



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Geography Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Mercy Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Thomas Davis Street West Inchicore Dublin 8
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	60872A
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	13-10-2023
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	16/01/2024

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 Geography 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 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.

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">1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">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.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.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.

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

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	12-10-2023 & 13-10-2023
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students, including a student focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 4 lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Mercy Secondary School, Inchicore is a voluntary co-educational post-primary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). There is a current enrolment of 291 students. At the time of the evaluation the school offered Junior Cycle, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE). The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good with a small number of areas for improvement identified.
- It was good that a variety of assessment strategies were used in all lessons to assess prior knowledge and to prompt deeper discussion on geography-related issues.
- Good practice was observed in the majority of junior cycle lessons where a clear emphasis on embedding key geographical concepts and subject-specific terminology enabled student's learning.
- There was a strong emphasis on building positive student-teacher relationships in all lessons; student's opinions and ideas were valued.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for Geography was very good in terms of timetabling, deployment of teachers and resourcing of the department.
- The overall quality of subject planning was satisfactory and while individual teacher planning was good, there was a need to take a more collaborative approach to developing Junior Cycle units of learning.

Recommendations

- The questioning strategies used in the majority of lessons were effective, however, teachers should use more higher-order questions, challenging students appropriately to think critically about the subject content.
- To maximise the effectiveness of pair and group work teachers should take a more structured approach; designing and implementing tasks to ensure clear roles and expectations of students to facilitate them in demonstration of their learning.
- Map and aerial photograph analysis and interpretation are key geographical skills to be developed by students and teachers should introduce these earlier in the junior cycle to support the study of all aspects of the specification.
- While regular subject department meetings are scheduled, it is recommended that a template is created by senior management to capture the minutes from these meetings that include a note of decisions taken, timelines and actions agreed.

- The subject department should prioritise the development of junior cycle units of learning to ensure all elements of the Framework for Junior Cycle and the subject specification are met.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good in the lessons observed with a small number of areas for improvement identified.
- Teachers outlined the learning intentions at the beginning of each class and revisited these throughout the lesson allowing students to effectively track and identify their progress. In all lessons, students had a good sense of ownership of their learning and took pride in their work. However, greater attention should be paid to embedding the action verbs in the learning intentions across all three years of the junior cycle programme to encourage students to consider, interpret and explain geographical data.
- In most lessons, there was a clear focus on key geographical terms and opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding of them. Commendably, where possible, teachers linked new terms to local examples and case studies to demonstrate the meaning of these geographical terms. In these lessons, it was good when students were seen to apply these terms to their local environment.
- In all lessons, there was good use of targeted and open questions which enabled teachers to assess prior knowledge and link the new learning to content covered in previous lessons. Teachers' questioning strategies should be further developed to promote greater discussion in class and challenge students to think critically about the geographical concepts being taught.
- Classroom management was very good in all lessons with a clear emphasis on developing positive and respectful student-teacher relationships. In all lessons, students asked questions, suggested solutions confidently and were seen to make progress in a supportive learning environment.
- Student engagement was high in all lessons with students responding positively to the good active-learning methodologies introduced by teachers to progress learning. In the majority of lessons, a variety of meaningful tasks set by the teacher were seen to promote observation, literacy, numeracy and communication skills well.
- In most lessons opportunities were lost to link maps to the subject content. Map and aerial photograph analysis and interpretation are key geographical skills to develop and should be introduced earlier in the junior cycle and practiced regularly to support the study of all aspects of the specification.
- Pair and group work were under-developed in the majority of lessons. It was recommended that teachers use a structured approach to student collaboration by clearly explaining the task, setting high expectations of all students, assigning roles, setting a timer and allowing sufficient time for student feedback.
- Teachers had developed high quality, print-rich learning environments in their base classrooms with a range of materials to support the teaching of Geography. In all classrooms, exemplars of good-standard student work were displayed and demonstrated good attainment and student progress.
- Homework was set in all lessons, however teachers should discourage students from starting homework in class and maximise the available time for teaching and learning.
- In the student focus group, participants spoke positively of their experience in geography lessons, stating that they felt supported by their teachers, were making progress and were well-prepared for the state examinations.
- Students were able to demonstrate the connections they made between the subject and their everyday lives, giving specific examples from the physical world and in relation to climate change and sustainability.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- The overall subject provision and whole-school support for Geography was very good. Geography was a core subject at junior cycle and was studied by all students as part of the mandatory TY programme with a high uptake of Geography among senior cycle students.
- Timetabling in both junior and senior cycles was in line with syllabus guidelines.
- The senior management team was supportive of the geography department. There was very good provision of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning. The school provided a digital platform to facilitate the sharing of resources and the setting of student homework.
- It was good that senior management promoted and provided regular opportunities for teachers to engage with continuous professional development.
- All class groups were taught by suitably qualified teachers and, where the timetable allowed, all geography teachers were given opportunities to teach the junior and senior programmes which helps to build experience and capacity within the subject department.
- Each geography teacher had been allocated a base classroom that allowed them easy access to resources and materials to support teaching and learning.

3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of planning and preparation for Geography was satisfactory.
- Teacher's individual planning for the lessons observed was good.
- Commendably, the subject department had developed a comprehensive subject plan outlining its approach to teaching and learning, assessment, skills development and supporting students with additional needs.
- The subject department had a well-developed scheme of work for senior cycle.
- The quality of Junior Cycle units of learning was satisfactory and further development needs to be prioritised to ensure that all elements of the specification are included and that students are able to make interconnections between the various strands in the specification.
- Much of the planning was done by individual teachers. However, geography teachers should take a more collaborative approach to developing the units of learning by selecting learning outcomes that can be linked together and agreeing strategies to develop geographic skills throughout the three year cycle.
- The geography department should review their senior cycle Geographical Investigation to effectively apply and embed the geographical skills acquired during their course.
- The TY programme should also be reviewed by the subject department to broaden the student experience of geography and allow students to explore the relationship between people and places outside of the formal specifications.

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

We are happy that the content of this inspection is a true reflection on the teaching and learning at Mercy Inchicore.

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

As senior management, we plan to implement recommendations around planning and collaboration using the SSE process. We are part of the Forbairt project this year with Oide and have chosen collaboration as the theme of our project for the year ahead. This will start with work on assessments in the school and we have already met as a staff to learn about best practice in collaboration. We have come from small one teacher departments to larger departments recently which allows for greater opportunities to collaborate. As senior management we are committed to ensuring teachers engage in worthwhile CPD to further develop their skills in group work and team teaching.

After detailed discussions with the Geography teachers we have committed to engaging in subject department planning which prioritises units of learning. We will complete the field study in our local area with our own resources.

The inspection has given us a renewed energy and focus and we are excited about implementing the recommendations.

We were very happy to see that our positive student relationships, high engagement and very good classroom management were acknowledged by the Inspector and we will use this as a foundation for implementing the recommendations.

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;