

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography

REPORT

St Mary's, Knockbeg College, Carlow

Roll number: 61130H

Dates of inspection: 13th November 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	12 and 13 th November 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, teaching was of good quality with some very good practice evident but teacher talk predominated in a number of lessons.
- Learning took place in a positive and well-disciplined environment in all classes evaluated.
- Substantial progress has been made in the effective integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning and both geography teachers are helping to lead developments in this area.
- There is a strong commitment to fieldwork and project work at all levels that includes a focus on Carlow and its environs in Transition Year (TY).
- Timetabling arrangements for the subject are very good with three periods a week in junior cycle and five periods a week in senior cycle.
- A detailed geography subject plan has been produced that is based on syllabus aims and objectives, key concepts and skills.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater use should be made of the local area at all levels. Projects and case studies based on the local area would help to promote and to stimulate greater interest and involvement of students.
- Although the Junior and Leaving Certificate examination results in Geography are collated, analysed and compared to national norms annually, the outcomes of the analysis should be stated and used for target setting.
- Geography planning should focus more on active methodologies, on literacy and numeracy development and on correcting students' written work for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

St. Mary's, Knockbeg College is a diocesan college that is located close to Carlow. The current enrolment numbers 366 students. Students come from a wide catchment area and from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and an optional TY programme. All junior cycle students study Geography and uptake of the subject at senior cycle is strong.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning were of good quality and some very good practice was evident in the lessons observed. Teacher instruction was clear and key concepts and skills were well explained in all classes. Teacher talk and teacher directed learning predominated in some lessons. There was a need in these classes to focus more on student engagement and active methodologies.
- Learning took place in a disciplined environment. There was good rapport evident between teachers and students.
- Lesson outcomes were clearly stated at the beginning of lessons and were usually returned to at the end.
- Very good progress has been made in the use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning as evidenced by the use of a learning platform, data projectors, ebooks and digital photography. This needs to be maintained in order to maximise the potential of ICT to enrich the teaching and learning of Geography.
- The TY geography module includes a local focus on Carlow which is based on the very effective use of Scoilnet maps and other resources. Greater use of the Carlow area should be made in teaching and learning and in the design of locally based projects at all levels. Such projects have motivational and promotional benefits for the subject and also promote cross-curricular learning and teaching.
- There is a commitment to and an involvement in field work at all levels as time and resources allow. Glendalough, Curracloe beach and the Comeragh Mountains have been visited and focussed projects have been undertaken on these areas which have greatly enhanced the teaching and learning of the subject.
- Homework is regularly given and students' written work which includes note making and note taking are well monitored. More comments towards improvement should be written on students' copy work and credit for copy work should be given in school term reports.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography teaching and learning take place in a mixed-ability class setting. Timetabling arrangements for the teaching of Geography are very good. There are three periods a week for Geography in junior cycle and five periods at leaving certificate level.
- Formal school assessments take place twice yearly. Regular testing also takes place which helps to focus students and to track their progress. Target setting in the areas of literacy and numeracy should be an integral part of the self-evaluation process within the subject.

- The subject is well resourced and resources are also provided on a needs basis. Teachers are facilitated and encouraged by school management to attend relevant professional development courses.
- The use of ICT in teaching and learning is actively promoted and both geography teachers are helping to lead developments in this area at both subject and whole-school level.
- Teacher-based classrooms facilitate the gathering, storage and display of resources. However, the age and state of the building is a major challenge when displaying material on walls. One very cramped classroom, which is used regularly for geography lessons, does not facilitate the development of modern approaches to teaching and learning.
- The school's Junior and Leaving Certificate examination results in Geography are strong and above national norms. These results are analysed year on year and compared with national norms. The results of the annual analysis should form the basis of target setting for improvement.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The geography department meets formally at least twice a year and informally on a much more regular basis. Minutes of Geography department meetings are recorded. The formal meetings need to be more reflective and strategic. They should focus on what is working well and not working well within the subject and on how improvements in teaching, learning and assessment can be achieved.
- A subject co-ordinator is in place. The geography teachers share resources, have developed common programmes of work and have worked well on sharing ICT based resources and project and fieldwork development.
- The quality of individual teacher planning is very good.
- Considerable effort has gone into the development of a detailed subject plan for Geography. This plan outlines relevant aims, objectives and key skills. It contains a detailed scheme of work for each year group. It is recognised by the geography teachers that the plan is still very much a work in progress.
- There is a willingness to review the subject plan in line with the findings and recommendations in this report. The plan needs to be revised to make it less content driven, to put greater emphasis on active teaching methodologies and learning strategies and to place a greater focus on literacy and numeracy development. The revised plan should also include strategies in relation to the consistent correction of students' written work.

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 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.