



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Curriculum Evaluation: History Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	St Mary's National School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Windsor Avenue Fairview Dublin 3 County Dublin
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	19981U
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	29-11-2022

What is a curriculum evaluation?

Curriculum evaluations report on the quality of teaching and learning in specific subjects of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* and the *Primary Language Curriculum (2019)*. 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 inspectors evaluated learning and teaching in History under the following headings:

1. Quality of pupils' learning
2. Supporting pupils' learning through learner experiences and teachers' practice
3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing pupils' learning

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.

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 were prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.2. The Child Safeguarding Statement had been ratified by the board and included an annual review and a risk assessment.3. All teachers visited reported that they had read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they were aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school had developed an anti-bullying policy that met the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> and this policy was reviewed annually.2. The board of management minutes recorded that the principal provided 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 was published on its website and was readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and pupils.

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

Curriculum evaluation

Date of inspection	29-11-2022
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal and teachers• Review of relevant documents• Pupil focus-group interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning• Examination of pupils' work• Interaction with pupils• Feedback to principal and teachers

School context

St. Mary's National School caters for boys and girls from junior infants to first class and for girls only from second to sixth class. At the time of the inspection, there were 215 pupils enrolled across eleven mainstream classrooms and one special class for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The school is under the patronage of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. The school is included in Band 1 of the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity to Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of pupils' learning in History was very good with pupils demonstrating good capacity to engage in critical thinking.
- Learner experiences were of a very high quality in which pupils were provided with purposeful opportunities to engage in enquiry-based learning activities, enabling them to develop the skills relevant to working as a historian.
- The overall quality of teaching was very good with teachers using a wide range of methodologies including an integrated approach to teaching History, thereby connecting pupils' learning across the curriculum and beyond.
- Whole-school assessment practices were good with very good procedures in place to enable pupils to activate and build on their prior knowledge.
- School planning in History was of a very high standard; the whole-school plan clarified the content and skills to be addressed at each class level using a developmental approach as appropriate.

Recommendations

- Teachers should enable pupils to maintain an individual learning log in which they can record their learning in History and provide further opportunities to enable them reflect on their progress over time, thereby further developing pupils' self-assessment skills.
- As there were inconsistencies in terms of assessment practices, teacher should review the whole-school approach to assessment to ensure a more consistent emphasis be placed on monitoring and recording pupils' incremental skill development and attainment of key concepts.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. The quality of pupils' learning

The overall quality of pupils' learning in History was very good. Pupils were very enthusiastic about their learning and demonstrated high levels of engagement during lessons. They were articulate in sharing their thoughts, using subject-specific language appropriately. Pupils' capacity to engage in critical thinking and empathise with those negatively impacted by historical events, was commendable.

Pupils demonstrated good knowledge of the content completed to date. They demonstrated an age-appropriate understanding of time and chronology. This was effectively supported by classroom displays depicting relevant timelines. Where learning was very good, reference was made to the timeline during the lesson, enabling pupils to establish an understanding of the sequence of individual events. Most pupils were competent in identifying the similarities and differences between the past and present and between different eras in history. Pupils enjoyed frequent opportunities to engage with their peers in examining various photographs, objects and artefacts from the past. During such activities, pupils demonstrated an enquiring disposition; they composed relevant questions and made meaningful deductions. They displayed a very good ability to use and interpret evidence, to select relevant information, and to record their findings using a variety of techniques and media. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of local history was effectively developed and enhanced through engaging in local history trails. This involved engaging with guest speakers and visiting local sites of historical interest, a practice which is being re-introduced following the impact of Covid-19.

Pupils' were provided with opportunities to reflect on their learning at the end of lessons. This practice could be further enhanced by enabling pupils to maintain accessible learning logs in which they can record their learning. Pupils' self-assessment skills could be further progressed by providing them with additional opportunities to reflect constructively on both their learning and the feedback received from teachers during their lessons.

2. Supporting pupils' learning: Learner experiences and teachers' practice

Learner experiences were of a very high quality. Teachers provided inclusive and inspiring classroom environments that were conducive to learning. History was celebrated in classrooms and in the wider school environment through attractive displays of pupils' learning. Murals on the corridors displayed myths and legends which captured scenes of local and national historical importance and depicted the lives of various civilisations. Pupils were provided with frequent opportunities to work independently and collaboratively as historians in a purposeful and productive manner. They have benefitted from engagement in visual thinking strategies which were particularly effective in enabling them to explore, interpret and express their understanding of historical themes. Pupils' learning in History was further enhanced through very good use of digital technologies. This enabled them use technology as a tool to research, record and present relevant information on historical topics.

Pupils in the focus-group discussion spoke very positively about the variety of topics they explored and the engaging methodologies used by teachers during their History lessons. They talked positively of their engagement in project work and enquiry-based learning activities in terms of facilitating their learning in History. They noted in particular the importance of exploring local history as a means to gaining a more holistic sense of place and self-identity.

The overall quality of teachers' practice was very good. All lessons were well-structured and appropriately resourced, ensuring high levels of pupils' sustained engagement. Pupils were informed of learning objectives at the start of the lessons, enabling them to activate and build on their prior learning in History. Teachers demonstrated a very good knowledge of the content and skills of the curriculum. They adopted an integrated approach to teaching, ensuring History was embedded across the curriculum and interwoven through play-based learning activities in the infant classes. Teachers employed a broad range of methodologies including story, evidence, pictures, photographs and enquiry-based tasks to enhance pupils' learning experiences. They responded very well to individual learning needs, appropriately modifying tasks so as to enable all pupils to participate at a level commensurate with their abilities.

Teachers' planning and preparation facilitated effective teaching and learning. A range of methods was implemented to monitor and assess pupils' learning in History including teacher observation, teacher-designed tasks and tests, portfolios and projects. Teachers facilitated pupils in assessing their learning as the lessons progressed and they provided verbal feedback to further scaffold pupils' understanding. Pupils in the senior classes were in the process of developing digital assessment portfolios. They compiled a record of pupils' progress which would be shared with their parents. A whole-school approach to the assessment of learning should be reviewed to ensure a more consistent emphasis be placed on monitoring and recording pupils' attainment of key concepts and their incremental skill development.

3. The effectiveness of school planning, including SSE, in progressing pupils' learning

The quality of school planning in History was very good. The whole-school plan clarified the content and skills to be addressed at each class level. It effectively informed and guided teachers' individual planning and classroom practice, which clearly demonstrated a developmental approach to teaching History. The plan was contextualised to the school setting and included a number of appendices referencing local sites of historical interest, sources of local history and relevant literature. Consideration should be given to reviewing the plan to reflect the teaching and learning practices which have further evolved and developed at class level.

The development of pupils' vocabulary skills had been identified as a target of the school's current improvement plan. It was commendable that a whole-school emphasis on promoting pupils' literacy skills, through History, was evident in all settings. Teachers carefully identified, appropriately modelled and taught the key vocabulary for each topic in History.

Teachers were reflective in developing their practices and it was noteworthy that they demonstrated a commitment to on-going professional learning with a view to improving provision for all the pupils.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management acknowledges and affirms the excellent teaching and learning in St. Mary's.

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

A review of assessment practices will take place over the coming months to provide a more consistent and systematic approach to assessment at whole school level.

The school has already applied for further CPD in the development of eportfolios.

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;