

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection in Geography**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Ashton School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Blackrock Road Cork
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	81008W

**Date of Inspection: 15-11-2017**



**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. 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.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	14 and 15-11-2017
<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</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Ashton School was established as a co-educational comprehensive school in 1972 following the amalgamation of two private schools: Rochelle School and Cork Grammar School. It is under the joint patronage of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork and Cork Education and Training Board (CETB). The school has a current enrolment of 517 students. It offers a comprehensive curriculum to students which includes the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed.
- Students were engaged and on task with their learning throughout their lessons and some opportunities for collaborative work in groups were provided within the lessons observed.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was used appropriately in the lessons observed; however, it is now an appropriate time to create a vision for how the department will use ICT resources to support student learning into the future
- Subject provision and whole school support for the subject is very good, while teachers in the department work well together as a team and share information and resources both on a formal and an informal basis.
- The quality of planning and preparation for lessons within the department is good, and is reflected in the geography subject plan which outlines the general department programme for the subject, which is currently under review.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers in the department should consider organising their classroom layouts, particularly in the geography room, in ways that would facilitate the creation of co-operative learning opportunities for students.
- The department should explore the potential impact and benefits that visualisers, mobile technologies and a learning platform could give in supporting student learning in Geography.
- In light of the current departmental review, the geography subject plan would benefit from a revision which would be more specific, descriptive and detailed as to the uses of various pedagogical methodologies, resources and learning links to school-wide initiatives, such as literacy and numeracy within the school self-evaluation agenda.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed. Lessons were well-prepared and appropriate teaching for learning resources were accessed, assembled and used by teachers.
- Learning intentions and expectations were clearly outlined at the beginning of lessons and best practice was observed when these intentions were referred to during and at the end of the lesson. Links to previous learning were made at the beginning of lessons and this provided important continuity for students in their learning.
- Students were engaged and on task with their learning throughout their lessons and some opportunities for collaborative work in groups were provided within the lessons observed. Classroom desk layout did not always facilitate collaborative working for groups of students. Teachers in the department should consider organising their classroom layouts, particularly in the geography room, in ways that would facilitate the creation of co-operative learning opportunities for students.
- Homework was regularly set and checked. In the senior cycle, monthly assessments are given to students, where a grade and comment are discussed with students and their parents.
- ICT was used appropriately in the lessons observed. Teachers in the department can also share resources through the school's collaboration portal. It is now an appropriate time to create a vision for, and plan towards how the department will use ICT resources to support student learning into the future. The department should explore the potential impact and benefits that visualisers, mobile technologies and a learning platform could give for ICT to support student learning in Geography. The recent *Digital Learning Framework for Post-Primary Schools* together with the associated planning templates, published by the Department of Education and Skills, should prove useful as the department develops its vision and plan for supporting learning for Geography students through ICT.

### 2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and whole school support for the subject is very good.
- Timetable provision for Geography at junior cycle and senior cycle levels is appropriate with three lessons per week at junior cycle and five lessons per week at senior cycle. Classes are generally taught in mixed-ability groups and a dedicated geography room is available for most classes, especially at senior cycle
- School management is supportive of the department with regard to resources, timetabling and access to continuing professional development (CPD). Teachers in the department are members of their local subject association which is an important link for the department to have, especially in light of the introduction of Geography as a subject in the new Junior Cycle programme in September 2018.

- In Transition Year, approximately two-thirds of students choose Geography, which is delivered in a modular programme and which amounts to eighteen lessons. The programme includes research and fieldwork skills elements, as well as a focus on locational geography.

### **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of planning and preparation for lessons within the department is good.
- Teachers in the department work well together as a team and share information and resources both on a formal and an informal basis. The department meets formally between three and five times throughout the school year. A school-wide meeting template is used to record what was discussed in meetings, at which administrative and pedagogic themes are discussed.
- Links between the geography department and the special educational needs (SEN) department are very strong and Professional Masters in Education student-teachers are well supported by the department.
- The geography subject plan includes a mission statement, the aims and objectives of the subject and the general department programme which outlines a range of teaching methodologies. The subject plan would benefit from a revision which would be more specific, descriptive and detailed as to the uses of various pedagogical methodologies, resources and learning links to school-wide initiatives, such as literacy and numeracy within the school self-evaluation agenda.
- Department schemes of work are characterised by lists of subject content and learning outcomes in first and second year, by subject content and learning intentions in third year, and by textbook chapter and topic in the senior cycle. The department should review and revise these schemes of work and possibly develop a template which would include learning information about skills, resources used, links to literacy, numeracy, learning outcomes and review. At a recent department meeting, geography teachers identified this work as being necessary. Planning for the new Junior Cycle programme should support this review.
- Fieldwork activities are organised for some class groups. Second-year and third-year students engage in a cross-curricular Cork City walk activity, TY students do a virtual river study, while at senior cycle, the obligatory fieldwork element is carried out in fifth year. The department should now plan for delivering relevant, local fieldwork opportunities for every year group of geography students, especially in light of the opportunities for course-linked fieldwork offered by the new junior cycle geography specification.

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.

## 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 of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;