

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Saint Raphael's College
Loughrea, County Galway

Roll number: 63070C

Date of inspection: 14 March 2014



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	14 March 2014
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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed.
- Teaching and learning were most effective where there was a clear focus on learning outcomes and where the methodologies employed actively engaged and challenged students across the ability spectrum.
- Timetabling provision is appropriate and the subject is well resourced.
- Effective procedures are in place for formal assessment of students' progress however assessment for learning principles should be further implemented.
- Subject planning is collaborative and reflective, however planning documentation is in need of further development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Lessons should be guided by explicit learning outcomes and these should be reviewed at different stages during the lesson to assess the learning achieved.
 - To support improvement there needs to be more thorough and regular provision of written feedback on students' work as well as the implementation of strategies to facilitate student self-assessment and peer-assessment.
 - A module in Geography should be reinstated in the Transition Year (TY) programme.
 - Schemes of work should be further developed and the first-year teaching programme should be reviewed.
-

INTRODUCTION

St. Raphael's College is a post-primary co-educational school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education Irish School Trust (CEIST). The school is one of two providers of post-primary education in the town of Loughrea and has a current enrolment of 422 students. Geography is not included in the school's optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Good quality teaching and learning was observed in lessons.
- Classroom management was very good and an affirming and disciplined atmosphere was underpinned by good interpersonal relationships.
- While the content of each lesson was clear it is recommended that the learning outcomes are identified and shared in greater detail as a focus for lesson structure and student learning. The learning outcomes should also be reviewed over the course of the lesson and at the lesson conclusion as a framework against which student learning can be assessed.
- Teachers were well prepared for lessons and there was good use of resources such as the whiteboard and worksheets to enhance and consolidate learning. However, in some cases there was scope for greater differentiation in the tasks assigned so that students were appropriately challenged at the upper end of the ability spectrum.
- Teacher instruction was concise and good links were made between geographical concepts and examples familiar to students in the local and regional environment.
- Concepts were well explained and teachers used a range of active learning methodologies which facilitated both independent and collaborative learning. There was some effective use of higher-order questions to engage students' critical thinking and to interrogate their knowledge. This good practice should be further developed and supported by the greater use of targeted questions to assess individual student progress.
- In one lesson some of the material under study was very challenging for the year group and there was limited evidence of students having a clear understanding of the key concepts. In this context, it is recommended that greater consideration should be given to the ability level of students when selecting topics for inclusion in the planned programme of work.
- The use of *Scoilnet Maps* is recommended where lessons are focused on the development of geographical skills so that a range of maps and photographs can be shown to the class to highlight various examples of relevant geographical features and phenomena. Map or photograph sketches and other key skills should also be modelled initially on the whiteboard in a step-by-step manner so that students can then proceed with the task at a pace commensurate with their abilities.
- There was a good focus on subject terminology in lessons. In first year students maintain a keyword notebook. To ensure a more consistent approach to students' literacy development the use of keyword strategies should be further developed in other year groups.
- Where the lesson focus was on examination preparation a sample answer was provided and linked to the assessment criteria to illustrate how the question should be approached.

This approach should be further extended and strategies to facilitate student self-assessment and peer-assessment should be developed to enable them to become more effective evaluators of their own work.

- It was clear from students' copybooks that homework is regularly assigned. While copybooks showed monitoring for the completion of work and were dated by teachers there was limited written feedback giving guidance on how to improve the quality of the work. More written formative feedback should be provided on students' work to support improvement and the students should then follow-up on this feedback.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole school support for Geography. Class period provision in both cycles is in line with syllabus guidelines with a generous allocation in sixth year. The geography teachers are deployed in line with their qualifications and have been facilitated to teach in both cycles thus ensuring a good level of capacity within the geography team.
- Geography is part of the core curriculum at junior cycle and is an optional subject for the Leaving Certificate provided within an open choice structure. A module in Geography should be reinstated into the TY programme. This module should include fieldwork activities in the local environment. This would enable students to develop geographical skills in an experiential and investigative manner and would support the progression between the junior cycle and senior cycle. In this context, the department should plan to build a stock of fieldwork instruments as resources become available.
- Teachers have availed of professional development in the subject. It is commendable that the geography team have upskilled themselves to use *Scoilnet Maps* and are now encouraged to make full use of this resource. The geography department should now consider becoming affiliated to the Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland (AGTI).
- Geography is well resourced. Teachers have base classrooms and there is very good access to information and communication technology. A higher level of collaboration in terms of the sharing of resources electronically should now be considered by the geography teaching team.
- There is regular formal assessment of students' work and parents are kept well informed on students' progress.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The geography teachers work well as a team and appropriate planning practices including regular formal meetings and rotation of the co-ordination of the department are in place. A good quality subject plan has been developed. As an effective guide for teaching and learning schemes of work should have a greater focus on learning outcomes and the methodologies and resources to support the achievement of these outcomes. The geography team should also agree strategies to ensure the more consistent implementation of assessment for learning practices in the correction of students' work. These strategies should be included in the planned programmes of work.
- There was some very good evidence of review and evaluation in the department. Certificate examination results are analysed on an annual basis and the department has been very successful in meeting its aim to maintain and increase the uptake of higher

level geography and to improve student attainment. Points raised in a teaching and learning self-evaluation questionnaire administered to leaving certificate students have been taken into account by the teaching team. Building on this good work an action-planning cycle should now be agreed to advance other identified priorities in areas such as literacy, the increased use of ICT and promoting improvements in teaching practice through self-assessment.

- The first-year teaching programmes should include a variety of topics more appropriate to the ability levels and learning styles of the student cohort. Ordnance Survey (OS) map and aerial photograph skills should also be introduced from an early stage in first year.

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