Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Cobh Community College
County Cork
Roll number: 70970G

Date of inspection: 27 September 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in all the lessons observed.
- The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into geography lessons is advancing.
- Uptake of higher level Geography at senior cycle is good.
- Individual teacher planning and preparedness for lessons was of a high standard.
- Geography does not form part of the core curriculum in junior cycle which contributes to low levels of uptake by students.
- A very effective geography department has been developed in the school

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- School management should consider providing access to Geography to all class groups at junior cycle.
- Geography teachers should now advance collaborative subject planning based on identified priorities within an action-planning cycle.

INTRODUCTION

Cobh Community College, under the management of County Cork Vocational Education Committee, provides for the educational needs of students in Cobh and Great Island in Co Cork. Current enrolment stands at 199 students in junior and senior cycle while adult, continuing and further education programmes are also offered. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. The Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are all available to students in the school.
TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in the geography lessons evaluated. These lessons were well structured and clear routines were established. All lessons began with a focus on homework. Completed work was monitored by the teachers while students were engaged by an appropriate task. The learning intention was clear in all lessons and the intended learning outcomes were achieved. In all cases, lessons ended with the assignment of homework tasks that were achievable and that linked appropriately with the lesson topic.

- Student engagement and participation was achieved through a range of well-planned methodologies and strategies. Tasks were set for students throughout the lessons observed. Clear and well prepared work sheets or map-based tasks focused students on their learning. The learning intention was also developed through the good use of visual-stimulus materials including photographs and appropriate video material interspersed with questions and opportunities for discussion. All of these inputs were short, were well placed within the lesson and succeeded in maintaining students’ attention.

- The established classroom routines relating to seating, homework and short focused inputs from teachers resulted in very well managed lessons. Students in some lessons were observed to have short attention spans and could display some challenging behaviour. The classroom management strategies observed ensured the participation of students in the lessons. Very purposeful and courteous interactions were observed between students and teachers resulting in the creation of very positive learning environments in classrooms.

- Good quality integration of ICT was observed that provided students with focused written learning points using PowerPoint presentations. These points were very effectively supported by visual representations including photographs and diagrams. The projection of an Ordnance Survey (OS) map in combination with the individual copies of the map allowed students to practise and apply their map skills. The continued appropriate integration of ICT into lessons should be considered as a collaborative planning priority by the geography teachers.

- There was a visible and effective focus on students’ literacy in lessons. Attention was paid to reading, written notes and oral responses. Emphasis was placed on the identification and understanding of key words and terminology in Geography. The attention paid by teachers to the quality of written homework and students’ work in their copybooks also enhanced this literacy focus.

- Effective assessment strategies were also interspersed through the lessons. The allocation of tasks created time for teachers to give individual attention to students and to provide commentary on the standard of their work. Good quality questioning strategies and the students’ responses allowed teachers to assess learning and progress in lessons.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- It is unusual that Geography and History are not core subjects for all junior cycle year groups in Cobh Community College. Uptake of Geography is low in junior cycle as a consequence and uptake of higher level by these students is also low. The impact of this decision should be examined and school management should consider offering access to
Geography to all class groups at junior cycle to ensure that curriculum provision meets their needs.

- Junior cycle students are grouped into mixed-ability classes while students following the JCSP form a single class group. These students study Geography or History for just one period per week on alternate years with a view to providing the students with an experience of geographical skills and local studies. They do not sit the Junior Certificate geography examination. This decision also limits the uptake of Geography and should be kept under review to ensure that the JCSP meets the needs of students.

- Geography is a compulsory subject within the optional TY programme. Students are offered an appropriate experience that focuses on local settings, geographical skills and current events.

- Uptake of Geography in fifth year is good and uptake of higher level for Leaving Certificate is very good. Students are achieving well in certificate examinations in Geography.

- The school has a well-established geography department. While most teachers are allocated to base rooms, the geography room is the focus for the subject in the school. The room is shared as appropriate, while fifth year and sixth year geography class groups are normally based in the geography room. A range of resources is stored in the room and the walls provide a visually stimulating learning environment through the display of posters, maps, student projects and the use of the wall-mounted data projector. Other base classrooms visited during the evaluation also provide a good quality learning environment through displays of maps and posters.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Two of the geography classes were taught by substitute teachers during the evaluation. In all cases, teachers had engaged in very good quality individual planning for their lessons and the outcome of this work was visible in the engagement and level of participation of students in the planned learning.

- An effective collaborative planning process, led by the subject coordinator, has resulted in the development of the geography room, shared resources, a subject plan and an agreed teaching programme. The records of meetings reveal that numeracy, literacy, ICT and differentiation have been among the agenda items at subject department meetings. The geography teachers should now build on this good work to identify a small number of key planning priorities for teaching and learning in Geography that should be addressed within an action-planning cycle.

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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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