

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Coláiste Choilm
Ballincollig, Co Cork
Roll number: 71103K

Date of inspection: 12 November 2013



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

Dates of inspection	11-12 November 2013
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 ten class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good, with some examples of excellent practice.
- Students were on task and actively engaged in their learning. Opportunities for working in groups were integrated into lessons when appropriate.
- A very positive classroom atmosphere and a high level of trust between teachers and students supported learning.
- The teachers in the geography department work very well together as a team and both formal and informal opportunities for communication and collaboration are in place.
- Individual and collaborative planning are of a very high quality across the department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The department should review the structure of the Transition Year (TY) geography programme to ensure that all TY students have the opportunity to strengthen their skills and knowledge base sufficiently to prepare them to bridge the study of Geography at junior and senior levels.
 - The department should review its use of the ICT tools available and should consider more regular use of the visualiser in lessons.
 - The department should consider further developing town-based fieldwork opportunities within walking distance of the school.
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INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Choilm is a large, co-educational community college in Ballincollig, with a mainstream English-medium school and a Gaelcholáiste. The current enrolment is 1,393 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes. Students can study Geography through the medium of Irish in the Gaelcholáiste.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed was very good, with some examples of excellent practice. Learning intentions were shared with students at the beginning of each lesson and teachers skilfully linked the lesson content and progression with previous learning. Examples of geographical content from the local area were integrated into the lessons when appropriate.
- Resources were used effectively and lessons were structured in a coherent and sequenced manner. Audio-visual resources were particularly well used. Teachers used information and communication technologies (ICT) appropriately although some ICT tools could be further exploited to support learning and teaching.
- Students were on task and actively engaged in their learning. Opportunities for working in groups were integrated into lessons when appropriate.
- A very positive classroom atmosphere and a high level of trust between teachers and students supported learning. Students were motivated to learn and teacher praise was used effectively.
- There was a focus on literacy and numeracy strategies which have been developed by the geography department as part of a whole-school initiative. Key geographical terms were highlighted, as were the potential uses for charts and graphs for presenting geographical information.
- Questioning strategies were used effectively by teachers to both assess the level of learning of students as well as differentiating the pace of learning in mixed-ability groups. The department has an inclusive special educational needs (SEN) policy in place and there are very good channels of communication between class teachers, resource teachers, learning support staff and special needs assistants. Homework was regularly set and monitored with a good level of formative feedback given to students, in line with the whole-school assessment strategy.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and timetabling is generally in line with syllabus recommendations, with first-year students having two periods of Geography per week which rises to three periods per week in the remainder of the junior cycle. Geography is an obligatory, core subject at junior cycle while half of senior cycle students take Geography to Leaving Certificate level. Almost all students follow the Transition Year programme in which Geography is a core subject. Students are taught in mixed-ability classes. Levels of achievement in Geography in certificate examinations are very good.
- Transition Year Geography is taught on a modular basis with all TY students studying either a Geology course or a Continental Studies course as part of a six-week module.

The courses offered are broad ranging and are set in a global context. Fieldwork and project work are also integrated into the programme. TY students also maintain the GEO notice board in the main social area in the school. The department could investigate the possibility of engaging in cross-curricular fieldwork with other subject departments within the TY programme. The department should review the structure of the Transition Year (TY) geography programme to ensure that all TY students have the opportunity to strengthen their skills and knowledge base sufficiently to prepare them to bridge the study of Geography at junior and senior levels.

- The school actively supports the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers in the geography department and the department is affiliated to the local branch of their professional subject association. The department follows the school's induction policy for new teachers and PDE geography students, and the department has appointed a mentor who fulfils a clear and effective role. The teachers in the geography department work very well together as a team and both formal and informal opportunities for communication and collaboration are in place.
- The geography department has developed an eLearning plan which has focused staff on strategies for integrating ICT tools and materials into the classroom. The department has begun to use iPads as both teaching and learning tools and is building up a rich experience in this area. Teachers have reached a high level of competency in using computers and a projector in their teaching. Every classroom has an interactive digital projector and visualiser available. The department should review its use of the ICT tools available and should consider more regular use of the visualiser in lessons.
- The department has a well-equipped geography room and storage area, and classrooms are print-rich and well resourced. *Scoilnet Maps* is regularly used in lessons. The department has built up a range of digital resources which are maintained on the laptop computer in the geography room. The department is considering the use of another platform, such as a shared folder on a Server, to allow better access to shared resources. A seismograph is available to the department and this resource is regularly integrated into lesson planning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual and collaborative planning are of a very high quality across the department. An excellent subject planning folder has been developed, is regularly updated and is reviewed annually. Student performance in certificate examinations is analysed and discussed by teachers in the department and this analysis feeds directly into the annual planning review for the department.
- Department meetings are held regularly and have consistently focused on teaching and learning issues such as literacy and numeracy, eLearning and instructional leadership. The role of the subject co-ordinator is clear and well established and allows for a high level of communication and collaboration to occur, not only among geography teachers, but also with school management and with other subject departments. Geography teachers in the Gaelcholáiste work very closely with their colleagues in the mainstream English-medium school and share the same subject department, policies and planning structures.
- A very extensive fieldwork programme has been established. All year groups are programmed to engage in some fieldwork experience which includes local farm studies,

urban studies in Cork and local quarry studies. The department should consider further developing town-based fieldwork opportunities within walking distance of the school.

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.