

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Geography

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Coláiste Chill Mhantáin
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Burkeen Wicklow Town Co Wicklow
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	76099B

Date of Inspection: 09-12-2016



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 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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	08-12-2016 and 09-12-2016
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 single and two double class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Coláiste Chill Mhantáin is a co-educational, post-primary school, managed under the auspices of Kildare / Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB). The school has a current enrolment of 947 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from very good to good, with some examples of exemplary practice in evidence.
- The integration of information and communications technology (ICT) significantly engaged geography students in lessons and in their learning.
- Patterns identifiable in the outcomes for geography students in certificate examinations reflect high expectations of teachers for their students and a whole-school emphasis on increasing students' uptake of higher level in subjects.
- Provision for Geography is good.
- Collaborative planning for Geography is well established, however, there is scope to improve the programme plan for Transition Year (TY) geography.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Geography teachers should analyse patterns of student achievement in certificate examinations, identify areas for improvement, and then work to address these with specific interventions using time-bound action planning strategies.
- Programme planning for TY should now focus on developing an appropriate skills-based plan to support students' learning in Geography.
- The study of Ordnance Survey (OS) map skills and the analysis of aerial photographs should be repositioned to the curricular plan for first year.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, as observed in geography lessons, ranged from very good to good, with some examples of exemplary practice in evidence. Students were clearly learning in geography lessons and their learning was scaffolded by the very good planning and preparation of their geography teachers. Very good quality classroom practice was underpinned by courteous and mutually respectful relationships, and by a very positive classroom atmosphere in the clearly mixed-ability class contexts.

- The highly effective classroom practice in lessons observed was planned, had a coherent structure and included the sharing of the learning intention. A review of students' learning was evident in most lessons. This review, when observed, included questioning of students based on a review of the learning intention, and in one lesson, the use of a quiz, created by the teacher using an online application. The inclusion of very good quality formative written commentary on students' written work was a very positive aspect of teachers' practice in a number of lessons. The need to further develop strategies to review what has been learned in lessons through a range of formative assessment strategies should be considered by all teachers. Homework tasks could then be set based on this review.
- Students were active and engaged by the planned teaching and learning strategies used in all lessons. These active methodologies facilitated and scaffolded student learning. In a number of lessons, the learning was enabled through discussion and group work, in response to visual stimuli, and through engagement with practical tasks. Double lessons particularly facilitated learning in this way as students and teachers had time to discuss, to think, and to practise skills.
- Very well-organised and routine use of collaborative learning strategies ensured that students, in these mixed-ability contexts, remained active and focused. Students engaged with tasks and worksheets in pairs or in small groups that were well-structured to ensure that all students were involved. Placemats and mind maps were used, in some cases, to gather students' ideas, and to feedback to the whole class. These strategies were very effective as they placed responsibility on students to engage, discuss, think, and then to respond. The sharing of these good practices, particularly through teacher peer observation, could be explored by the geography teaching team.
- Where recommendations were made in particular lessons, they focused on limiting teacher inputs so as to place responsibility on students to engage and to respond and on the need to develop questioning strategies to provide students with time to think and therefore to develop their answers. The appropriate use of a range of higher and lower-order questions was also recommended.
- The integration of ICT as a teaching tool was evident in all lessons, while its use as a tool to facilitate students' learning was particularly evident in a number of lessons. Access to the school's virtual learning environment (VLE) allows teachers to share resources that were used in class with students to support homework and further study. In addition to the aforementioned review of learning using an online quiz application, students' use of hand-held tablet technology in another lesson, to record river erosive processes in a model of a river valley, was also very effective.
- Patterns identifiable in the outcomes for geography students in certificate examinations reflect high expectations for students by their geography teachers, the mixed-ability nature of the cohort, and the whole-school emphasis on increasing uptake of higher level in Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. The geography teaching team should analyse patterns of student achievement in certificate examinations, identify areas for improvement, and then work to address these with specific interventions using time-bound action planning strategies. These actions should focus on emphasising students' competence in using and applying key geographical skills, and on a stronger focus on aspects of examination technique.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography is good in the school. Geography has now become an optional subject in junior cycle, and students make their subject choice on entry without a subject-sampling period. Uptake of the subject has consequently reduced although patterns of uptake are showing some increase. It is very positive however that Geography has an increased timetable allocation of four class-periods per week for junior cycle that includes one double period.
- The provision of tablet technology and the use of the VLE are very positive. Both have engaged teachers in developing their classroom practice and are observed to have a very positive impact on the students' experience of Geography.
- Geography is not currently provided in the TY programme. However, plans are in place for its reintroduction into the modular subject-sampling layer for the coming school year. This is very positive.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject planning is well established in the geography department. It is also very positive that the geography teachers have produced an action-plan for the subject that includes the reinstating of Geography in the TY programme.
- The challenge and opportunity for the geography department is to now develop an appropriate skills-based plan that will provide TY appropriate geographical learning experiences for students when TY provision for Geography is restored. This revised plan should also be used to support the potential transfer of these students into Leaving Certificate geography.
- OS map and aerial photograph analysis skills should be repositioned into the curricular plan for first year. Teachers should introduce these skills early in first year to allow students to experience, and to manipulate, spatial information in these formats, and, through skills acquisition, allow application across the breadth of the curricular plan at both Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate. This early focus on geographical skills should also be monitored and tracked by the geography teachers in their analysis of outcomes for students in certificate examinations.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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 is affirmed by the very positive commentary pertaining to the classes visited by the inspectorate. We are also delighted where it was noted that ***“very good quality classroom practise was underpinned by courteous and mutually respectful relationships, and by a very positive classroom atmosphere”***. This overarching commentary echoes the sentiments of our school Mission Statement and it is heartening that the inspectorate were able to identify and witness our Mission Statement in action.

The members are also supportive of and encouraging of the use of active learning strategies by our teaching team. The Board of Management consider it noteworthy that the inspectorate identified in the report that students are engaging in these active methodologies which both facilitate and scaffold student learning in our school; this coupled with the comment ***“highly effective classroom practise in lessons observed”*** further reinforces the positive tone of this inspection report.

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

The students who choose Geography are in line with the national averages in relation to examination attainment in State Examinations and this is positive. However our Geography Department will continue to analyse patterns of student achievement on an annual basis.

The Geography Department have forwarded a department proposal to school management, with a view to the scheduling of Geography in the Transition Year Programme. The department will review this proposal in light of suggestions made during the feedback session by the inspectorate. The Geography Department see value in implementing some change to the current proposal. The Board of Management are supportive of the Geography Departments commitment, to further enhancing the student learning experience in the subject area.

The Geography Department see value in the repositioning some of the topics on the subject department plan as per the advice of the inspectorate. The Geography Department will monitor this change and examine whether it enhances student learning and further develops their geographical skills.

The Board of management will endeavour to implement the recommendations identified by the inspectorate and will review the progress of these recommendations.

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;