Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Coláiste Muire
Ballymote, County Sligo
Roll number: 65140H

Date of inspection: 24 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>24 October 2011</th>
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<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during one double and one single class period</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning were most effective where students were challenged and engaged by a good range of questioning strategies. However there is scope for the greater use of questions directed to individual students so that all students across the ability spectrum are engaged.

- Uptake of higher-level Geography in both cycles is high and students achieve well in certificate examinations.

- Timetabled provision for the subject is in line with syllabus guidelines.

- The geography department has access to a good range of subject resources and information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.

- Standard procedures are in place for assessment of students’ progress and reporting to parents, however there is scope to further implement assessment for learning (AfL) practices.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Lesson planning should provide a greater focus on the pace and sequence of delivery to ensure that the expected learning outcomes are appropriately achieved.

- The increased implementation of assessment for learning (AfL) strategies and the use of certificate examination criteria for assessment are recommended to support students in improving their work.

- School management should consider including Geography in the Transition Year (TY) programme.

- The increased integration of ICT in the classroom is recommended.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Muire is a co-educational school situated in the town of Ballymote. Currently the school has an enrolment of 255 students. Programmes provided in the school include the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. Geography is not offered as part of the school’s optional TY programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There was good use of differentiation strategies including questioning combined with pair and individual learning tasks to facilitate students’ engagement in their learning. Teaching and learning were most effective where students were appropriately challenged by a good level of questioning including a combination of higher-order and lower-order questions. The greater use of directed questions throughout lessons is recommended to ensure the participation of all students and a greater level of student input.

- Lessons had clear learning outcomes which were shared with students at the outset. In planning for lessons it is recommended that greater attention should be paid to the pace and sequence of material so that key points are dealt with adequately before moving on through the lesson. The structuring of lessons in this way would support the achievement of the stated learning outcomes and should allow time for review as the lesson nears completion.

- There were good links established with previous learning, the students’ experience and the local environment to enhance students’ understanding of the concepts under study.

- ICT was used in one lesson effectively to present material and to integrate visual stimuli. The increased use of ICT, including the use of Scoilnet Map resources is recommended to support teaching and learning in Geography.

- The development of geographical literacy skills was observed as subject terminology was reinforced in lessons. Word banks of technical terms in some topics were also noted in senior-cycle copybooks. This good practice should be extended to all year groups. To further enhance students’ writing skills criteria for assessment should be shared with students to support them in the layout and development of answers to longer questions.

- Learning tasks were integrated into lessons to facilitate the development of geographical skills including map interpretation and constructing graphs. It is recommended that key skills, particularly those with a numerical dimension, are demonstrated initially on the board by the teacher so that all students have a clear understanding of how to approach the task. The criteria for assessment should also be highlighted to ensure that students use sufficient map-based evidence in their answers.

- Homework is regularly assigned and monitored. The greater use of developmental feedback is recommended to assist students in improving the quality of their work. This feedback should provide students with information about their strengths and to identify areas for attention.

- Classroom management was excellent and students were very well behaved in all lessons.

- Student attainment in certificate examinations is good.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is part of the core curriculum in junior cycle and becomes an optional subject at senior cycle. Uptake of the subject at senior cycle is below the national norm. It is recommended that a module in Geography be included within the optional TY programme. This provision would assist students in making more informed subject choices and should give students an insight into the study of the subject at senior cycle.

- Subject-option bands for senior cycle are based on students’ choices and appropriate support is provided to students when selecting subjects.

- Timetabled provision for the subject is good and double periods are facilitated in senior cycle. In practically all cases classes are well spread across the week. This is good practice. Where possible, the timetabling of lessons on three consecutive days at the start or the end of the week with no Geography on the remaining days should be avoided.

- The subject department is well resourced with subject materials and ICT.

- Senior management has facilitated the subject department’s attendance at subject in-service training and has provided a number of whole-school professional development inputs to support teaching and learning. Membership of the local Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland (AGTI) should be considered.

- The geography room is an appropriate learning environment with a range of maps, student-generated posters and key word charts on display.

- Formal assessment of students takes place at the end of term and continuous assessment is also in use. Common tests are implemented. An examination period longer than a double class period should be timetabled for certificate class groups in preparation for mock and state examinations. Procedures for reporting to parents are appropriate.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- School management facilitates the subject planning process with the provision of planning time on a number of occasions throughout the school year.

- The subject department has developed a good quality subject plan which provides clear information on the organisation of the department. Curricular plans of work have been drawn up that outline the planned delivery of the subject for each year group. In line with good practice the first-year teaching programme covers a range of topics from different sections of the syllabus and map and photograph skills are introduced and developed from an early stage. In addition revision time is incorporated into all planned programmes of work.

- In the context of ongoing subject planning it is recommended that curricular plans be further developed to identify the expected learning outcomes, useful resources and modes of assessment in relation to the planned units of work. This would enhance the effectiveness of plans in guiding classroom practice.

- The subject department conducts an analysis of students’ attainment in the certificate examinations annually. This is good practice.

- A good level of preparation for lessons was evident in the integration of visual resources to support students’ learning.
The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teacher 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.