

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**Oaklands Community College,
Sr Senan Avenue,
Edenderry,
Co Offaly
Roll number: 725400**

Dates of inspection: 2 March 2015



**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 March 2015
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning was of good quality with some very good practice evident in a number of the lessons observed. In a minority of lessons teacher talk predominated.
- Learning took place in a positive, well-disciplined environment during all lessons evaluated.
- Good use was made of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be more regular and more structured use of the local area to stimulate and motivate students, to promote the subject and to provide more local exemplars for more general themes.
- There is a need for increased use of supportive written comments by teachers on students' copybooks.
- Geography planning should focus more on planning for improvement in teaching and learning in particular on reducing teacher talk in some lessons and on the greater use of active methodologies in lessons.
- Geography-related modules should be included in the TY programme.

INTRODUCTION

Oaklands College, Edenderry is a co-educational post primary school located in County Offaly with a current enrolment of 555 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes as well as an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. Oaklands College participates in the Delivering Equality in our Schools (DEIS) programme. All junior cycle students study Geography or Environmental and Social Studies. There are three teachers currently teaching Geography in the school, all of whom were visited during the evaluation.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning was of good quality with some very good practice evident in a number of the lessons observed.
- Teacher instruction was clear and relevant. Key concepts and ideas were well explained during all lessons.
- Some effective and varied teaching and learning methodologies were observed. Group work was used in a number of lessons to promote student engagement, and to give opportunities for students to help and to learn from each other. Show-me-boards and traffic light strategies were in place in a number of lessons to assist in the monitoring of learning and teaching.
- The strong focus on skill and knowledge development, learning outcomes, assessment for learning strategies (AfL) and on the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills in most lessons is affirmed. However, more progress is needed in embedding the principles of AfL in all classroom practice in the teaching of Geography.
- Teacher talk predominated in a minority of the lessons observed. Greater use of strategies to increase student activity and reduce teacher talk is required in these lessons.
- Learning took place in a positive, well-disciplined environment during all lessons evaluated.
- Learning intentions were clearly stated at the beginning of lessons, were reviewed at the end and strong links were made with prior learning where appropriate.
- Questioning strategies were effective but in some cases questions needed to be targeted more towards individuals.
- Good use was made of ICT to enhance teaching and learning. This included the effective use of data projectors, electronic white boards and digital images.
- Keyword strategies were routinely used effectively to enhance literacy and brainstorming of key words and concepts was used to good effect in most lessons.
- A print-rich environment, which included the display of maps, charts and students' work, was evident in all classrooms visited. The display of students' work in Geography in classrooms and corridors is commended.
- Some local studies have been undertaken such as a local factory visit and visits to a wind farm are planned. This is commended. However, there is a need for greater and more structured use of the local area as a resource for the teaching and learning of Geography.
- Homework is regularly given and students' written work is monitored well. There was some very good self and peer correcting especially in relation to the pre-leaving examinations. Supportive written comments by teachers on students' written work were

evident in some of the samples of students' copy books but there is a need to build on and extend this practice within the geography department.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The teaching and study of Geography take place mostly in teacher-based classrooms. This facilitates the gathering, storage and display of resources. Seating arrangements that facilitate group work were evident in a number of lessons.
- Timetabling arrangements for the teaching and study of Geography are good. Option bands were changed at senior cycle which allowed more students to study Geography. There are 46 students in fifth year. However, the use of banding of students at junior cycle should be kept under review especially in relation to its potentially negative impact on some students.
- Junior cycle students have three geography lesson periods per week and Leaving Certificate geography students have one single lesson and two double lessons each week. It is important to ensure that these lessons are evenly distributed across the week especially as student absenteeism was quite high on the Monday of the evaluation.
- Regular class tests take place which help to focus students and to track their progress.
- The subject is well resourced by management by means of an annual budget.
- The regular and routine use of ICT in the teaching and learning is actively promoted by management.
- The school's participation in the Gaisce Awards and the Green Schools initiative are very supportive of the aims and content of the geography syllabuses.
- Currently there is no provision for Geography in TY. Geography-related modules should be included in the programme. Initial planning has begun on this issue within the subject department but this work needs to be promoted by management.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The geography department meets formally at least once a term and informally on a more regular basis. Minutes of geography department meetings are recorded. Forward planning features consistently in subject meetings and in subject documentation. This is commended.
- The co-ordinator is rotated regularly which is good practice. The current co-ordinator is very well organised, committed and provides very good leadership.
- The quality of individual teacher planning for the lessons observed was very good. Study plans for students in senior cycle are focussed and very worthwhile.
- The geography teachers share resources on line and in hard copy. They have put a lot of work into developing common programmes of work and common tests. They also co-operate on fieldwork planning especially on the river-based Leaving Certificate project.
- The results in Geography are very well analysed by management and by the geography teaching team. In line with the requirements of DEIS planning, the results of this analysis are used to set targets for improvement especially in relation to increasing the numbers of students taking the subject at higher level in the state examinations.

- A geography plan is in place for the current academic year. The focus in planning documents and in schemes of work on skill and knowledge development, learning outcomes, assessment for learning strategies (AfL) and the explicit focus on literacy and numeracy development is affirmed.
- Geography planning should continue to place emphasis on the use of active methodologies.
- In keeping with the requirements of DEIS planning the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills is a strong focus of subject department planning, as was evidenced by the minutes of team meetings and subject plans.

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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.