

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**St Mel's College,
Longford, County Longford
Roll number:63750B**

Date of inspection: 16 May 2011



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	16 May 2011
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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Geography teachers are competent and experienced and they have a very good knowledge and understanding of course material.
- There is a very good rapport between teachers and students, and teaching and learning takes place in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- The growing use of data projectors is enhancing teaching and learning by the provision of more vivid and topical resources.
- More cohesion and co-operative working would enhance planning and preparation for the teaching and learning of Geography and the sharing of resources.
- Examination results are strong. Revision and examination strategies were a major focus of teaching and learning in the build up to state examinations. Teachers would benefit from marking state examinations.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Homework copies and notebooks, especially at junior certificate level, should have more written comments from teachers that both affirm students' work and point towards areas for improvement.
 - Subject planning needs to move beyond lists of agreed topics to more action-based improvement-oriented planning that focuses on learning outcomes, varied methodologies, literacy and modes of assessment.
 - Opportunities to use the local area, including Longford town and its hinterland, in teaching and learning should be exploited in a more regular and systematic way.
 - The position of subject coordinator should be rotated every two to three years.
-

INTRODUCTION

St. Mel's College is a diocesan college under the patronage of the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. It is an all-boys school. The current enrolment is 511. There are five geography teachers, four of whom have a primary degree in Geography. An optional Transition Year programme includes geography related modules.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning in the classes observed is generally of a high standard and takes place in an atmosphere of mutual respect. There is very good rapport between teachers and students.
- Learning objectives were clear and were communicated to students. Particularly good practice was evident where planned learning outcomes were outlined at the beginning of lessons and returned to at the end of lessons.
- The challenge of mixed-ability teaching and learning in Geography is well met and differentiation is particularly evident in the range and types of questioning used. A greater focus on literacy and numeracy skills would enhance teaching and learning in a number of the lessons observed.
- Teaching and learning in examinations classes was rightly focussed on examination related questions and strategies as the evaluation took place a number of weeks before the state examinations. Care should be taken to ensure that a focus on examination questions and strategies does not dominate classroom practices at other times of the year.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The uptake of Geography is strong and there is a strong tradition of Geography in the school.
- Geography is allocated three periods a week in each year of junior cycle and five periods a week in senior cycle which is in line with syllabus requirements. The repeat leaving certificate class is allocated six periods a week for Geography. There is one period a week allocated to Geography in Transition Year. This level of provision for the subject is to be commended.
- Regular testing is carried out in all geography classes and homework is regularly monitored.
- Teacher-based classrooms are an asset to the teaching and learning of Geography as they allow teaching resources to be built up in situ, and allow visual material to be displayed more regularly.
- The provision and use of information and communication technology (ICT) make the subject more real, vivid and topical. The extensive resources, including ICT-based resources, gathered by individual teachers should be shared more and should be placed on the central server.
- Teachers have availed of professional development in relation to the use of ICT, restorative justice and dealing with students with challenging behaviour.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject-department planning is at an early stage of development and largely consists of agreeing common themes and topics for each year group. Some work was done on the subject plan immediately prior to the evaluation. The subject plan needs to be further reviewed to focus more on action oriented improvement and less on course content to be covered. The subject plan should also be brought into line with the school's subject-planning template.
- Subject department meetings are held once a term. Minutes of these meetings should be maintained in the geography folder. It is important that all geography teachers are facilitated to actively participate in subject meetings in order to develop greater collaboration, planning and team working.
- Record keeping by individual teachers is well developed especially in relation to class tests.

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.