



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Subject Inspection: Religious Education (RE) Report

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Loreto Abbey Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Dalkey Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	60130C
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	22-11-2022
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	24/02/2023

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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(s) evaluated learning and teaching in Religious Education 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.

## 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.</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>	22-11-2022
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students, including focus groups</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during 4 lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

## School context

Loreto Abbey School is a fee-charging voluntary secondary school for girls under the trusteeship of the Loreto Education Trust. There are currently 732 students enrolled. It provides the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good, with some examples of exemplary practice in relation to active learning.
- In most lessons observed, students were given opportunities to reflect on their progress as learners and there was a strong emphasis on activating student voice.
- The RE department have successfully embedded collaborative learning methodologies into classroom practice.
- Very good assessment practices were observed, with some examples of highly effective practice.
- Whole-school support for RE is very good, RE is offered at both junior cycle and senior cycle level and there is a good uptake of RE at senior level.
- Preparation for lessons was very good and highly effective collaborative practice was observed among the RE teachers, there is scope for development in relation to subject planning.

### Recommendations

- Teachers should further explore peer observation opportunities available in the school with a view to sharing the exemplary practice observed in relation to the sharing of success criteria, the use of engaging stimuli to engage learners and effective formative feedback to progress learning.
- Planning for Junior Cycle should include a section for teacher reflection and it is timely now that the units of learning are reviewed and updated by the RE team.

# Detailed findings and recommendations

## 1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was very good, with exemplary practice observed in some lessons in relation to the sharing of success criteria and the delivery of highly effective formative feedback. In all lessons observed the teacher created a positive and safe environment that was conducive to learning.
- Individual lesson preparation was very good and many high quality resources were included to elicit personal responses and to support the development of key skills, such as enquiry skills. Learning intentions were consistently shared at the beginning of each lesson. In the most effective lessons the learning intentions were explained and referenced at the end of the lesson to assist the consolidation of learning, and to support learner confidence and a sense of achievement.
- Lessons were characterised by respectful and affirming interactions between the students and teachers, and among students. Teaching practices were inclusive and in the most effective lessons students were given autonomy in relation to their learning, for example, they were given a choice of activities.
- Student outcomes were very good and they demonstrated very good knowledge, skills and understanding. This was exemplified in their ability to draw on prior learning and to use their reflective and critical-thinking skills to support and develop their learning.
- This ability to reflect on learning was evidenced during the focus group meeting with students when they discussed their learning experiences at different stages throughout the RE programme, and how this learning and the development of key skills, such as critical-thinking skills, will enable them to participate in their communities and in the world as informed, respectful, responsible and caring members of society.
- In the most effective lessons students were active participants in their learning. They were appropriately challenged through higher-order questioning and took ownership of their learning. Purposeful student engagement and high motivation levels were triggered through the use of interesting and engaging stimuli, such as live links to sacred places. However, in one lesson there were missed opportunities in relation to using visual stimuli to develop understanding and progress the learning.
- In some instances, students could be further encouraged to extend their verbal responses to questions and in making links across the three inter-connected strands at junior level. This is another area that could be developed through peer observation opportunities available in the school with a view to improving the quality of upwards differentiation.
- Active and collaborative methodologies were a key strength observed, for example, in one lesson students were given the opportunity to conduct research together using co-constructed success criteria. This task experienced high participation levels and supported the development of collaborative skills.
- Differentiation was effective in the majority of lessons. This is a target area identified in the school's self-evaluation process. It is advised that the RE department continues to develop and implement effective differentiation practices across all lessons.
- Teachers circulated the room during group activities and offered good levels of support and challenge. There was scope in a minority of lessons to include further levels of challenge to progress the learning and maximise attainment levels.
- There was some evidence of highly effective formative feedback on students' work, however, there is scope for development in this area, with an emphasis on how to improve.
- Student focus group participants described their learning in the RE classroom as enjoyable, interesting, engaging and collaborative. They also spoke about the caring, inclusive and supportive classroom environment created by the classroom teachers. In addition, they expressed their appreciation for the time afforded to them in lessons to develop and progress their learning through high levels of active student voice.

## 2. Subject provision and whole school support

- The quality of leadership for learning was very good, and senior management provide valuable support to the RE department.
- Due to the high levels of student interest, Leaving Certificate RE is offered at senior cycle and although the timetabled hours for Leaving Certificate RE fall below the requirements for optimum subject provision, the school has made concerted efforts to fully include Leaving Certificate RE on the timetable. Senior students take a class one morning each week before school to make up the full hours. It is recommended that senior management continue to review the current timetabling arrangement for Leaving Certificate RE, and when possible, provide optimum provision.
- School management encourage and facilitate the subject teacher's attendance at relevant continuing professional development (CPD) courses.
- It is evident that the RE team are supporting areas of development identified through the school's self-evaluation process, for example, questioning techniques.
- The RE department has worked closely with the school's teaching and learning committee and the Additional Educational Needs department to provide high levels of support and challenge to all learners.
- Professional Master of Education students have been welcomed into the school and newly qualified teachers are supported through the Droichead programme.

## 3. Planning and preparation

- Very good collaborative practice was noted among the members of the RE department. In addition to regular in-person meetings, the use of digital technology is used to good effect to share resources and plans.
- The overall quality of individual teacher preparation for lessons observed was of a very high standard, lessons were well structured and included interesting and engaging stimuli and tasks.
- Detailed schemes of work are in place and are shared in an online platform. It is recommended that a teacher reflection component which supports the evolving needs of students is included. At junior cycle it is recommended that the RE team review units of learning to ensure that the specific learning needs of each class group are catered for.
- The RE coordinator's role is well developed and the role supports a collaborative and collegial team approach across the department. It was noted by the team that high levels of support are given to new members of the RE department.

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