

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Midleton College
Midleton, County Cork
Roll number: 62370J

Date of inspection: 23 April 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

Date of inspection	23 April 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, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in all the geography lessons observed.
- Interaction, challenge and engagement were central to the classroom experience for students of Geography in the lessons observed.
- Fieldwork and the application of geographical skills are significant aspects of pedagogy in Geography in the school.
- Uptake of Geography at senior cycle, uptake of higher-level and levels of achievement by students in certificate examinations are all significantly strong.
- Timetable allocation and the provision of resources in the form of base-classrooms and information and communication technology (ICT) to support geography teaching are very good.
- The identification and implementation of planning priorities by the geography department in the areas of literacy and numeracy, and the advanced integration of ICT are indicative of an engaged and focused geography teaching team.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography teachers should formalise their prioritised planning initiatives within a time-bound action planning cycle and include clarity relating to aims, roles, intended outcomes and strategies for review.
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INTRODUCTION

Midleton College is co-educational fee-paying secondary school with an enrolment of 336 students. The school was founded in 1696 and provides Junior Certificate, the Transition Year (TY) programme and Leaving Certificate to both boarding and day students. Geography is a core subject in junior cycle and in the compulsory TY programme. Geography is offered as an optional subject for Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in all the geography lessons observed. These lessons had been well planned and prepared and were presented to students using methods that focused on active engagement, participation and student interaction.
- Students were challenged appropriately by lesson content and pace. Homework and previous learning were used to develop new topics within a carefully planned and agreed scheme at both junior and senior cycle. A class group preparing for a certificate examination focused particularly on key terminology and significant learning points as a complex and value-laden topic was discussed. Key points were gathered on the whiteboard and appropriate terminology was discussed, explained and applied within the boundaries and limitations of an examination question structure. This approach represented very good practice and students' responses were both positive and enthusiastic.
- In other lessons, those not directly focused on preparation for rapidly approaching certificate examinations, the students were engaged by interesting and well-presented topics. These lessons included an appropriate blend of teacher presentation, visual-stimulus materials, discussion and tasks.
- The integration of ICT played a significant role in the effectiveness of the geography lessons observed. Very well-chosen film clips were used to situate and introduce some topics, while others significantly advanced the key idea of the syllabus being treated in the lesson and enhanced students' understanding. Teachers limited the length of these film clips and interjected appropriately to stress key points and to link the setting to the students' experience.
- A satellite image of the Midleton region projected using a data-projector was used very effectively to examine the key functions and patterns of development of the town and its hinterland. The use of the zoom function allowed students to apply the concepts of relative location and urban function to their local area. A combination of maps, photographs and diagrams in a PowerPoint presentation also introduced the idea of polders as settings to understand settlement patterns. These visual-stimulus materials were seamlessly introduced and had a significantly positive impact on the effectiveness of the lessons observed.
- Geographical fieldwork plays an important role in the quality of teaching and learning and in the popularity of Geography among students in Midleton College. Students' fieldwork projects are on display in geography classrooms. A significant bi-annual fieldtrip to the Netherlands combines with more locally-based urban, coastal and glacial fieldtrips. These provide very valuable opportunities for students to engage with the physical and human environment as they enhance students' learning in both TY and in Leaving Certificate geography.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable and resource provision for Geography are very good. Two base-classrooms in a newly-opened school extension are used for geography lessons. A significant range of teaching resources including fieldwork equipment and audio-visual sources is stored in these rooms. These resources are shared by all members of the teaching team. Recent developments in ICT provision and the range of visual materials displayed also enhance the quality of these geography rooms as visual learning environments.
- Significant support for fieldwork by school management is matched by the commitment of the geography teachers to engage over many years in these valuable learning activities.
- Arising from an open subject-choice process, a large number of students opt to study Geography at senior cycle. Uptake of higher-level and achievement by students in Geography in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations are significantly strong.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collaborative planning for Geography is on-going and a departmental structure is in place. Regular departmental meetings are arranged, appropriate records are kept and a subject co-ordinator has been appointed. The planned rotation of this role is encouraged to facilitate the development of the leadership skills and capacities of the geography teaching team.
- The department has advanced a number of whole-school planning priorities in the areas of literacy and numeracy and the advanced integration of ICT. The outcomes of this work were clearly evident in lessons through the quality of engagement with ICT and the initial focus on literacy and numeracy with the first-year cohort. The identification and implementation of these planning priorities by the geography department is indicative of an engaged and focused geography teaching team.
- The geography department should now formalise their prioritised planning initiatives within a time-bound action-planning cycle and include clarity relating to aims, roles, intended outcomes and strategies for review.
- Individual planning for teaching and learning in Geography was of very good quality.

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.

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