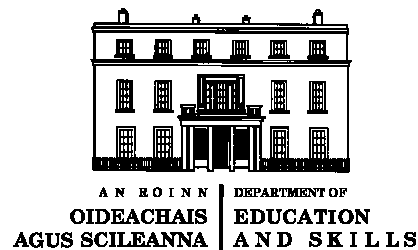


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Coláiste Cholmáin
Fermoy, County Cork
Roll number: 62260C

Date of inspection: 21 April 2016



REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	20 and 21 April 2016
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

- Teaching and learning of very high quality, that engaged students actively, was observed in all lessons.
- A whole-school strategic emphasis on continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers, combined with individual reflection and CPD initiatives by teachers, is having a significantly positive impact on the students' experience of teaching and learning in Geography.
- Uptake of higher level geography, and achievement at all levels in certificate examinations, are consistently very strong.
- The provision of just two class-periods per week for Geography for first-year students presents significant challenges for teachers in teaching the subject in first year.
- Individual planning by geography teachers was excellent, while collaborative planning is of very high quality, reflective and evaluative, and is clearly informing the very good classroom practices in evidence.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- School management should now endeavour to provide three class-periods per week for Geography in first year, within the limits of available resources.
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INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Cholmáin is a Catholic voluntary secondary school for boys under the Diocese of Cloyne. The school was established as the Cloyne Diocesan Seminary in 1858 and acted as a boarding school until 2003. The current student cohort of 448 students is drawn from the urban area of Fermoy and the surrounding rural hinterland of the Blackwater valley. Students are offered Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning of very high quality actively engaged students in learning in all the lessons observed. The planned learning in lessons was coherent, learning intentions were shared, and the classroom atmosphere combined both positivity and challenge in mutually respectful classroom learning environments.
- The challenge that characterised lessons was the need to engage with a range of strategies to ensure the inclusion of all students in the mixed-ability class-group configurations. This was achieved by clear and coherent lesson planning, through a focus on engagement and participation, through a coherence around the learning, and through the use of teaching strategies to achieve this. Tasks, and the application and practice of geographical skills, that scaffolded students' learning, ensured that students were active, engaged and learning in all lessons. There was no evidence of passive students in lessons or of the predominance of teacher delivery of content and knowledge. Students and their teacher worked together in co-constructing the learning within very active classroom settings.
- Lesson topics varied across lessons from a discussion of coastal geomorphological processes, to map work, to a range of engagements with economic Geography. A junior cycle lesson observed engaged students with very good coastal photographs in combination with a placemat exercise, using poster-size sheets that students enjoyed contributing to, within a very effective collaborative task. In another junior cycle lesson observed, students experienced a very effective and challenging hot-seat exercise involving framing questions for their classmates. At senior cycle, a class group was engaged with both a discussion and follow-on tasks dealing with maps of differing scales, while, in another lesson, students responded to a range of visuals to frame their understanding of the concept of a region. In a further senior cycle lesson observed, students, in preparation for their upcoming Leaving Certificate examination, were engaged in a discussion of the socio-cultural aspects of Brazil as a region within a very appropriate examination framing. In all these lessons, students were actively engaged by challenging thinking and discussion, and by associated and differentiated tasks, towards understanding key concepts, within an enjoyable and calm learning environment.
- The range of very effective strategies used by the geography teachers included many associated with instructional leadership and assessment for learning. All were framed within clear learning intentions that were reviewed. Tasks focused on collaborative strategies that facilitated teachers to create differentiated groups. The learning was scaffolded within these tasks through the use of digital images, video clips, the display of a range of Ordnance Survey maps using Scoilnet maps, and an array of worksheets that ensured focus and action. The whole-school strategic emphasis on CPD is having a significantly positive impact on the students' experience of teaching and learning in Geography, as seen in the lessons observed.

- Homework, linked with, and extended from, students' learning in lessons. The quality of students' written work and diagrams, in their copybooks, was very good. It was also very positive to see formative written comments in copies on key pieces of students' work. The sharing of success criteria for homework tasks generally, and for the assessment of projects in TY, represents very good practice.
- These developments in classroom practice have included a significant emphasis on a skills-based approach to examination preparation. It is clear that these approaches are effective in these mixed-ability classes as levels of uptake of higher level, and achievement at all levels, in certificate examinations, are consistently very strong in Geography.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The aforementioned provision for CPD with a strategic focus on teaching and learning, by school management, and the level of engagement with CPD by geography teachers, is very positive and forward-looking.
- Classrooms for Geography lessons are very well equipped, and provide bright and visual learning environments for the students. Posters created by members of the geography department concerning significant relevant points (SRPs) in Leaving Certificate examination answers, and the need for statement and development in Junior Certificate answers, are innovative, and provide a consistent message to all students of Geography in each classroom.
- TY provision for Geography has been reviewed recently. This review has resulted in the provision of three rotating modules for students. These focus on map skills, geographical investigation and fieldwork skills, and a module linking with History using historical maps. These modules have the potential to provide students with a significant learning experience, whether they transfer to Leaving Certificate Geography, or complete their study of Geography in TY.
- Timetable provision for Geography reflects normal practice with the exception of the allocation to first year Geography. Just two class periods per week are allocated to Geography in first year. This allocation increases to three class-periods for second and third year. School management should now endeavour to provide three class-periods per week for Geography in first year, within the limits of available resources.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning for Geography is of very high quality. It is reflective and evaluative, and is clearly informing the very good classroom practices in evidence. The subject plan for Geography is detailed and has a clear focus on classroom practice and on learning outcomes rather than on a list of content for study.
- Strategic planning has focused on review and reflection for improvement. This finds expressions in the changes that have been implemented in TY. These changes have seen an increased emphasis on a skills-based approach that supports transfer to, and achievement in Leaving Certificate Geography. Strategic planning in relation to teaching and learning strategies is clearly enhancing students' skills and competencies to learn and to think.

- Individual planning for lessons was of excellent quality. This combined a personal commitment by teachers to reflection and to engagement, with innovative teaching and learning strategies, towards improvement of the students' experience of Geography.

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.