



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Subject Inspection: History Report

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Mercy Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Ballymahon Co Longford
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	63710M
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	17-01-2023 and 18-01-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	26/04/2023

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## 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

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.

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.

## Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.</li><li>2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.</li><li>3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.</li><li>2. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides a report to the board at least once a term on the overall number of bullying cases reported (by means of the bullying recording template provided in the <i>Procedures</i>) since the previous report to the board.</li><li>3. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils/students.</li></ol>

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

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# Subject inspection

<b>Date of inspection</b>	17-01-2023 and 18-01-2023
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents.</li><li>• Discussion with principal, deputy principals and history teachers.</li><li>• Interaction with students, including focus groups.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons.</li><li>• Examination of students' work.</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principals and history teachers.</li></ul>

## School context

Mercy Secondary School, Ballymahon is a co-educational post-primary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 758 students and offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE).

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good.
- Teachers displayed excellent pedagogical knowledge, classroom management skills and modelled enthusiasm for History.
- In all lessons, there was a very good balance between teacher input and student voice.
- Digital learning technologies (DLT) were used effectively, in all lessons, to enhance learners' experiences.
- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good.
- The quality of department planning was very good.

### Recommendations

- To help improve students' abilities to review and consolidate their learning, the key areas of learning achieved from class activities should be recorded on the school's digital learning platform.
- There was limited evidence of formative feedback on students written work. History teachers should review the current practice of providing students with formative feedback, and ensure all students are provided with regular written strategies to improve their work.
- As review and analysis of in-house assessments was not embedded at subject department level, teachers should analyse and share data gathered from these assessments to further inform planning.

## Detailed findings and recommendations

### 1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good. Teachers displayed excellent pedagogical knowledge, classroom management skills and modelled enthusiasm for History. In all lessons, there was an appropriate balance between teacher input and purposeful student activity and voice.
- In line with highly effective practice, all teachers provided learning intentions and used effective questioning strategies, to assess and to affirm attainment. In a few highly effective lessons, teachers' front ended assessment, provided success criteria, and aligned homework with the intentions, to support the capacity of all learners to extend their learning.
- All teachers placed a strong emphasis on the development of students' literacy skills, in relation to historical terms. In most lessons, there was an over dependence on transcribing teachers' notes. Teachers should provide students with the appropriate time and support to record, explain and contextualise the historical terms into their own words, to develop their note-making capacity.
- In all senior cycle lessons, students were empowered to take an active role and responsibility for their own learning. This was achieved through highly effective discussion during source analysis. This highly effective teaching approach should be extended to junior cycle lessons, to develop their capacity to relate to historical content and to discuss it using a multi-perspective approach.
- There was good use of questioning in most lessons. Very effective practice was noted when appropriate wait-time was provided and higher-order questioning strategies were used. This type of questioning had a beneficial impact on developing students' understanding. This practice was more dominant at senior cycle, extending the use of higher order questioning in junior cycle lessons would support junior students to develop their critical thinking skills.
- In all lessons, digital learning technologies (DLT) was used effectively to enhance learner experiences. Very good use of DLT was noted in a few lessons, where students used devices as part of group work, to develop a collaborative document for essay planning. This highly effective collaborative approach, promoted the students' ability to work interactively with their peers and supported project-based learning. To develop further positive learning experiences, it is recommended that teachers' upload the key learning achieved from in-class activities to the school's digital learning platform, to facilitate students revisiting their learning.
- Effective group work was observed in almost all lessons and this had a positive impact on student learning. In a few lessons, very effective collaborative learning was noted. In these instances, teachers encouraged students to participate in think-pair-share activities, before they contributed their answers. This highly effective practice facilitated deeper learning opportunities and enhanced the students' capacity to work effectively with their peers to consolidate their learning.
- In more than half of the lessons, highly effective differentiated teaching approaches were evident. In these instances, lesson content and tasks were appropriately differentiated to ensure that learners were challenged by their learning. Extending this highly effective approach to all lessons, would support the capacity of all students to develop as independent learners.
- Students in the focus groups spoke positively about their experiences of history lessons. Senior students, attributed their positive learning experiences to their personal interest in historical content and their teachers' enthusiasm for History. Junior students, spoke positively about their ability to engage with various learning opportunities, such as quizzes, online research and through group discussions.
- A review of junior cycle students' copybooks showed limited examples of written strategies to improve learning. This also applied to the editing of student work from digital feedback provided by teachers. It is recommended that all teachers collectively review formative assessment planning and ensure all students receive regular written feedback, to improve learning outcomes.

## **2. Subject provision and whole school support**

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good. School management was very supportive of History, and an appropriate time allocation was provided.
- Management was highly supportive of teacher engagement with subject specific continuing professional development (CPD). History teachers have engaged in all recent CPD for History. It was positive that some teachers are members of the History Teachers Association.
- There was evidence from the department minutes that school leadership was very supportive of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities to enhance learners' experiences of History. These experiences included, local historical tours and annual trips to visit historical sites of interest.
- In line with the school's commitment to promoting digital literacy all history teachers and the majority of students used mobile digital devices effectively in lessons.

## **3. Planning and preparation**

- The quality of department planning was very good. Department plans were developed collaboratively, and shared on the school's digital platform. The coordination of the subject was rotated annually and history department meetings were held regularly with minutes recorded. All recorded planning meetings were informed by the school's targeted areas for development.
- In line with very effective practice, the history department used rubrics in the collaborative development of all in-house assessments. Department plans showed that teachers conducted an analysis of the certificate examinations' results for improvement planning. Consolidating this effective practice with a review and analysis of in-house assessments would enhance the teachers' collective capacity to improve learners' outcomes.
- The history department had developed an eight week history module in TY, which was appropriately based on the interests of the students. To ensure the TY course continues to meet the needs and interests of all students, teachers developed an incremental approach to planning for the module, which is good practice. Students spoke very positively about their experiences of History in TY.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and history 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 quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	<i>Very good</i> 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 <i>outstanding</i> 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	<i>Good</i> 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	<i>Satisfactory</i> 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	<i>Fair</i> 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	<i>Weak</i> 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;