

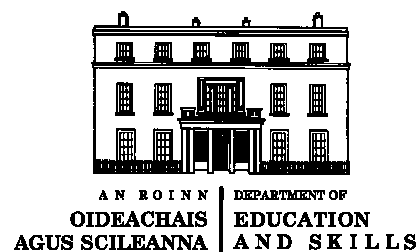
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**Christian Brothers Secondary School
Castleredmond, Midleton, Co. Cork
Roll number: 62360G**

Date of inspection: 29 January 2016



REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	29 January 2016
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

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons visited.
- Students were actively engaged in their learning and were comfortable and enthusiastic when opportunities to work together in groups were presented.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used appropriately in the lessons observed.
- Subject provision and timetabling for Geography is in line with syllabus recommendations.
- The department has built up a wide range of teaching resources.
- Individual and collaborative planning were of a high quality across the geography department.
- The Transition Year (TY) plan indicates a good balance between the study of geographical content and the development of geographical skills.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The department should develop its homework policy and practices within the context of a broader assessment model which could capture a wide range of skills, knowledge and assessment types which could support learning in a geography classroom.
 - The school and the department should continue to review the timing of when students make choices about their Leaving Certificate subjects.
 - The department should continue to develop local opportunities for fieldwork across all geography classes and levels.
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INTRODUCTION

Christian Brothers Secondary School is an all-boys school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Trust (ERST). It has a current enrolment of 657 students. The school offers Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The school has recently moved into new school buildings.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons visited. Learning intentions were shared with students at the beginning of lessons and best practice was observed when students had time to reflect on their learning at the end of a lesson. Lessons were well planned and learning resources were skilfully created and shared by teachers in the department. Teachers regularly used local examples and case-studies in their classroom teaching, which contributed to a deeper student understanding of the application of geographical concepts and content to their everyday lives. This was particularly evident at a time when winter flooding was a major local and national issue.
- Teachers used praise effectively to create a positive learning atmosphere. Students were actively engaged in their learning and were comfortable and enthusiastic when opportunities to work together in groups were presented. The department has an inclusive special needs plan in place and teachers, the Special Educational Needs (SEN) department and support staff work well together to create a differentiated and inclusive learning experience for all students.
- Homework was set and checked regularly, and was often used as a bridge to previous learning. The department follows a homework policy which gives general guidelines around the purpose and types of homework which could be set. The department should develop its homework policy and practices within the context of a broader assessment model which could capture a wide range of skills, knowledge and assessment types which could support learning in a geography classroom.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used appropriately in the lessons observed. The department has begun to use interactive screens in classroom teaching. The department should continue to develop its use of the *Scoilnet maps* resource for teaching and learning in Geography. The department is already advancing its use of ICT and geography teachers should now create an ICT plan for the subject which would consolidate the hardware and software resources currently available, and then focus on creating opportunities for communication and collaboration through ICT, which would support student learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and timetabling for Geography is in line with syllabus recommendations. At junior cycle, three lessons per week are allocated to Geography while five lessons are allocated for senior cycle classes. Geography is offered as a core subject at junior cycle and is taught in mixed-ability classes, while over half of all senior cycle students take Geography at Leaving Certificate level. Geography in Transition Year (TY) is an optional subject with an allocation of four periods per week. A majority of students choose Geography in TY. Levels of achievement in Geography in certificate

examinations are consistently good and a majority of students take the subject at higher level in the Junior Certificate and in Leaving Certificate examinations.

- School management has supported continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities for geography teachers on themes such as the use of Clevertouch screens and *Scoilnet maps*. The department has built up a wide range of teaching resources and classrooms are designed to facilitate and encourage collaborative learning opportunities. The department also has access to weather station instruments located on the school site. Teachers in the department collaborate effectively and work well together as a team. There is a good support network for new staff and for Professional Masters in Education (PME) student teachers in the department. Staff are affiliated to the local branch of the professional subject association which is important in terms of keeping up with changes and future developments in the subject.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual and collaborative planning were of a high quality across the geography department. Subject plans for the various levels make reference to resources, assessment practices and learning outcomes for students. Plans also incorporate links to school-wide literacy and numeracy strategies. The department has started to harmonise assessments across geography classes, with first-year students currently doing common assessments. A digitalised version of the department plan would facilitate regular revision based on classroom experience and make the plan more dynamic and effective as a tool in support of collaboration, teaching and learning in the subject.
 - The TY plan indicates a good balance between the study of geographical content and the development of geographical skills. TY students study physical geography, biodiversity, Green School and map skills units during the course of the year. Up to now, TY students choose their Leaving Certificate subjects at the end of the junior cycle. This practice undermines the developmental potential of a TY programme where students will experience a wide range of learning opportunities and subject experiences before making a better-informed final subject choice for the senior cycle. The school and the department should continue to review the timing of when students make choices about their Leaving Certificate subjects.
 - Teachers in the department communicate both formally and informally on a continuous basis. Formal meetings are held on a regular basis and usually focus on both administrative issues and teaching and learning priorities. Assessment data is regularly analysed and feeds into subject planning. There is very good communication between the geography department and their colleagues in the Special Educational Needs (SEN) area and this alliance is well documented in the minutes of department meetings.
 - The department has developed a fieldwork programme in Geography, which is generally based on local studies in junior cycle while senior students engage in coastal fieldwork at Garryvoe. The department should continue to develop local opportunities for fieldwork across all geography classes and levels. In this way, fieldwork could be planned to support the learning objectives specific to geographical study for all students. Local fieldwork opportunities could be developed in conjunction with other subject departments who could collaborate on a cross-curricular basis.
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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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.