

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Ashton School
Cork City
Roll number: 81008W

Date of inspection: 2 February 2012



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

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| Date of inspection | 2 February 2012 |
| 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 principal and teachers |

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning in Geography is very good.
- Geography lessons are interactive and have a significant focus on geographical skills.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was integrated very effectively to enhance the students' learning in all the geography lessons observed.
- The emphasis on geographical investigation skills in Transition Year (TY) geography is a very significant support for students in advance of Leaving Certificate geography.
- Uptake of higher-level geography is significant and examination outcomes for students are very good.
- Individual and collaborative planning for geography is advanced and informs classroom practice.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography department should use the opportunity that will be provided by the school building project to evaluate existing teaching resources and plan for future requirements.
 - Attention to literacy and numeracy in Geography should become a priority for the geography department within a time-bound action-planning cycle.
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INTRODUCTION

Ashton is a comprehensive school on the south side of Cork city with an enrolment of 502 students. Junior Certificate, TY and Leaving Certificate are offered to students. The school is about to embark on a major building project to provide a new school building.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The experience of students in geography lessons in Ashton is very positive. Teaching and learning was of a very high quality in all the lessons observed in the course of the subject inspection. Students responded to very interesting and stimulating lessons that were syllabus appropriate but that were presented as visual, interactive and challenging. The students responded very positively through their questions and comments, and through their enthusiasm for the tasks and challenges presented. Teachers display a strong interest and commitment to Geography and work hard to provide for their students.
- In all lessons, the learning intention was clear from the outset and new topics were introduced as they arose from previous learning or from a review of homework tasks. A very effective balance was maintained between the various aspects of the lessons. Teacher inputs were limited, allowing students to engage with the topic or task individually and cooperatively as pairs and groups. In a number of lessons, students were invited to the whiteboard to demonstrate their competence in performing a skill or in displaying their learning. In the mixed-ability context of the geography lessons, very careful pacing ensured that students participated and that teachers, through questioning and prompting, progressed the planned learning.
- In junior cycle, map work skills are introduced in second year and are then applied to topics already studied in physical geography, and as new topics for study are approached. In the lessons observed, students engaged with the 1:50,000 series Ordnance Survey (OS) map. Students used the actual paper copy of the sheet and a representation of the map projected using a data projector. A staged approach to establishing location and distance was achieved through the combination of teacher demonstration, student engagement, and interaction with the visual display as projected. This work represents very good practice.
- Other lessons based on syllabus topics used similar methods. A first-year group studying weather and climate used the unusual continental weather patterns being experienced at the time of the inspection as an entry point to the topic of weather and weather forecasting. The TV weather forecast was interpreted and then linked to the instruments that are used to measure and record aspects of the weather. First-year students were enthusiastic in their engagement with this topic. Leaving Certificate higher-level students similarly engaged with climate but with its impact on the creation of a biome. The complex interrelationships of climate, soils, vegetation, flora and fauna were very effectively combined using visual imagery, student interaction with the topics, worksheets, and teacher-led discussion and questioning.
- The students displayed their learning and understanding in all lessons. It was clear from the quality of homework observed in copybooks, the responses to questions and the outcome of tasks that appropriate learning in the context of mixed-ability class groups was being achieved.

- All class groups aim at higher-level geography and decisions on levels are taken in consultation with students and parents following the pre-examinations. It is clear that uptake of higher-level geography is significant at both junior and senior cycle, and that levels of achievement for geography students in certificate examination are very good.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is appropriately provided for in the context of overall school provision in relation to timetabling and room allocation. The school operates a system of teacher-based classrooms but a specialist Geography room is also provided. This very good quality room provides a map-rich and print-rich learning environment for geography students. An adjoining room provides ample storage for resources and fieldwork equipment.
- It is clear that the geography teaching team operate as an effective subject department. A co-ordinator has been appointed and the team is facilitated to meet formally although much informal support and collaboration was also reported. It is recommended that the geography department seize the opportunity afforded by the new building project to focus on the provision of the new social studies room and associated equipment and resources to support geography teaching. An audit of existing resources should assist this process.
- It is very positive that school management and the geography teachers actively support Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) students of Geography. Classes allocated to these beginning teachers are shared with the timetabled teacher. This ensures adequate support for the student teacher and equally ensures that class groups progress through the agreed curriculum plan for Geography.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual planning and preparation for lessons is of a very high standard. Teachers have acquired significant experience in teaching the subject and, over time, have gathered a range of resources, maps, visual materials and details of current geographical events.
- Collaborative planning for Geography is well advanced through an agreed subject and curricular plan. To build on this ongoing planning process, the geography teachers should focus their collaborative planning to prioritise literacy and numeracy development within geography lessons. A time-bound action-planning cycle should be used to progress this initiative. This could provide an entry point for a whole-school focus on literacy and numeracy in line with the Department of Education and Skills' literacy and numeracy strategy.
- The TY programme, as presented in the TY plan, is a very appropriate addition to the geographical experience of students. Presented in the form of learning outcomes, it focuses on the skills required to complete and present a geographical investigation. This work will clearly supports students who advance to Leaving Certificate geography. The range of fieldwork experiences, as outlined within the plan, should be widened to include local settings based on urban or human geography that are within walking distance of the school.

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

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The school is very pleased to note that the report gives affirmation that the quality of teaching and learning in Geography is very good. The school is also pleased that the significant uptake of Geography at higher level and the very good examination outcomes of students have been noted.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The school will address the recommendations of the report and is fully committed to implementing the National Strategy for Improving Literacy and Numeracy at whole-school level.