

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Geography

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Coláiste Chraobh Abhann
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Creowen Kilcoole Co Wicklow
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	76076M

Date of Inspection: 28-04-2017



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. Learning, teaching 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	28-04-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and geography teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Coláiste Chraobh Abhann is a co-educational post-primary school managed by Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). The 674 students enrolled are offered the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- Teaching, learning and assessment practice of exceptionally high quality was observed in geography lessons.
- Strategies employed by all the teachers of Geography very effectively engaged students in lesson activities and in learning.
- Uptake of higher level geography at all levels is very good, but levels of achievement of a small cohort of students at higher level Junior Certificate require some attention.
- Provision for Geography is very good.
- Individual planning by teachers for the subject is of very high quality, while collaborative subject planning for Geography could be further developed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography teachers should develop strategies, within an action-planning cycle, to assist the small cohort of students who currently attempt higher level geography in junior cycle but who are not achieving that level in the Junior Certificate.
- Curricular plans for Geography should now be revised to reflect the Framework for Junior Cycle and the planned reintroduction of Geography into the TY programme in the school.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- Teaching, learning and assessment practice of an exceptionally high quality was observed in geography lessons. Central to this practice were the student-focused and task-based strategies employed by all teachers of Geography. As a consequence, students were active, engaged, responsive and busy in their lessons. The atmosphere in lessons was very positive and found expression in very respectful interactions. In the classroom learning settings observed, students were confident in tackling the learning tasks and challenges set by their geography teachers.

- Lessons and their associated learning intentions were very clear and coherent, and were shared with students. The range of visual stimulus materials provided the entry points into the planned learning that engaged students' interest and attention. The planned learning was clearly linked to, and developed from, previous learning and included a range of uncomplicated yet very effective geography teaching strategies.
- The strategies employed included the use of digital photographs of coasts of erosion and deposition combined with an Ordnance Survey (OS) map of a local coastal area. These facilitated junior cycle students to very effectively extend their previous learning of coastal processes and consider issues of coastal protection. A very interesting word-association puzzle and a television clip relating to agricultural problems in the West of Ireland facilitated senior cycle students to develop their understanding and challenge stereotypical thinking in relation to core and peripheral regions in Ireland. Learning about regional inequality was very effectively achieved in another junior cycle lesson through the use of atlases, a sketch map, tablet computers and a learning frame. Well-chosen digital photographs were the entry point for another junior cycle class group to very effectively discuss the economic impacts of tourism both locally in Kilcoole, and in the Mediterranean. These exemplary classroom strategies allowed students to learn and to engage with others in their learning of Geography.
- Collaborative learning strategies were observed to be part of routine practice in geography lessons, and were both well-structured and very effective. Groups were strategically structured, group tasks were clear and time-bound, and responsibility for feedback was assigned to particular students. These established practices allowed teachers, in all lessons observed, to engage in supporting particular students or groups, to challenge their thinking, and to progress their learning in the mixed-ability group configurations.
- The questioning strategies used in all lessons were highly effective. These strategies were clearly planned in relation to the class context. Well-composed and clear questions were used in all cases. A combination of higher-order and lower-order questions was used. Questions were targeted at named students, and an appropriate 'wait time' allowed students to think and to compose their responses. This is very effective practice. Equally positive aspects of questioning were the challenge to students to further develop the response of another student, and the level of affirmation provided by teachers. These strategies involved many light-hearted moments and contributed to the very positive classroom learning environment in all lessons.
- A range of strategies to review learning in lessons was also observed to be very effective. It was very positive to see some formative written comments on students' work in their geography copybooks. The quality of diagram drawing by some students should however become a focus for improvement by the geography department. The importance of the skill of drawing good quality diagrams in copies should be stressed both from the perspective of demonstrating understanding, but also in the context of marks allocated to diagrams and other geographical skills in certificate examinations.
- Levels of uptake of higher level geography are very good at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. This reflects the outcomes of whole-school initiatives in this area and the high expectations of the geography teachers for their students. The lack of achievement of higher level by a small cohort of students in Junior Certificate is an area of concern. It is recommended therefore that the geography teachers should develop strategies, within an action-planning cycle, to assist this small cohort of students in raising their attainment levels in higher level in Geography.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography is very good in the school as the subject forms part of the core curriculum within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Geography and History currently share five-class periods per week in first year. It is very positive that this allocation will increase to three class periods per week in first year for both subjects, in parallel with the implementation of the revised junior cycle specifications for Geography and History in 2018. Geography will then also continue to have its current allocation of three class periods per week for second and third year.
- It is very positive that a module of Geography is to be re-introduced into the TY programme. This should provide a wide-ranging geographical experience for students and an effective skills base to support study of the subject for Leaving Certificate.
- Teacher-based classrooms for Geography are of very high quality and provide a setting to display an extensive range of students' work, photographs and very high quality models produced by first year students.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A curricular plan for Geography is in place but should now be revised in the context of the introduction of a new specification for the subject at junior cycle. The plan should take a non-linear approach in the context of the strands, elements and learning outcomes of the specification for Geography. The positioning of the teaching of geographical skills should also be considered. The key geographical skills of map interpretation should be positioned early in first year within the plan. This will allow students to practise key skills, and will facilitate teachers to integrate map interpretation across the range of learning outcomes as students progress their learning in Geography.
- A revised TY plan for the reintroduced module in Geography should also be developed focusing on further advancing engagement with geographical skills, and on maximising the potential of the local area for fields studies and project work.
- Assessment planning and practice is very effective. The provision of a geography student-of-the-week prize in a first-year class group was observed to be a very good motivator for students to engage and enjoy their study of Geography. The provision of an assessment weighting for students' models and posters, in both first year and second year, reflects very good practice and has resulted in the production of students' work of very high quality.
- The level and depth of individual teacher planning is very high. It is clear that this planning provides the basis for the very effective classroom learning experiences provided to students.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and the geography 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 the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good 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 outstanding 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	Good 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	Satisfactory 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	Fair 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	Weak 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;