

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**Coláiste Íosagáin
Portarlinton, County Laois
Roll number: 68068R**

Date of inspection: 12 December 2013



**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(s) of inspection	12 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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in the lessons evaluated.
- Teaching and learning took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and very good rapport was evident between students and teachers.
- The regular and appropriate use of information and communications technology (ICT), including data projectors and the internet is a major stimulus to the teaching and learning of Geography.
- The teachers of Geography work well as a team and a dedicated co-ordinator is in place.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography department planning should be less content driven and planning should be more oriented towards improvement.
 - There is a need to build on progress made in the development of literacy and numeracy strategies by developing a structured plan for literacy and numeracy in Geography.
 - There should be more locally based projects undertaken at junior cycle level which will act as a major stimulus for the subject and will be motivating for teachers and students.
 - Cross-curricular linkages need to be better planned and co-ordinated between the geography department and other subject departments
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INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Íosagáin is a large co-educational voluntary secondary school. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. They are currently 871 students enrolled. Students come mainly from the Portarlinton area and from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. All students study Geography in junior cycle. The uptake of Leaving Certificate Geography is very strong with four class groups studying Geography in fifth year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good to very good in the lessons evaluated.
- Key themes and concepts were well explained. Students were on task and demonstrated a good knowledge of the subject.
- During all lessons teaching and learning took place within a disciplined environment and within a context of mutual respect. A very strong work ethic was evident among both students and teachers. There was also very good rapport between teachers and students.
- Substantial progress has been made in integrating ICT into teaching and learning and classrooms have been well resourced in this regard. Some excellent practice was observed in the regular and routine use of the data projector and the internet to bring greater relevance and immediacy to the subject.
- Teachers prepared well for their lessons. Lesson outcomes were well outlined at the start of most lessons and good links were made with prior learning. Directed questioning strategies were used in most classes. In the best lessons learners contributed significantly to lessons and their input was sought and valued by teachers.
- Copies and hardback notebooks, in particular, are well maintained by students and are monitored regularly by teachers. The teachers' provision of written comments on students' written assignments highlighting ways for students to improve their work is highly commended.
- The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills was supported by the teachers' clear explanations of key terms and concepts, by differentiated questioning, by the use of key word strategies and by good individual attention being given to students. The identification of and focus on seventy-five subject specific key words is a useful way of improving student literacy. Every opportunity should be taken to exploiting fully the huge potential of Geography for both literacy and numeracy development.
- Two formal assessments are undertaken each term. Class tests and teacher and peer correcting are a regular feature of classroom practice. Examination results in Geography are strong at both junior and senior cycle. These results are collated and analysed each year at both school and subject levels in order to identify areas that need to be addressed.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school support for the teaching and learning of Geography.
- The provision of teacher-based classrooms has been a great asset to the teaching and learning process as it facilitates the gathering and storing of resources and allows for the display of students' work.
- There are three lesson periods a week allocated to Geography in junior cycle and five periods, which includes one double period, are allocated to Leaving Certificate students. The allocation is in line with syllabus requirements.
- The geography department is allocated money for resources on a needs basis.
- Teachers are encouraged by school management to attend relevant in-career development courses including subject-specific courses.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Formal subject department meetings are held regularly and minutes of these meetings are maintained in the geography folder. These minutes should be more detailed. The geography department planning should be less content driven and planning should be more oriented towards improvement.
- The geography department is characterised by collegiality and co-operation. The position of co-ordinator is rotated and there is a new and dedicated co-ordinator in place..
- A detailed subject department plan for Geography has been developed. This plan outlines the aims, learning objectives and content of the Geography syllabuses and is a useful starting point for future planning and self-evaluation and review.
- Subject planning is mainly content driven and needs to focus more on planning for improvement. Agreed sequencing of topics and common examinations are indicative of the co-operation at subject level. Yearly plans and schemes of work are prepared for each year group. These should be less focussed on content and should concentrate more on active methodologies and improvement.
- Key word strategies are used effectively to promote literacy and, numeracy is addressed in map work. There is a need to build on the progress made in the development of literacy and numeracy strategies by developing a structured plan for literacy and numeracy in Geography.
- The local area is used to some extent as a resource for the teaching and learning of Geography especially in relation to the fieldwork study at senior cycle. More locally based projects at junior cycle level will act as a major stimulus for the subject and will be motivating for teachers and students.
- Cross-curricular planning needs further development. Planning for cross-curricular linkages should be more focussed and more co-ordinated with other subject departments such as the science, mathematics and history departments. A combined history and geography field trip for first years is commended as are trips to the Burren with senior cycle students.

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.