

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Geography  
REPORT**

**Borrisokane Community College  
County Tipperary  
Roll number: 72370P**

**Date of inspection: 12 May 2011**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT  
OIDEACHAIS | OF 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>	12 May 2011
<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**

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in all lessons observed, with excellent practice in evidence in a number of cases.
- The work of the geography teachers is focused on the continual development of the subject through strategic planning, reflection and the mentoring of new teachers.
- The quality of work in students' notebooks and the level of formative feedback provided by teachers are of a very high standard.
- Provision for Geography, uptake of higher level and outcomes for students are very good.
- Very good quality individual and collaborative planning resulted in very positive experiences for students in the lessons observed.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The provision of a double lesson in Transition Year (TY) Geography is recommended.
  - The building project should be used as an opportunity to review and develop teaching resources and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in Geography.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Borrisokane Community College is co-educational and has an enrolment of 491 students. Geography is offered as a core subject in junior cycle and as an optional subject in Transition Year (TY) and for Leaving Certificate. At the time of the subject inspection, a major building programme that will provide two new social studies rooms was about to commence. These new rooms should enhance opportunities for students to engage with all aspects of Geography.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- High quality teaching and learning was observed in all lessons. Many examples of excellent classroom practice were also in evidence. Questioning, individual and group responses to visual-stimulus materials, and the application of geographical skills were features of these very effective lessons. In all cases, these methodologies had been well planned and were used at a pace that suited the mixed-ability nature of the class groups.
- Sharing the learning intention with students, allowing time for them to formulate and give a response to teachers' questions, and particular attention to the challenge and depth of questioning in lessons, reflected the very positive whole-school focus on assessment for learning strategies.
- It was clear that students were engaged by the topics for study and that they were learning in the lessons observed. This learning manifested itself in the deep and considered responses of students to questioning and discussion prompted by the teachers, particularly at senior cycle. It was also reflected in the students' ability to engage in the discussion facilitated by the inspector, and in the quality of their use and application of geographical skills. Attainment in certificate examinations is very good and reflects the quality of work observed in the geography lessons.
- Senior cycle lessons observed had an appropriate focus on revision of examination topics with particular attention to the structure of examination questions and to the management of time in the writing of sample answers. It was very positive to note that the focus was also on students' understanding of concepts and interrelationships rather than on factual recall alone. This approach, which was evident in all the senior cycle lessons observed, is very effective as it develops higher-order thinking skills and limits the temptation for students to memorise sample answers without clear understanding of the geographical principles that they involve.
- Junior cycle lessons were characterised by the use of a range of resources. These included diagrams and photographs, summary hand-out materials, a map of the locality and reference to a case study of turf-cutting in the local area. While students were actively engaged in these lessons, the provision of short periods of time for them to note the main learning points would be helpful in linking the content of the lesson to the syllabus key idea, and to the intended learning outcome.
- The geography lessons observed were characterised by very good relationships between students and their teachers. The work in student notebooks and the quality of formative feedback on students' written work was very good. These combined with the very good teaching strategies and resources used to provide an engaging experience for students in geography lessons.

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

- Provision and support for Geography is good. Geography is a core subject in junior cycle, is also provided in the TY programme and is an optional subject at senior cycle. Students are afforded the opportunity to sample the optional subjects during their first year which reduces the allocation for Geography to two class period per week. Provision is then restored to three class periods for second and third year. Five class periods per week are allocated at Leaving Certificate level. Uptake of the subject at senior cycle is consistently high as is the uptake of higher level geography for Leaving Certificate.
- Geography is part of the TY programme and has a timetable allocation of two single class periods per week for the full year. Students engage with a range of topics including world events and sub-continental regions. Emphasis is also placed on the development of geographical investigation skills. It is recommended that the current timetable allocation of two single class periods be combined to create one double class period that would facilitate engagement with fieldwork activities in the local area.
- The school was about to embark on a major school building programme at the time of the subject inspection. While this presents challenges for teaching Geography in temporary accommodation during the building phase, the provision of a new social studies room also presents a significant opportunity for the geography teaching team. A review of teaching resources for the subject should inform priorities for the equipping of the new teaching spaces for Geography. The opportunity to develop the integration of ICT into teaching and learning in Geography should also be seized.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The geography teachers have developed a very effective subject department. The inclusion and mentoring of new and beginning teachers is particularly noteworthy and represents very good practice. The expertise of both beginning and experienced teachers is shared in a supportive and professional learning environment.
  - Planning for Geography is very well advanced and is of a very high quality. Individual planning by the teachers is centred on students' learning and is characterised by reflection and the use of appropriate supports that will engage students in their learning.
  - An excellent collaborative plan has been produced. This reflects an ongoing and inclusive planning process. Formal planning structures are in place and it is clear that the plan is not a static document but that it represents work in progress. Processes of review and evaluation are in evidence as both whole-school and subject specific issues arise over time.
  - The very high quality teamwork, mentoring and planning in evidence in the geography department has a clear impact on the very good quality of experiences and outcomes for geography students.
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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 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 October 2011*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

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

The Board of Management is delighted to accept this very positive Geography Inspection Report and would like to compliment the teachers of Geography on the quality of teaching and learning that is taking place.