

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**Saint Joseph's College
Ballinasloe, County Galway
Roll number: 62880J**

Date of inspection: 12 April 2011



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	11 & 12 April 2011
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with principal• Discussions with geography teachers• Meeting with subject coordinator• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good quality teaching and learning was observed with some high quality teaching in evidence in a number of classes.
- The school has very good Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities and ICT was well integrated in lessons to enhance student learning and interest.
- Achievement in certificate examinations is good at all levels. Plans should be put in place to raise the uptake of higher-level Geography for the Junior Certificate.
- Geography is a well resourced subject.
- There are good supports in place for students with additional educational needs.
- Procedures in relation to formal assessment of students' progress and reporting to parents are thorough.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- All lessons should incorporate some active learning methodologies.
 - The geography teachers should develop agreed practices for monitoring and correcting students' written work in terms of layout and development of answers in line with examination criteria.
 - A stand-alone geography module should be developed in Transition Year and should include a geographical investigation.
 - Schemes of work should be further developed to include learning outcomes, resources, methodologies and assessment modes.
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INTRODUCTION

St. Joseph's College is a voluntary secondary school for boys with an enrolment of 438 students. The school offers the following programmes: the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. An optional Transition Year (TY) programme is also available in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Good quality teaching and learning was observed with some high quality teaching in evidence.
- A very good level of advance preparation was noted in lessons. A wide range of stimulating and appropriate resources, including some excellent ICT resources, was employed to enhance student learning.
- Learning objectives were shared with students, lessons were well structured and in most cases appropriately paced. It is recommended that due attention is paid to lesson pace so that there is adequate coverage of material, and to ensure that sufficient time is given to the treatment of key points.
- Instruction was accurate and in many instances contextualised through links made with previous learning and reference to the local environment.
- There was a good mix of higher-order and lower-order questioning in lessons. It is recommended that greater use be made of targeted questioning, rather than global questioning in order to check individual learning and to ensure that all students are included and engaged throughout the lesson.
- Individual and pair-work activities were incorporated into some lessons to actively engage students in their learning. It is recommended that in all lessons, tasks and the application of skills should be interspersed with questioning and note-taking.
- A positive and supportive atmosphere prevailed in all lessons and teachers were affirming of students.
- The standard of students' work in copybooks and tests varied significantly in terms of content, presentation and neatness. Good practice was noted where students' work is provided with feedback to support them in improving the quality of the work. It is recommended that teachers monitor students' written work more closely and reinforce the success criteria to guide students in presenting their work and developing their answers.
- There was some appropriate application of examination criteria and marking schemes in the correction of work. This approach should be further adopted across the department.
- Students achieve well in state examinations. It is recommended that the geography teachers should now set targets to increase the uptake of higher-level Geography for the Junior Certificate.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is a core subject at junior cycle. In senior cycle Geography becomes an optional subject and is provided within an open choice structure. Timetabled provision for Geography is in line with syllabus guidelines in both cycles.

- Classes are well spread across the week. It is recommended that full responsibility for any one class group should be allocated to the same teacher for all elements of the course.
- Geography is a well-resourced subject. The majority of teachers have base classrooms equipped with data projectors and desktop computers and have good access to audio-visual equipment. All the geography teachers should register for the use of *Scoilnet Maps*.
- In some cases classrooms had well developed geographical learning environments. All teachers are encouraged to develop their rooms in this regard and students could contribute project work and articles, photographs and posters from a range of media sources. It is recommended that all classrooms should have on display large maps of Ireland, Europe and the world to support the teaching of locational Geography.
- Students with additional educational needs are well supported through the provision of extra tuition in Geography by two of the geography teachers. More formal communication links should be established with the geography teaching team to enhance individual support for these students within the mainstream setting.
- Continuing professional development is facilitated and availed of. The geography department should become affiliated to the Association of Geography Teachers Ireland (AGTI).
- Students are assessed regularly on a formal basis and reports are issued to parents on five occasions each year. Common tests for Geography are implemented where appropriate.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject planning is facilitated through formal meetings once a term and one teacher acts as subject co-ordinator. The role of the co-ordinator in leading planning should be supported by individual members of the geography teaching team undertaking planning tasks in order to advance collaborative planning for the subject
- A subject plan has been developed and long-term schemes of work have been documented for each year group. It is recommended that these schemes are developed beyond a content focus and that the topics taught are linked in an integrated manner to the key learning outcomes, resources, methodologies and assessment modes.
- The 'Intergenerational Studies' programme in Transition Year (TY) includes elements of Geography. As this programme has primarily a historical focus, it is recommended in the future, that a stand-alone module in Geography be developed. The module should include a geographical investigation in order to provide a suitable taster of what the subject entails at senior cycle and to build on the geographical skills acquired by students at junior cycle.
- The geography teachers co-operate well in the development and sharing of electronic resources. This collaboration is highly commended and the sharing of expertise, practice and resources is further encouraged.
- The first-year teaching programme consists of topics from geomorphology and meteorology. It is recommended that this programme be reviewed in order to include less technical areas of the syllabus and the development of map and photograph skills at an early stage.
- Student achievement in certificate examinations should be analysed annually in a comprehensible manner to inform future planning for both teaching and learning.

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.