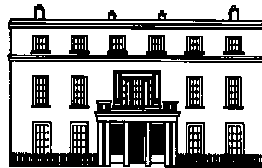


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

De la Salle College
Newtown, Waterford
Roll number: 649500

Date of inspection: 26 November 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

Dates of inspection	25 and 26 November 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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principals and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Geography teaching and students' learning, ranging from very good to excellent quality, were observed in lessons.
- Patterns of uptake of higher level, and achievement at all levels in Geography in certificate examinations, are consistently strong.
- Key whole-school initiatives that include differentiated teaching and learning strategies and the development of students' literacy, are evident in classroom planning and practice in Geography.
- Provision for Geography in the context of timetabling, the development of base classrooms, support for the integration of information and communications technology (ICT) and for departmental planning, is very positive.
- Collaborative planning that is clearly informing individual teacher planning, is very well advanced, and is supporting high-quality classroom practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography teachers should identify and engage with peer learning strategies to discuss, share and further develop the very good quality teaching and learning approaches in evidence in the mixed-ability geography classroom settings.
- School management should examine the future provision and sustainability of Environmental and Social Studies (ESS), for students within the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), in the context of progression routes for these students to senior cycle.

INTRODUCTION

De la Salle College is a long-established school for boys in Waterford city with a current enrolment of 1,170 students. The school is managed under the auspices of the Le Chéile Schools' Trust. Students are organised into mixed-ability class groups and are offered junior cycle, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. A small group of targeted students participate in the JCSP in junior cycle. These students study ESS as an alternative to the study of History and Geography to Junior Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from very good to excellent. Teachers, in this large subject department, share a commitment to their students and to the development of their subject within a school that offers a comprehensive curriculum and a diverse range of programmes.
- The mixed-ability nature of geography class groups presents opportunities for the inclusion of all students within the planned learning in lessons. It equally presents the challenge of differentiation to ensure engagement, participation and learning for all students. Teacher-student rapport is very positive and relationships are mutually respectful. It is clear that teachers are providing and striving to develop very positive classroom learning environments in which their students can learn and progress.
- The lessons observed were underpinned by very good quality individual planning that framed lessons within the syllabus and the demands of the examination. The detailed attention to clear geographical knowledge, skills and concepts underpinned lessons. Lesson topics arose from an agreed curricular plan but were built upon by teachers' individual style of engagement with their students, by the variety of teaching and learning strategies used, and by linkage to concrete examples and settings, many in the local area.
- Literacy development has a clear visibility in geography classrooms. This is evident through the emphasis on understanding and on the correct spelling of key geographical terminology and through the development of students' reading towards their comprehension of geographical concepts and topics. These ongoing strategies reflect the geography teachers' translation of whole-school improvement planning into the classroom.
- Lesson topics ranged from physical geography that concerned rock types, geomorphological processes and resulting landscape features to the teaching and subsequent application of geographical skills. Students' learning in these lessons was scaffolded by the use of visual stimulus materials including Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, digital photographs of features and short film clips or animations of processes. These effective strategies were used, in combination with discussion and questioning, to build students' understanding. The use of OS maps to apply and illustrate particular points was very positive, when evident in lessons. The practice and application of map skills is also recommended in all lessons, as appropriate to the lesson topic.
- The integration of tasks to engage students, either individually or in pairs, in lesson topics was clearly an established practice, in most of the lessons observed. These differentiated tasks effected an appropriate balance between direct teacher inputs, teacher-led discussion and questioning, and the opportunity for students to engage and to learn cooperatively.
- Where lessons of excellent quality were observed, they combined aspects of lessons including the aforementioned integration of tasks, visual stimuli and skills with a coherence

around the learning intention of the lesson, clear and effective differentiated strategies, and the very effective and paced integration of the range of strategies used to progress the lesson. The quality and level of questioning was excellent in that it engaged, encouraged and affirmed students, and equally progressed the lesson and the learning. In these lessons, the chosen strategies also allowed time for the teacher to interact with, and support, individual students in their learning. The provision of oral and written formative feedback to students on their written work was a further key strength of these lessons.

- To build from the very collegial atmosphere that underpins the work of the geography department, a sharing of the very good and excellent classroom practices that are evident within the team is recommended. This could be effected through more formal discussions of classroom strategies and through peer observation based on professional trust between colleagues.
- Patterns of uptake of higher level, and achievement at all levels in Geography in certificate examinations, are consistently strong. A strategy employed to encourage the maximum number of students to pursue higher level has been very effective. An emphasis on improving the level of achievement of an identifiable, yet small, cohort of students at junior cycle, who undertake higher level but do not achieve a higher level grade, should now be effected. At the time of this evaluation, a student from the school was honoured with the Gwenda Hurst medal for achievement at national level in Leaving Certificate geography.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography in the context of timetabling, the provision of base classrooms, the facilitation of collaborative planning and provision for the integration of ICT, is very positive. The provision of three class periods per week for Geography in TY represents very good provision.
- A small group of targeted students, who follow the JCSP, take ESS as an alternative to History and Geography in junior cycle. School management should now examine the future provision and sustainability of ESS in the context of progression routes for these students to senior cycle History or Geography. It is positive that JCSP students are fully included in the TY programme and are thus engaged in the compulsory module of Geography in advance of progression to senior cycle.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Very good quality collaborative planning is clearly informing individual teacher planning. Planning processes are very well advanced, and are supporting high-quality classroom practice. The inclusion of a learning outcomes-based approach to syllabus units in the agreed curricular plan is a very forward-looking development in the context of junior cycle geography.
 - To strengthen the position of TY Geography as a significant learning experience for students, and as a potential progression route to Leaving Certificate, the current TY plans should be revised to place a greater focus on maximising the potential of Waterford city as a setting for a wide range of study and fieldwork possibilities.
-

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals 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.

Published February 2016