

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Coláiste Gleann Lí
Tralee, County Kerry
Roll number: 70550H

Date of inspection: 2 February 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	2 February 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning, as observed in lessons, and as experienced by students, was very good.
- Lessons were very well paced and were both differentiated and individualised to address the diverse needs of the students.
- Classroom learning environments were very positive, were visually stimulating, and were characterised by mutually respectful interactions between teachers and their students.
- Patterns of uptake of Geography at senior cycle, patterns of uptake of higher level geography, and patterns of achievement at all levels in certificate examinations, are positive and reflect high expectations of teachers for their students.
- Timetable provision for Geography is very good.
- A planning process for Geography that reflects whole-school planning, is both embedded and is advancing.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A strategy to provide formative written comments on students' written work should be developed to enhance current very good classroom practice.
 - Opportunities for the use of structured collaborative learning strategies should be introduced, or further developed, to encourage increased engagement and participation by students.
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INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Gleann Lí is a co-educational second-level school managed by Kerry Education and Training Board (ETB). It is sited adjacent to Tralee College of Further Education. Coláiste Gleann Lí has a current enrolment of 127 students and is part of the Delivering Equality of Educational Opportunity (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. Junior cycle students follow the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and, at senior cycle, students are offered the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning, as observed in lessons, and as experienced by students, was very good. A key strength of the students' classroom experience was the teachers' awareness of the diverse needs of students and their implementation of strategies that attempted to meet those individual needs in geography lessons.
- Lessons were characterised by very good planning and preparation that resulted in clear learning intentions, appropriate teacher-directed strategies to engage students in their own learning, and the inclusion of skills and visuals to support students' participation and their learning. Classroom environments were very positive and visually stimulating. They were characterised by mutually respectful interactions between teachers and their students.
- Lessons were very well paced and were both differentiated and individualised to address the needs of the students. This facilitated significant interaction within the small class groups and much engaging discussion, explanation and questioning, to assess the levels of understanding and the progress of individual students. This was both skilfully and seamlessly achieved by teachers and it resulted in a significant level of individual attention for some students. Within this context, it was clear that tailored supports were being provided for students.
- The very successful strategies included a skills-based focus on Ordnance Survey (OS) map interpretation with a small class group manifesting a range of additional learning needs. Show-me-boards allowed students to demonstrate their understanding of settlement patterns. Students then applied this understanding by identifying and locating these settlement patterns on a range of maps. This task also allowed the students to use grid references. Success in this challenging exercise was attainable and students' achievements were affirmed by their teacher.
- A mixed-ability senior cycle class group very successfully identified clear physical contrasts between core and peripheral regions. This was achieved through engaging these students using maps, weather data and visuals, on a PowerPoint presentation that facilitated the identification of clear and concise points of contrast. Through skilful differentiated questioning, in a very encouraging and positive classroom environment, the teacher was successful both in pacing this lesson towards the achievement of the shared learning intention, and in gauging students' understanding of the key geographical concept of region.
- These very positive teaching and learning experiences for students could be further developed through increased engagement with more structured collaborative learning strategies. Opportunities for such strategies should be discussed by the geography teachers based on the needs and challenges of individual class group contexts. These could then be introduced appropriately to encourage further engagement and participation by students.

- Teachers paid very significant attention to homework in lessons. Oral and written responses to homework tasks, affirmation of effort, and formative comment, were observed to provide a very positive motivation for students to progress their understanding of lesson topics. The quality of work in students' copybooks was also very good. However, a strategy to provide formative written comments on students' written work should now be developed to further enhance current very good classroom practice.
- Patterns of uptake of Geography at senior cycle, patterns of uptake of higher level geography, and patterns of achievement at all levels in certificate examinations, are positive and reflect high expectations of teachers for their students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography is very good in Coláiste Gleann Lí with a timetable allocation of four class periods per week for students in junior cycle. This increases to five class periods per week for senior cycle.
- Geography becomes an optional subject in junior cycle following a short subject-sampling period early in first year. This has a significant negative impact on uptake of the subject in junior cycle. Uptake levels are uneven and, due to the outcomes of this subject-choice process, it was not possible to provide Geography for the current cohort of third year students.
- Positioning Geography as an optional subject in junior cycle is permissible in the context of an ETB school. However, an extension of the subject-sampling period could be considered. Similarly, the geography teachers should keep the content of the short sampling module under review. This module should focus on the basic practical skills of using OS maps and interpreting weather charts to engage students who may continue to study Geography, and to provide key geographical skills to those who may complete their formal geographical education at this time.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Very effective collaborative planning for junior cycle is informed by JCSP curricular approaches and by the use of profile statements. Collaborative planning for Geography also clearly reflects whole-school DEIS planning and ongoing school self-evaluation initiatives.
- The quality of individual planning is also very good, and is informed by the JCSP profile statements and by students' achievement of them. Individual teachers also plan for, and undertake, a number of cross-curricular initiatives combining Geography and Physical Education. These include orienteering and visits to local cave systems. These very positive initiatives provide an added profile and skills-based dimension to Geography in the school.

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. 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.

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