

Literacy in the Irish Reformatory School

Maighread Tobin¹

Summary: Literacy and education have long been acknowledged as key factors underpinning essential competencies and influencing lifestyle, social achievement and career choices in Ireland. The impact and effect of institutions and institutionalisation over the last century in Ireland on the children and young adult residents has, over recent years, raised serious concerns as a result of allegations of institutionalised abuse and neglect over many years involving many thousands of children in the care of the State and its agents. The author considers the history of literacy assessment and education in the Reformatory and Industrial Schools. The lack of detailed oversight in institutions formally designated as schools is explored. The author describes the educational opportunities provided by the schools and discusses their links with employment on discharge and the consequences of limited education and poor literacy for the former residents.

Keywords: Ireland, nineteenth century, twentieth century, reformatory schools, industrial schools, children, crime, juvenile justice, courts, literacy, education, Residential Institutions Redress Board, Magdalen Asylums, Department of Education, employment.