for History has been affected by the small number of students opting to study History for junior cycle.
- The quality of planning and preparation is very good; a very comprehensive subject department plan for History directs and informs teaching and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In order to support the full range of student abilities, greater use should be made of differentiated methodologies.
- Teachers, in collaboration with management, should explore cross-curricular options in order to provide students with opportunities to engage with some form of historical or social studies in TY.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during the evaluation was very good.
- The classroom environment was supportive of student learning with examples of student project work such as Ancient Ireland and the Explorations, historical timelines and mind maps on display. There was a very good rapport apparent in all interactions among students and between students and teachers.
- It was evident, in all lessons observed, that students were engaged, motivated to learn and could demonstrate their understanding of the stated learning intentions.
- Lessons were meticulously planned with a clear sequence of learning tasks supported by a range of handouts, worksheets and electronic presentations. This planning facilitated active learning and student engagement with historical content.
- In most lessons, students were provided with opportunities to work collaboratively through pair work; for example, to identify historical figures and their contribution to the causes of World War II. However, teachers need to be mindful of the pace and pitch of lesson activities to ensure that students are given appropriate time to engage in a meaningful way to support deeper learning.
- Very good use of written primary sources was observed in a few lessons. Guided by their teacher, students demonstrated a good knowledge and understanding of how to analyse primary sources such as identifying key information and examples of bias. Given this level of engagement, there is scope to give students more time to engage with these sources so that they can draw conclusions independently or collaboratively to support the development of their critical thinking skills.
- Good use of visual sources, such as images of inventions from the textile revolution, was evident in almost all lessons and this enabled students to connect with the relevant period. In one example of the very effective use of visual sources, students were given pre-identified tasks that challenged them to examine the source and draw conclusions from the evidence available, thus promoting historical enquiry and analysis.
- While some good examples of student-centred approaches were observed, the majority of lessons adopted a whole-class approach with the same content, tasks and homework for all. In order to support the full range of student abilities, greater use should be made of differentiated methodologies.
- The quality of assessment was good overall. There was a consistent use of whole-class oral questioning to monitor students' overall understanding of key words, facts and knowledge. This good practice could be broadened by greater use of open-ended questions and increased wait-time to foster deeper historical understanding.
- From reviewing student copybooks, it was evident that teachers assign homework frequently and have good systems to monitor student progress. Written formative comments were noted on extended writing tasks in a few classes; the most effective feedback gave directional guidance to students on areas of improvements.
- Assessment criteria are shared with junior-cycle students and the marking scheme is used by teachers to assess written work. To build on this good practice, teachers should consider the use of self-assessment and peer-assessment opportunities to allow students to make judgements about the quality of their own learning and to further assist them in taking responsibility for improvement.

- There was a very good emphasis on the development of students' historical literacy in all lessons through a focus on subject-specific vocabulary and concepts. Students recorded key words, used mind-maps to organise key facts and planned their extended writing tasks.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The overall quality of whole-school provision and support is good. Timetabling arrangements are appropriate and school management is very supportive of teachers' continuing professional development. A good range of whole-school in-service opportunities has taken place.
- History has been an optional subject in junior cycle, chosen after a five-week taster programme in first year. The decision of the school management to facilitate the current first years to study History for the whole year before choosing it as an optional subject is welcome as it will support the viability of the subject into the future.
- TY and Leaving Certificate provision for History has been affected by the small number of first-year students opting to study the subject in the past. There is a good commitment from school management to the restoration of History on the TY programme and to continuing to offer History within the Leaving Certificate options bands. Teachers, in collaboration with management, should explore cross-curricular options in order to provide students with opportunities to engage with some form of historical or social studies in TY.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning and preparation is very good. A collaborative approach to subject planning for History was evident. Department meetings are held regularly and minutes of meetings are documented appropriately.
- A very comprehensive subject department plan for History directs teaching and learning. For example, it was evident that sections on effective teaching methodologies, development of literacy and numeracy, planning for students with special educational needs and forms of assessment inform the work of teachers.
- In line with good practice, the schemes of work are laid out in terms of learning outcomes, resources and assessment.
- Teachers conduct an annual analysis of certificate examination results and, commendably, they use this information as a vehicle to reflect on teaching and learning. Some actions to support improvement were recorded and there is scope for teachers to continue to implement these improvements and evaluate their impact on student learning.

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

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

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 Transition Year timetable for the 2017-2018 academic year will include a module which will incorporate local History and a Social History.

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 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;