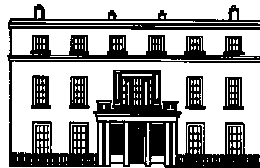


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

St Mary's CBS Secondary School
Enniscorthy, County Wexford
Roll number: 63560T

Date of inspection: 15 April 2016



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	15 April 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers• 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 teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in most lessons observed, while teaching strategies that resulted in passive and disengaged students were an area of particular concern in a small minority of lessons.
- Levels of uptake of higher level Geography in certificate examinations and levels of achievement in Leaving Certificate Geography are strong and reflect high expectations for students; however, a significant cohort of students is consistently not achieving higher level in Junior Certificate Geography.
- A very positive and appropriate Transition Year (TY) module for Geography is offered to students.
- Individual planning that focused particularly on the use of teacher-developed booklets for students preparing for certificate examinations, was of a very high quality.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Geography teachers should share and develop current practice to focus on lesson coherence through sharing more developed learning intentions and clear success criteria to scaffold students' learning and to allow them to demonstrate that learning.
- A particular emphasis should be placed on geographical skills in first-year Geography and on examination techniques, relating to the application of these skills, later in third year, to improve the achievement levels of those students who attempt higher-level geography but are currently underachieving at that level.

INTRODUCTION

St Mary's CBS is an all-boys voluntary secondary school serving the town of Enniscorthy and a wide rural hinterland. The school has a current enrolment of 666 students and is managed under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools' Trust (ERST). Students are offered Junior Certificate, an optional TY programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in most lessons observed. However, teaching strategies that resulted in passive and disengaged students in a junior cycle lesson, are an area of particular concern.
- In lessons that were task orientated and skills based, students actively engaged in the planned learning and in the associated activities and tasks. The pace, level of questioning and the responsibility placed on students to engage were of a very high quality and resulted in clear learning. Students were facilitated to demonstrate their learning through the completion of tasks, pair work and very good quality and challenging discussion. The atmosphere was very positive and mutually respectful in these lessons and teachers were well aware of the range of abilities and learning styles of their students.
- Leaving Certificate students, who were preparing for their examination, were very effectively engaging their sketch-mapping skills to identify the key physical, social and economic characteristics of an Irish region. Students were engaged actively by the practice of sketch mapping, through discussion in pairs, through feedback to the whole class, and through high-level questioning that created clear geographical interrelationships. The synthesis of skills, tasks, discussion and interrelationship within an examination framework reflects very good classroom practice.
- A mixed-ability group, in preparation for their approaching Junior Certificate examination, were observed to be involved in an intensive and very effective revision lesson on soils. Their learning was scaffolded by a booklet developed by their teacher that distilled the key learning points for the students and accompanied these with tasks and diagrams for completion to allow students to demonstrate their learning and to facilitate their teacher to gauge their understanding. The use of a model of a soil profile, in this context, was also observed to be particularly effective. It was clear that some students, who could potentially disengage in studying this complex topic, were significantly engaged by these very good classroom strategies.
- A booklet outlining a clear and specific group project on local tourism framed a TY lesson observed. Clear expectations for independent learning and roles within a group task were set out in relation to the creation of a local tourism brochure. The project was resourced with a substantial collection of local tourist brochures and maps, both modern and historic that had been gathered by the students. This skills-based project has the potential to be a very effective TY geography project.
- A junior cycle lesson observed, was mainly focused on teacher-led explanation and, in the absence of well-structured questioning, tasks and activities, the students became largely passive and some were observed to disengage from the lesson and the learning. To address possible further passivity and disengagement, teaching and learning should be planned so that students are given clear responsibility to engage with tasks and activities that support and scaffold a clear, shared and realistic learning intention and the planned

teaching and learning to achieve this. Success criteria for a task, discussion or homework, arising from the planned and shared learning intention, should then be discussed and shared with the students. The learning should be reviewed to gauge understanding through effective and differentiated questioning, and through the review of the outcomes of tasks. Such planning, and its expression in classroom practice, is essential to engage students, to ensure their participation, and to achieve meaningful and purposeful learning.

- To develop current classroom practice and to build and share capacity within the teaching team, geography teachers should discuss and share strategies to support lesson coherence. Lesson coherence could be effected through sharing a more developed learning intention and clear success criteria to enable students to demonstrate their learning through task, discussion or response in the classroom, and through homework tasks.
- Uptake and achievement in certificate examinations are strong and reflect the mixed-ability class configuration. The numbers taking higher level in junior cycle are very positive and reflect high expectations of teachers and school management for students. A significant cohort of students is consistently not achieving higher level in Junior Certificate Geography. Particular attention should be paid to this consistent pattern. To address this pattern, consideration should be given to the role that could be played by the placing of a greater emphasis on the practising and application of geographical skills in first year, and the placing of a significant focus on examination strategies at appropriate times in third year.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for Geography is good and reflects national norms of provision in both junior cycle and senior cycle. The provision of base classrooms has facilitated the creation of very good quality learning environments that allow for the display of students' work and of materials that highlight various emphases on numeracy and literacy integration.
- It is clear that the whole-school emphasis on continuing professional development relating to classroom practice, and particularly the emphasising of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies, has created a focus on lesson structure, the coherence of the learning, and on strategies to engage students in mixed-ability contexts. This emphasis has influenced much of the classroom practice evident in Geography. Further exploration, review and self-evaluation by the department is recommended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collaborative planning for Geography is embedded and ongoing. A comprehensive curricular plan is in place. A very positive and appropriate TY module for Geography is offered to students. Planning is also informed by teachers' analysis of outcomes for students in certificate examinations. The aforementioned consistent pattern of underachievement of higher level by cohort of junior cycle students should now become an urgent planning priority.
- Time-bound action-planning, relating to this cohort, that places the aforementioned emphasis on geographical skills in first year, and on examination techniques relating to the application of these skills later in third year, should be now used to improve the achievement levels of those students.

- Individual planning of a very high standard informed both the practice and the learning in most lessons. The development and use of teacher-developed booklets for students preparing for certificate examinations was a key strength of teachers' planning.

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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board recognises the high quality of preparation undertaken by our Geography teachers. This is verified by the inspector who commends the skills based approach taken in geography classes and the use of resources like models and booklets, in particular, to engage weaker students in mixed ability classes.

It was noted in the main findings that a significant cohort of students were consistently not achieving higher level grades in Junior Certificate Geography. The range of achievement for the years 2010 to 2015 ranged from 46% to 57% achieving A's B's or C's. We are happy to report that 77% of students achieved an A, B or C grade in the 2016 Junior Certificate results, where 85% of students attempted higher level.

The board of management is very grateful to teachers of Transition Year for the continual development of the transition year programme and it is gratifying that the transition year module in Geography is commended.

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 board of management of this school is committed to promoting quality teaching and learning in our school. The school self-evaluation process has placed the development of Assessment for learning at the heart of professional development in our school. The board is pleased that the Geography inspection recognised and commended the very good teaching practice that has followed from this development. Clearly where students were observed to be actively engaged in the planned learning the inspector observed that learning was taking place.

The board of management wishes to concur with the inspector in encouraging all teachers to prepare lessons that engage students and encourage the student voice. The principal and deputy principal have led 'Assessment for Learning' seminars for staff over the past two year and will continue to do so. The school has also engaged the services of an expert facilitator who has an expertise in this area.

In accordance with the recommendations of previous subject and whole school inspections the allocation of time to Geography has increased from 2 to 3 class periods in first and second year. This seems to have had positive outcomes in terms of learning and the results achieved in this year's junior cycle examinations.

In line with the recommendations in the report the schemes of work have been updated to include map reading and photograph skills in the first term in first year.

Geography teachers have begun to share effective teaching strategies with each other at department meetings in line with best practice and the recommendation made during the inspection.