

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**Presentation Secondary School
Sexton Street, Limerick
Roll number: 64250J**

Date of inspection: 6 December 2013



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	5 and 6 December 2013
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 and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- While some good to very good quality teaching was evident in many lessons the quality of students learning was in need of improvement in some instances.
- Classroom management was very good and underpinned by positive relationships between students and their teachers.
- Learning was most effective where students were well engaged and challenged by a variety of methodologies including very good quality visual stimuli.
- There is a low uptake of Geography in senior cycle.
- The geography department has access to a good range of resources.
- While the geography teachers co-operate well, planning for the ongoing development of the subject needs to be more collaborative and strategic.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be a consistent focus on improving learning by employing differentiated methodologies that challenge and support the range of abilities in the context of mixed-ability lessons.
 - Appropriate procedures for the assessment of students' work should be consistently applied by individual teachers to support student learning in Geography.
 - Senior management should review the provision of Geography within the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), and the shortfall in class period allocation for some junior cycle class groups should be addressed.
 - Target setting for improvement in relation to student attainment, uptake of the subject, the further development of curricular plans and use of web-based geographical resources including Scoilnet Maps should be key priorities in the subject planning process.
-

INTRODUCTION

Presentation Secondary School, under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education Irish School Trust (CEIST) is located in the inner city of Limerick. There are 276 students enrolled in mainstream programmes and the school also offers an extensive programme of Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The school participates in the Department of Education and Skills' action plan for delivering equality of opportunity in schools (DEIS).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Some good to very good quality teaching was evident in the lessons observed, however in some instances there was considerable scope to improve the quality of students' learning.
- A positive atmosphere prevailed in lessons and students were very well behaved and respectful.
- Teaching and learning were most effective where methodologies included a range of questioning strategies, use of stimulating visual materials, the incorporation of tasks, and an appropriately paced and pitched step-by-step approach. The teaching team should consider the merits of sharing effective practices in areas such as methodologies, differentiation and assessment strategies.
- In cases where a traditional didactic approach was dominant many students were largely passive and were not engaged or challenged by differentiated questioning or tasks. It is recommended that student activity and a range of questioning strategies be combined with teacher instruction to engage all students in the learning process and to cater for the varying learning styles and abilities of students.
- Cross-curricular links and prior learning were appropriately referenced to support students' learning as well as the integration of locational Geography in some lessons.
- There was evidence of some effective differentiation by questioning, use of visuals and a focus on subject terminology. Note-taking by students and the presentation of lesson material on PowerPoint slides should focus on strategies such as key points and short visual summaries as a further means of advancing a differentiated approach. The use of examination criteria to support students in the layout and development of answers to longer questions is also recommended in this regard.
- In a minority of lessons information and communication technology (ICT) was used very successfully to engage and deepen learning for students. The more dynamic use of ICT to provide visual stimuli, animations and to explain geographical concepts should be fully exploited by all teachers. Teachers should also use online resources, including *Scoilnet Maps* to support teaching and learning in Geography.
- Homework is regularly set and a good level of work was evident in students' copybooks in most cases. Teacher feedback was effective and beneficial where it provided an accurate assessment of the standard of students' work and gave clear guidelines on how to improve the quality of the work. This good practice needs to be extended across the department in a more regular and consistent manner to support improvement in learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is a core subject in the junior cycle except for some students following the JCSP. The unequal provision in class period allocation to class groups should be addressed to support all students' learning and access to the subject. This increased provision could potentially improve achievement, uptake of higher level Geography in certificate examinations and uptake of the subject at senior cycle.
- In second year one class period per week in Geography is assigned to a group of JCSP students. This provision should be reviewed in terms of the management and organisation of student profiles and learning targets as well as the learning outcomes achieved by students.
- Within the limitation of available resources continuity in teacher deployment to the subject should be maintained to support learning for students and to enable teachers to develop their expertise in the subject.
- Given the low uptake of Geography as an optional senior cycle subject, the geography teaching team in consultation with senior management should put in place a range of strategies to increase the participation rates and to ensure the sustainability of the subject at this level.
- The geography teachers should engage formally in subject-related continuing professional development (CPD) as it becomes available and should become affiliated to the local branch of the Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland (AGTI) in order to keep up to date with subject developments.
- The geography department is well resourced with subject materials and the geography room which is accessible to the teaching team has a stimulating learning environment

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The geography teaching team meet formally twice a year. A greater level of collaborative and strategic planning is required to address the challenges that face the subject. Going forward an action planning cycle based on target setting for improvement should focus on the uptake of Geography, attainment in certificate examinations as well as differentiated teaching methodologies to optimise students' experience and learning in the subject.
 - In some instances curricular plans are in need of further development. Each topic taught should be detailed and aligned to learning outcomes, resources, differentiated methodologies and assessment strategies.
 - The schedule of topics on the first-year teaching programme should be more streamlined to the diverse abilities of students and provide for the introduction of map and photograph skills from an early stage.
 - The Transition Year (TY) geography module should include a local fieldwork study as well as the opportunity for students to report on the findings of such an investigation. This provision would facilitate the development of a range of geographical skills and support the progression between the junior cycle and senior cycle.
-

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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; a response was not received from the board.