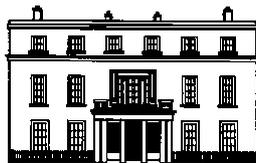


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

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

**Saint Jarlath's College**  
**Tuam, County Galway**  
**Roll number: 68074M**

**Date of inspection: 28 March 2011**



**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>Date of inspection</b>	<b>28-03-2011</b>
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion with principal</li><li>• Discussion with geography teachers</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting with subject coordinator</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning in all the lessons observed was either good or very good.
- In the lessons observed, there was clear evidence of individual planning for lessons, good quality resources were prepared and teaching strategies effectively engaged students.
- Uptake of higher-level Geography in both cycles is above the national norm.
- The current practice of streaming and banding is to be replaced by mixed-ability class groups from September 2011.
- The geography department is well resourced.
- The geography teachers are engaged in a collaborative and reflective planning process.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Increased integration of ICT in the classroom and further collaboration among teachers in developing electronic resources is recommended.
- It is recommended that the geography teachers agree and implement a consistent approach to monitoring written work and providing feedback to enable students to improve its quality.
- Senior cycle programmes of work should be further developed to include learning outcomes, resources, methodologies and assessment modes.

**INTRODUCTION**

St Jarlath's College amalgamated with St. Patrick's College in 2009. The school is under the patronage of the Archbishop of Tuam and has a total enrolment of 522 boys.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in all the lessons observed was either good or very good.
- Lessons were well prepared, good quality resources and appropriate methodologies were employed to support student learning.
- Lesson outcomes were clear and shared with students. Lessons were well structured and generally appropriately paced.
- There was good use of information and communication technologies to integrate visual materials which effectively enhanced students' understanding of topics and their engagement in the lesson. In this regard the further use of ICT, including *Scoilnet Maps*, in the teaching and learning of Geography is recommended where practicable.
- The dominant methodologies noted in lessons were questioning and explaining strategies. These strategies engaged students and facilitated good discussion.
- Learning was well supported and contextualised where the concepts were linked to the local environment and students' experience.
- In one lesson subject-specific vocabulary was well reinforced and students recorded new terms and their meanings. This approach to supporting geographical literacy should be implemented in all lessons.
- In one lesson there was a good focus on examination techniques which provided clear guidelines on how to structure answers to questions. It was also evident that students' work was corrected using examination marking schemes. It is recommended that these very good practices are adopted with all examination classes from an early stage.
- Copybooks examined showed that homework is regularly assigned. There were variations in the standard and presentation of written work. In some cases students' work was provided with a good level of feedback and in other cases there was little evidence of teacher monitoring of work.
- Teachers are aware of students with additional educational needs. Differentiated teaching was evident and included the use of visual resources, teacher support for individual students and a focus on terminology. The greater use of targeted questioning techniques is recommended so that all students are included in the lesson.
- Student achievement in certificate examinations is analysed annually. High expectations are set for learning and the uptake of higher-level Geography in both cycles is above the national norm. The department plans to further raise student attainment in these examinations. The setting of achievable targets is encouraged in this regard.
- Teachers maintain records of attendance and assessment results. These form the basis for discussion at parent-teacher meetings.

## SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Time allocation to the subject in both cycles is in line with syllabus recommendations. The uptake of Geography for the Leaving Certificate is in a healthy state.

- The majority of classes are well distributed across the week. The timetabling of geography lessons on three consecutive days at the start or at the end of the week should be avoided where possible.
- The geography teachers are appropriately qualified and have been facilitated to teach in both cycles.
- Geography classes in the junior cycle are organised in a combination of streamed and banded groups. The school plans to introduce a mixed-ability system of class organisation from September 2011. This approach is strongly encouraged.
- The school avails of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). Students involved in this programme form a distinct group and are studying Geography as part of the programme.
- The geography department is very well resourced. All the teachers have base classrooms, each of which is equipped with a short-throw projector and laptop. The computer room can also be accessed through a booking system.
- Teachers are commended for facilitating co-curricular activities including model making, project work, fieldwork activities and geography quizzes with an adjacent school.
- The geography teachers are committed to and engage in on-going professional development in the subject. The geography department is affiliated to the Association of Geography Teachers Ireland (AGTI).
- Whole-school policies on homework and assessment are currently being developed. Formal and informal procedures for student assessment are appropriate. It is commendable that common assessments for each year group have been introduced.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- St. Jarlath's is embedding and developing a subject department planning culture. The geography teachers have embraced this process in a collaborative and purposeful manner. The department is very well co-ordinated, teachers meet frequently to advance joint planning and work is reviewed on an ongoing basis.
- A high level of peer support and the sharing of knowledge, resources and expertise characterises the work of the teaching team. Further co-operation among teachers is encouraged in relation to the development of a shared bank of electronic resources.
- A good quality collaborative plan is in place for Geography which provides information on the department's organisation and practices. Teachers have agreed common programmes of work for each year group. The geography teachers plan to introduce Ordnance Survey map and photographs skills to the first year programme. The teaching of physical Geography in a linear manner in the first term of first year should be reviewed.
- In the context of ongoing subject department planning the senior cycle programmes of work should be further developed beyond their content focus and include the key learning outcomes, specific resources, methodologies and assessment modes.

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 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.

*Published, November 2011*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

The Inspection was a very positive experience and the report is extremely fair. We welcome it and appreciate its listing of our strengths while noting all recommendations for action.

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

1. Use of ICT in our classrooms is steadily on the increase. We are updating our electronic resources and are continuing to share new ideas from the conference, our own research and ongoing contact with other schools.
2. Senior level teachers have agreed to focus directly on examination techniques, questions and marking schemes. We are aiming at giving written feedback at the end of each assignment. Junior level teachers are formally testing students at the end of each section and taking homework from examination papers as much as possible, especially in third year.
3. We have put a plan in place to produce a more detailed scheme of work for the senior cycle, to include learning outcomes in line with the syllabus, to update ICT resources and to continue with greater use of targeted questioning, discussions, reinforcement and examination techniques. Assessments and marking schemes will be consistent throughout the department. Common tests and cross correcting have already been introduced.
4. At whole school level a new school homework policy has been put in place and a new assessment policy will shortly follow. The summer examinations in all subjects were based on the common examination approach. The streaming approach was finally abandoned in September last, for a mixed ability approach in first year which will gradually be extended.