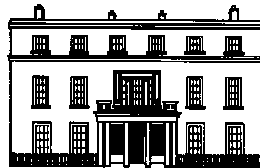


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Geography**  
**REPORT**

**Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa**  
**Doon, County Limerick**  
**Roll number: 68121S**

**Date of inspection: 8 May 2015**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF**  
**OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION**  
**AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	7 and 8 May 2015
<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 seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good, with some examples of excellent practice.
- Collaborative learning practices in lessons are a significant strength of the developing geography department.
- The established practice of providing formative written comment to students on their written work in Geography represents very good practice.
- Uptake of Geography, and achievement in the subject at all levels, are strong and reflect the high expectations of teachers for their students in the mixed-ability classroom settings.
- The absence of Geography from the Transition Year (TY) programme represents a gap in students' access to the subject in advance of their possible transition to Leaving Certificate geography.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- To build on current very good classroom practice, the geography department should now prioritise planning for the implementation of assessment for learning (AFL) strategies within a time-bound action-planning cycle.
  - The provision of a TY module of Geography should be considered within the limits of available resources.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa is a recently established voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education: An Irish schools' Trust (CEIST). Three schools amalgamated in September 2013 to form Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa. Students and staff moved into a new school building in Doon, Co Limerick in February 2014. The school has a current enrolment of 595 students and serves a largely rural hinterland straddling the Limerick and Tipperary border. Students are offered Junior Certificate, an optional TY programme, Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching and learning of very good quality, with evident examples of excellent practice, were observed in geography lessons in the course of this evaluation. In all cases, the atmosphere in classroom learning environments was positive, supportive and caring. Class groups are of mixed ability. The classrooms, in which geography lessons were observed, were bright and visually stimulating for students, and they contained evidence of students' project work in Geography. These classrooms had a strong literacy focus that was reflected throughout the very new and good quality school building through the provision of visually-stimulating and print-rich learning environments for all students.
- The coherence, structure and pace of the geography lessons observed are key strengths that enable students to actively engage and to co-construct their learning of Geography. The coherence and structure emerged from clear learning intentions for lessons. In many lessons, the learning intention was written on the board. In other lessons, it was discussed with students, while in some, the learning intention was already clear as it linked with previous learning and lessons. In all cases however, the learning intention was shared with students. The structure of the lessons, in the context of task, interaction, discussion and listening to the teacher, was underpinned by the achievement of these shared learning intentions. The pace of the lessons was managed very effectively to match both the range of abilities that was clearly evident within the class groups, and the complexity of the topic for study. It was clear that very good individual planning had informed this high-level practice.
- Lessons progressed using a range of strategies that ensured variety, interest, enthusiasm and progress towards the achievement of learning outcomes. Discussion, and questioning of students to gauge levels of understanding, were strategies that were used well in lessons. The quality of questioning in lessons was very good. Challenging students to think critically, using higher-order questions, and to establish key geographical interrelationships, was both effective and appropriate in the context of some of the topics under discussion. In other lessons, the learning, practising and application of key geographical skills also represented very effective classroom learning strategies.
- Stimulus materials were used in all lessons. These ranged from the use of maps of European regions, a soil sample, a mind map focusing on industrial location in the mid-west region, Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, projected digital images, video clips, and individual and group placemats that facilitated students to gather key learning points. These materials clearly supported students' engagement, participation and learning in the lessons observed.
- Very effective and meaningful collaborative learning practices were also observed in geography lessons. It was clear that such practice was routine given the ease with which

students engaged, and their awareness of their various roles. A range of strategies was used to allow students, to discuss and to engage with their peers, or in small groups, in the context of tasks and questions relating to topics for study. In all cases, where such strategies were effective, the geography teacher used the time available to keep students on task and also to support individual students. Such strategies should be discussed and shared by all members of the geography teaching team.

- In many lessons, individual attention to students was supported by detailed formative written comment on their work in copybooks. This represents very good practice in supporting students' learning, and in maintaining a balance between challenge and affirmation for students. The provision of such meaningful formative comment on students' work, at reasonable intervals, is encouraged as a key priority for all members of the geography teaching team.
- To build on, and to develop, current very good classroom practice, the newly formed geography department should now prioritise planning for the implementation of a wider range of assessment for learning (AFL) strategies within a time-bound action-planning cycle.
- Uptake of higher level geography, and achievement at both levels in certificate examinations, are currently significantly strong.

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

- Geography is a core subject in junior cycle, it is not currently part of the TY programme, and is an optional subject for Leaving Certificate.
- Timetable provision for Geography is positive with the allocation of three class periods per week for second and third-year students at junior cycle. An allocation of five class periods per week is provided for Leaving Certificate students. First-year students however, have a timetable allocation of just two class periods per week for Geography to facilitate a subject-sampling process. This allocation is below what is considered the normal allocation of three class periods per week for the subject.
- A TY module for Geography would further strengthen the students' experience of the subject in advance of their potential progression to Leaving Certificate. The inclusion of such a module should now be considered.
- The appropriate formality, structures and communication between the student-support team and the geography teachers, in relation to students with additional educational needs in geography classrooms, reflects very good practice in meeting the needs of these students.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A very effective and developing Geography department is evident in Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa. An agreed curricular plan is in place. This is a flexible working document that will be reviewed following its first full year of implementation. It is very positive that this plan is not static and that the position of geographical skills, and the range of assessment modes, are currently on the department's planning and review agenda.
- As a further planning priority, the geography team should now also present school management with a TY module plan for Geography. The module should have a clear

rationale for inclusion based on skills development, fieldwork and project work that will support and complement students' progression towards Leaving Certificate geography.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

- The Board wishes to acknowledge the comprehensive and detailed inspection report.

**Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

- The School in co-operation with the Geography Department has introduced a Geography module in T.Y.
- The Geography Department are continuing to work on assessment for learning strategies.