

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of GEOGRAPHY
REPORT**

**Coláiste Iascaigh
Easkey, County Sligo
Roll number: 72320A**

Date of inspection: 31 March 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(s) of inspection	
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students• Meeting with subject co-ordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching was very good in all of the lessons observed.
- Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) resource materials and differentiated teaching strategies are being used to develop students' literacy.
- Classroom management was very good; a positive respectful and affirming atmosphere was evident.
- Students are making good progress in their study of Geography and participated very well in the planned learning activities.
- A homework policy is in place and teachers are using assessment for learning (AfL) strategies in an effort to improve student attainment.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The first-year teaching plan should be revised so as to reduce the focus on teaching topics from physical geography and to introduce map and photograph skills at an early stage.
- It is recommended that the long-term curriculum plan should be revised so as to include reference to assessment and references to teaching methods and resources should be more specific and detailed.
- In planning for improvements in student attainment specific targets should be set and strategies put in place to achieve these targets.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Iascaigh is a co-educational school under the trusteeship of County Sligo Vocational Education Committee (VEC). Geography has recently been added to the school's core curriculum at junior cycle. It is planned to offer the subject for the established Leaving Certificate commencing in September 2013. The school serves a largely rural area and is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. Current enrolment stands at 111. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very high quality teaching was evident in the classrooms visited. Teacher input, teacher-student interaction and student activity were evident. The balance between these elements particularly, teacher exposition, should be closely monitored in lesson planning. Teacher exposition was clear and lessons were appropriately paced. Teachers shared the learning intentions with students at the start of lessons. In some instances more specific learning intentions would have been useful.
- Teachers are using information and communications technology (ICT) in lessons and there is scope to increase the use of visual images and video clips to enrich the learning experiences of students.
- Students' learning is supported by the use of differentiated teaching strategies and JCSP resource materials. JCSP statements in Geography have been agreed and students' progress in relation to these is being recorded and displayed in classrooms. This is very good practice. Questioning also showed evidence of differentiation and students were given personal attention while completing tasks set by their teacher. There is scope to develop this further by providing students with writing frames, partially completed maps and diagrams.
- There was a clear focus on developing students' literacy as key words were introduced, carefully explained and students were encouraged to use these in answering questions. Map-rich and print-rich classrooms evident in the school also contributed to developing students' literacy. The use of graphic organisers would support students in gaining an overview of the topic under discussion and could be used for revision purposes.
- References to current events, the local area and to students' personal experiences helped students to relate to and to understand geographical concepts. This is a very good teaching strategy.
- Students are encouraged to develop a questioning approach to their study of Geography and to develop higher-order thinking skills. This is being achieved through teachers adopting a questioning style that encourages an investigative approach. Questions, such as 'can you explain?' supported this effective approach.
- Students willingly participated in the planned learning activities and contributed to class discussions. They could recall previous learning and demonstrated a good grasp of geographic skills. In their interaction with the inspector they showed a good understanding of the topics being studied.
- Lessons were well managed, clear routines are in place and a positive and affirming atmosphere was evident in the classrooms visited.

- Teachers are working to raise the standard of student attainment and are using assessment for learning (AfL) strategies to achieve this. This was evident in a random sample of students' written work viewed during the evaluation where teachers had provided constructive feedback to students. The use of peer assessment was also noted. The good practice of having separate copybooks for homework and for a record of students' written work was noted. The quality of written work was generally good reflecting high teacher expectations.
- It is good practice that decisions relating to subject level in the certificate examinations are delayed as late as possible. There is, therefore, a high uptake of the higher level in the junior certificate examination.
- Project work and out-of-class learning activities are used to extend the range of learning opportunities provided to students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision and the distribution of lessons across students' timetables are in line with best practice.
- The changes in subject provision outlined in the introduction are welcomed and reflect the school's wish to provide a broader and more balanced curriculum for its students.
- The school has engaged with the Green School Programme, has achieved two Green Flags and is working to achieve a third flag. This co-curricular activity is very supportive of the aims of the geography syllabuses.
- Continuous assessment is used to monitor students' progress during the first term. Where continuous assessment is used clear procedures and assessment criteria should be in place to ensure an accurate evaluation of students' progress.
- Teacher-based classrooms are in place and this has resulted in the creation of map-rich and print-rich learning environments. The subject department plan sets the further development of resources as a key short-term aim and this is very appropriate.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The geography teachers are committed to working collaboratively to develop resources and to share best practice. A co-ordinator is in place and minutes of formal meetings are kept.
- A comprehensive subject plan is in place. References to planned learning outcomes and to JCSP resources are notable features of this plan. There is scope to further develop this plan as outlined in recommendations made earlier in this report. In addition where appropriate, teachers could adopt a spiral approach to planning for some topics and should consider ways to integrate map and photograph skills throughout the teaching programme.
- Teachers were very well prepared for the lessons observed and had a range of resources, which were used effectively to support teaching and learning.
- Teachers keep records of attendance, homework and class tests which are used to inform reporting to parents.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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