

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

**Subject Inspection of Geography**  
**REPORT**

**St Fanahan's College,**  
**Mitchelstown, County Cork**  
**Roll number: 71040M**

**Date of inspection: 16 November 2015**



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

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	16 November 2015
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</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 teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning was consistently very good in the lessons observed.
- Students were comfortable while working in groups and classroom layout facilitated collaborative learning scenarios.
- Geography has recently been added to the Transition Year (TY) programme in the school.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) resources were used appropriately and the *Scoilnet maps* resource was also available for classroom use.
- Senior management at the school regularly support geography teachers in their attendance at appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities outside the school.
- Teachers in the department work well together as a team.
- Individual and collaborative planning were of a high quality across the geography department.
- Fieldwork activities are generally organised for most year groups.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The department should consolidate its homework policy and practices within the context of a broader student assessment model which could guide learning in a more structured way.
- The department should now focus on developing strategies for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool in the geography classroom.
- The department should review the content of the Transition Year (TY) geography programme to ensure that TY students have an appropriate skill-set and knowledge-base with which to bridge the study of Geography at junior cycle and at senior cycle levels.

## **INTRODUCTION**

St Fanahan's College is a co-educational post-primary school in the scheme of Cork Education and Training Board (ETB). The current enrolment is 238 students. The school is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan and has maintained strong links with the supports available under the plan. The school offers the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning was consistently very good in the lessons observed. Learning intentions were clear and were shared with students at the beginning of each lesson. Best practice was observed when learning intentions were consolidated at the end of a lesson. Relevant links were made with previous learning which supported the learning process and lessons were paced appropriately. Lessons were well planned and resources were used effectively. A variety of questioning strategies was successfully applied to enhance student learning. Tasks and resources were differentiated across mixed ability groupings which reflected a strong collaboration and communication between teachers in the geography department and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) department. The geography department has an inclusive special needs policy in place and teachers, special needs assistants (SNA) and other support staff work well together to create a differentiated and inclusive learning experience for all students.
- Students were comfortable while working in groups and classroom layout facilitated collaborative learning scenarios. Students were on task and were actively engaged in their learning. Teachers used praise effectively to create a positive learning atmosphere which was shared by both students and teachers. Homework was set and monitored and good use was made of the homework journal. The department should consolidate its homework policy and practices within the context of a broader student assessment model which could guide learning in a more structured way. Teachers in the department sometimes share classes in a team-teaching situation. During the inspection, a combined senior cycle fieldwork class was visited. Both teachers worked together to plan and deliver a rich and highly relevant learning experience for fifth-year and sixth-year students who had just completed their fieldwork trip to the Burren.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) resources were used appropriately and the *Scoilnet maps* resource was also available for classroom use. More use could be made of the shared visualiser to which the department has access. The department should now focus on developing strategies for the use of ICT as a learning tool in the geography classroom. The department should consider ways in which they could share lesson content and information with their students by using a collaboration platform, blog or geography website.

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

- Geography is optional at junior cycle level where first-year students can choose Geography as a Junior Certificate subject after a subject-sampling block of twelve lessons in the subject during the first semester. About one-third of students then choose

Geography as a Junior Certificate subject. The department should re-examine the course content followed in that subject-sampling block and consider the potential benefit of focusing the twelve introductory lessons on local fieldwork opportunities which exist in close proximity to the school. Geography has recently been added to the Transition Year (TY) programme in the school. Geography is compulsory in Transition Year and students are allocated approximately thirty lessons during the year and course content is focused on environmental Geography. The department should review the content of the TY geography programme to ensure that TY students have an appropriate skill-set and knowledge-base with which to bridge the study of Geography at junior cycle and at senior cycle levels. This is especially important as the majority of students studying Geography in Transition Year would not have studied Geography as a Junior Certificate subject. In senior cycle, the subject is allocated five lessons per week

- In recent years, teachers in the department have had continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities in Literacy and in Assessment for Learning at a whole-school level. Senior management at the school regularly support geography teachers in their attendance at appropriate CPD opportunities outside the school. Teachers in the department work well together as a team. There is a good support network for new staff and for Professional Diploma in Education (PDE) student teachers in the department. The school is a pilot school for the Droichead programme. Staff are affiliated to the local branch of the professional subject association which is becoming increasingly important in terms of keeping up with changes and future developments in the subject.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Individual and collaborative planning were of a high quality across the geography department. Teachers review both their own teaching and students' learning at regular intervals throughout the school year and DEIS planning frameworks are regularly used. The subject planning template is mainly comprised of syllabus content and could be developed by adding columns which relate to literacy and numeracy, specific resources used, skills developed and opportunities for review. A digitalised version of the department plan would facilitate regular revision based on classroom experience which would make the plan more dynamic and effective as a tool which would focus on collaboration, teaching and learning in the subject.
- Teachers in the department communicate both formally and informally on a continuous basis. The department has engaged in a self-evaluation process since 2012 which has identified trends in certificate examination results and in uptake levels for the subject. Formal meetings usually focus on administrative issues and the progress of the various class groups. The department should include teaching and learning as a permanent item on the agenda for formal meetings. This would allow teachers to focus on pedagogic planning for the subject which could include areas such as ICT, teaching methodologies and curricular change.
- Fieldwork activities are generally organised for most year groups. This year, senior cycle students carried out their fieldwork exercise in the Burren. The department should continue to develop an integrated, systematic fieldwork programme across all year groups. In this way, fieldwork could be planned to support the learning objectives specific to geographical study at all levels, which would encourage students to apply their understanding of geographical concepts, to their local area and beyond.

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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 of the school 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**

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

The management and staff of the school welcome the recognition of effective teaching and learning in the school. It was identified that the quality of teaching and learning was consistently very good in the lessons observed. The geography department welcomes the acknowledgment of the subject's teachers as a team who work well together. It was noted that individual and collaborative planning were of a high quality across the geography department and this reflection in the report provided affirmation for hard work and collaboration.

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

### **Recommendation No 1- Homework Policy and Practices**

A homework policy was in the process of being drafted and is now at the point of ratification by the Board of Management. This policy governs homework and assessment. That rationale of the policy is that individual teachers along with subject departments will strive towards a consolidated approach which aims to guide learning and assessment in a more structured fashion. Subject department meetings will now include Homework and Assessment in department meeting agenda.

### **Recommendation No 2. – Information and Communication Technology**

Recent refurbishments in information and Communication Technology has provided the school with a more improved infrastructure to engage with ICT in the classroom. As outlined in the Main Findings ICT resources were used appropriately. It was agreed that the use of ICT in the delivery of the subject will be discussed at subject Department level and strategies are to be developed to further increase student engagement with the appropriate use of ICT.

### **Recommendation No 3 – Transition Year Geography Programme**

A yearly review of the Transition Year Programme takes place in May to identify how the content of each module/component could be improved. It was agreed that all subject reviews, including Geography, will now have an increased focus on bridging the gap between the study of subjects at junior cycle and at senior cycle levels in order to provide the necessary skill set and knowledge base.