

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

**Subject Inspection in Geography**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Blackwater Community School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Ballyanchor Road Lismore Co Waterford
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	91509E

**Date of Inspection: 12-10-2017**



**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>Date of inspection</b>	12-10-2017
<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 four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Blackwater Community School is a co-educational post-primary school with a current enrolment of 784 students. The school is set in the historic town of Lismore, Co Waterford.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from very good to good while there were some areas for development in relation to lesson structure and the clarity of the planned learning in some lessons.
- Levels of uptake and achievement in Geography are very good in certificate examinations although some further attention should be focused on the small cohort of students who sit the higher level examination at Junior Certificate but who are not currently achieving a higher-level grade.
- Provision for Geography is very good.
- Planning and review practices are well established in the geography department although the current Transition Year (TY) and junior cycle curricular plans would benefit from review.

#### Recommendations

- A focus on lesson structure and on the planned learning is required in some lessons.
- The implementation of strategies to assist the small cohort of students who are not achieving higher level in junior cycle geography, should be prioritised.
- The TY plan should be revised, while the curricular plan for junior cycle geography should be further developed in light of the publication of the new junior cycle specification for Geography within the Framework for Junior Cycle.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- Overall, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment ranged from very good to good in the lessons observed. Areas for development were identified in some aspects of teachers' individual practice. In all lessons, teacher-student relationships were mutually respectful, and the classroom atmosphere was very positive.
- Very good individual practice by geography teachers was evident in lessons when the learning to be achieved was clear to students, and when a range of appropriate methods and strategies was used to engage students in that planned learning. In a senior cycle lesson, it was very clear to the students that the focus of the learning was on understanding the environmental impact of an economic activity in a particular regional setting, and on strategies to remedy negative impacts.
- Very good individual teacher practice was also evident in a lesson that focused on linking map skills and physical geography. Scoilnet Maps, an online mapping tool provided to schools by the Department of Education and Skills, facilitated the layering of the first edition Ordnance Survey (OS) map over the current 1:50,000 Discovery Series local sheet. This allowed students to observe and to measure coastal denudation very effectively.
- There was scope to develop lesson structure and clarity in relation to the planned learning in some lessons. The effect of very good preparation of digital images, data sets and a video clip could have had a greater impact on students' learning in one lesson, due to the lack of clarity in relation to the planned learning and the absence of strategies to assess students' understanding during the lesson. In another lesson, the effectiveness of equally very good preparation of resources including local case-studies and digital images was limited by the lack of lesson structure and by the absence of strategies to engage all of the students within a clear lesson structure. A focus on lesson structure and on clarity relating to the planned learning and assessment is therefore required in some lessons.
- Learner experiences in lessons were generally very good given the high level of preparation by all teachers and the visual quality of the resources used. The visual and print-rich nature of the classrooms also enhanced these experiences. Engagement with very well-organised collaborative learning tasks, including pair and group work, and engagement with tasks relating to maps skills, provided very positive learning experiences for some class groups.
- Assessment of learner outcomes arose naturally and seamlessly from the aforementioned well-structured lessons. The ability to use and apply geographical skills, and the completion of tasks, provided clear evidence of learning. The level of discussion arising from group tasks, peer assessment, and students' responses to teacher questions, indicated very positive learner outcomes.
- It is clear that the geography teachers have high expectations for their students. These expectations are reflected in very positive patterns of uptake and in patterns of achievement in Geography in certificate examinations. The geography teachers should prioritise strategies to assist the small cohort of students who are identifiable as attempting higher level in the Junior Certificate but who are currently not achieving a higher level grade.

## **2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Whole-school provision for Geography is very good, as evidenced by timetabling, the provision of base classrooms for Geography teachers, and in relation to the information and communications technology (ICT) resources available. The visual aspect of classrooms created a very positive learning environment for students while the use of an interactive whiteboard, in one classroom, significantly added to the students' experience of the subject. The development and use of a shared online folder, within the Geography department, is a further positive development in subject provision.
- While Geography is a compulsory subject in the TY programme, and an option at Leaving Certificate, it is in the process of transitioning to optional status at junior cycle in the context of the implementation of the Framework for Junior Cycle. The impact of this change in subject provision should be kept under review.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Collaborative subject planning and subject department planning practices are well established. It is now timely to review and to further develop the current curricular plan in light of the publication of the specification for junior cycle geography within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Revisions should include a focus on the learning outcomes in the geography specification, and the translation of these to learning intentions for lessons. The quality of individual planning and preparation for lessons was very good.
- The TY plan for Geography should be revised to place a further focus on geographical skills and local settings. Overt reference to Leaving Certificate content should be removed. A statement relating to the current appropriate modes of assessment should also be outlined.
- Repositioning the teaching of the geographical skills of map interpretation to the first term in first year would allow for the application and integration of these skills across all areas of study at junior cycle. This strategy, among others, including greater attention to the quality of the diagrams produced by students, could also assist the aforementioned small cohort of students to achieve a higher level grade at Junior Certificate.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and the 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

## 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;

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The board welcomes the findings pertaining to the quality of Teaching and Learning, the provision of geography at BCS as well as the level of update and achievement in the state examinations.

**Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

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