

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Geography  
REPORT**

**Coláiste Dún Iascaigh  
Cahir, Co Tipperary  
Roll number: 76063D**

**Date of inspection: 4 April 2014**



**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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	4 April 2014
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Overall, a very good quality of teaching and learning was observed in geography lessons.
- Teaching and learning methodologies were student-centred and engaged students actively in their own learning.
- A very positive, mutually respectful and caring classroom atmosphere informed the geography lessons observed.
- Streaming of geography class groups in junior cycle may be a factor in limiting the uptake of higher-level Geography.
- Timetable provision for Geography is very positive.
- Planning for Geography, both collaborative and individual, is significantly advanced.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The geography teachers should consider the impact of sharing a more developed learning intention with students, which could then be used to review learning outcomes and give further clarity and coherence to lesson structure.
  - School management and the geography teachers should focus one aspect of school improvement planning, within school self-evaluation, on gradually increasing the uptake of higher level Geography.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Coláiste Dún Iascaigh is managed under the auspices of Tipperary Education and Training Board (TETB) and is the sole provider of second-level education in the town of Cahir, Co Tipperary. This co-educational school has a current enrolment of 636 students. Students are offered Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall in the lessons observed. These lessons were informed by good lesson structure, the outline of a general learning intention or lesson aim, strategies to facilitate engagement and participation of students, a very positive classroom atmosphere, and high expectations of students by their teachers, particularly in relation to uptake of higher level in certificate examinations. Where recommendations were made, they related to the pace of the lesson, an over-emphasis on teacher-led presentation and discussion that could cause passivity among some students, and the potential to more fully develop the learning intention thus facilitating a review of the planned learning by the teacher as the lesson progressed towards completion.
- A geographical skills focus was evident in a number of lessons. The emphasis on actively engaging students by visual stimulus materials and tasks from the outset was particularly effective in junior cycle classes where some students had the potential to disengage. Clear routines had been established around the review of previous learning, and the allocation and monitoring of homework. Students were then provided with an achievable task using an individual Ordnance Survey (OS) map. Their work was scaffolded by uncomplicated instructions, a worksheet and by the individual attention provided by teachers. Success criteria were easily identifiable through a whole class review of the elements included in these individual sketch maps.
- Map work activities facilitated very worthwhile opportunities to integrate numeracy into Geography through calculations based on dimension, reduction and scale. While there was a general emphasis on literacy development in the lessons observed, continued effective and reflective practice in this area is encouraged.
- Lessons with a more theoretical focus were equally successful in engaging students in their own learning. The study of peripheral regions was supported by individual student research as homework, and by a teacher-prepared summary note copied for each student. Key words leading to significant relevant points (SRP) were identified within a well-structured group activity. Students engaged enthusiastically with this task and feedback was gathered within a mind map on the whiteboard. This allowed students to discuss and share their overall understanding of the general characteristics of a peripheral region based on a case study.
- Junior cycle students, in preparation for their upcoming Junior Certificate examination, were focused on interpreting graphical and tabular data arising from an analysis of examination papers. This valid and worthwhile exercise had an appropriate focus on examination technique and allowed students to develop the skill of garnering information from stimulus-response examination questions that provide graphs and tables for interpretation.
- All lessons were informed by clear and established routines in relation to seating, homework and collaborative work. Such established routines were clearly effective in engaging students who could potentially disengage in some lessons.

- Overall levels of achievement in Geography in certificate examinations and levels of uptake of higher level at senior cycle are strong. However, some attention should be given to increasing the pattern of uptake of higher level at junior cycle.

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

- Timetable provision for Geography is very positive in Coláiste Dún Iascaigh, with the provision of four class periods per week in junior cycle, one single and one double class-period in TY and five class periods for Leaving Certificate. A geography class is also provided for senior cycle students for whom English is an additional language (EAL), for those with exemptions from Gaeilge and for short-term language exchange students.
- The growth in student numbers and the building layout have limited the provision of base classrooms for teachers and consequently the development of print-rich visual learning environments within classrooms. Examples of students' project work and posters that support teaching and learning in Geography are evident in some classrooms. A very useful and well-presented geography notice board does provide an effective visual focus for students on subject-related issues. Photographs of recent fieldwork activities provide a very positive image of the subject for students as they approach subject and programme choice in advance of senior cycle.
- Streamed class groups for Geography are formed as students transition into second year in junior cycle. While it is reported by the school principal that there has been ongoing consideration of this issue over a prolonged period involving teachers, parents and school management, the question of whether streaming is having some negative impact on patterns of uptake of higher level Geography at junior cycle remains. School management and the geography teachers therefore should focus one aspect of school improvement planning, within school self-evaluation, on gradually increasing the uptake of higher level Geography within this policy of streaming at junior cycle.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Collaborative planning for Geography has been significantly advanced through ongoing formal and informal collaboration by the teaching team. Skills and new ideas from new staff members are welcomed and included within the ongoing development of the subject. A very good curricular plan is in place for all year groups and it is very positive to see an emphasis on locally-based cross-curricular fieldwork in TY. The town of Cahir as a nodal point, both currently and historically, and the proximity of the school to the town centre, provide a range of very interesting opportunities to develop geographical investigative skills.
- Teachers' very good practice in geography lessons and the students' very positive experience of the subject is informed by very good quality individual planning.

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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.

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