Subject Inspection of GEOGRAPHY
REPORT

St Mary’s College
Ballysadare, County Sligo
Roll number: 65130E

Date of inspection: 1 April 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of inspection</th>
<th>April 1 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during 3 class periods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Meeting with subject co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- In all of the lessons observed teaching was of a very high quality.
- Clear routines are in place for the start and conclusion of lessons and this helped to create optimal conditions for teaching and learning. Students were frequently affirmed for their contributions to discussions.
- The display of maps, charts and particularly students’ work created a stimulating learning environment.
- Students displayed a good knowledge of their courses, could use geographical terms appropriately and could apply their knowledge in new settings.
- The range of assessment strategies used to monitor students’ progress is underdeveloped. There is scope to extend further the forms of assessment used.
- Planning for the lessons observed was very good and a subject department plan for Geography is in place which could be further developed.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consideration should be given to including a module in Geography in the Transition Year (TY) programme.
- Resources of the geography department should be stored in a central location, accessible to all teachers, and a detailed inventory of these should be provided to all members of the department.
- Student outcomes in certificate examinations should be analysed to identify strategies which are effective and to put in place specific targets and action plans for improvement.
- A more comprehensive long-term curriculum plan for the subject should be developed by the collaborative efforts of the geography teaching team. This plan should focus on learning outcomes for students.
INTRODUCTION
St Mary’s College is a co-educational voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of CEIST – Catholic Education, An Irish Schools Trust. Geography is included in the core junior cycle curriculum and is an optional subject for the established Leaving Certificate. An optional TY programme is provided, which does not however include Geography. Current enrolment is 334, 189 boys and 145 girls.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- Very high quality teaching was evident in all of the lessons observed. Questioning was very effective in encouraging students to offer explanations and to develop their answers, thus developing higher-order thinking skills.
- There was generally a good balance between teacher input and student activity and this balance should be kept under review.
- Visual learners were effectively catered for by the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Students were supported in maximising the use of visual stimuli by the provision of teacher-generated worksheets that were clearly presented. The display of maps, charts and particularly students’ work created a stimulating learning environment.
- Students’ geographical literacy was encouraged by the careful introduction of key terms. These were clearly explained and students were encouraged to use these terms in answering.
- Differentiated teaching was used in lessons. This was evident in the variety of questioning and in the use of key words. There is scope for the members of the geography teaching team to discuss the issue of differentiation and to develop further strategies to support learning.
- Classroom management was very effective. Clear routines are in place for the start and conclusion of lessons and this helped to create optimal conditions for teaching and learning. Students were frequently affirmed for their contributions to discussions.
- There was an appropriate focus on revision. Students were given advice in relation to answering techniques and were provided with supportive revision worksheets.
- Students displayed a good knowledge of their courses, could use geographical terms appropriately and could apply their knowledge in new settings.
- A range of assessment strategies is used to monitor students’ progress. There is scope to extend further the forms of assessment used. Test papers used to assess students’ progress were made available. In some instances there is scope to make this more reflective of those set by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), to be more visual and to test a variety of cognitive skills in preference to testing simple factual recall.
- Where students had answered past examination questions they had received constructive feedback from their teacher. Making feedback more specific would more effectively support improvement in students’ achievement. A policy on assessment for learning (AfL) should be developed and included in the subject department plan.
- There is a good uptake of Geography at higher level in the certificate examinations. Student outcomes in certificate examinations should be analysed to identify strategies
which are effective and to put in place specific targets and action plans for improvement. Opportunities for peer assessment by students should be explored.

- Students maintain a record of their written work and there is scope for students to become independent note makers and not be dependent on teacher-generated notes. This would encourage independent learning.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Time allocation is in line with syllabus recommendations and lessons are appropriately distributed across the timetable. Students are provided with an open choice of subject for the established Leaving Certificate and the uptake of the subject is in a very healthy state. Consideration should be given to including a module in Geography in the TY programme.

- Teacher-based classrooms are provided and a wide range of resources is available in individual classrooms. Geography department resources should be stored in a central location, accessible to all teachers, and a detailed inventory of these should be provided to all members of the department.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There is clear evidence of collaborative subject department planning and the sharing of resources by teachers. All the organisational arrangements for the subject are in place and a long-term curriculum plan has been developed, monitored and reviewed. A more comprehensive long-term curriculum plan for the subject should be developed which would focus on learning outcomes for students rather than being textbook led. This should be done through the collaborative efforts of the geography teaching team.

- The first-year curriculum plan has a good balance between human and physical geography. The development of map and photograph skills early in first year is encouraged and these skills could then be developed further by being integrated into the long-term curriculum plan.

- Planning for the lessons observed was very good, written lesson plans were provided. Learning outcomes were shared with students and lessons were part of a larger unit of work. High quality resources were used appropriately to support teaching and learning.

- Teachers maintain records of attendance, homework and formal assessments. These are used to report on students’ progress to parents.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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.

*Published October 2011*