

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

CBS Secondary School
Mitchelstown, County Cork
Roll number: 62420V

Date of inspection: 28 January 2014



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	28 January 2014
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

- Teaching and learning of very good quality was observed in geography lessons.
- Students were actively engaged and participated in lessons within very positive classroom learning environments.
- Uptake of higher level geography, and achievement at all levels of Geography, is strong.
- Geography is not provided as part of the optional Transition Year (TY) programme.
- Collaborative subject planning has been advanced.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To enhance current practice, the geography teachers should focus on further developing lesson structure and questioning strategies within geography lessons.
 - A TY module for Geography should be considered.
 - Clear planning priorities relating to literacy development and patterns arising from the analysis of outcomes from certificate examinations should inform collaborative subject planning within a time-bound action-planning cycle.
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INTRODUCTION

CBS Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice School's Trust (ERST). It has a current enrolment of 323 boys. Students are offered Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Teaching resources and subject options have been maximised through the alignment of senior cycle timetables with the nearby Presentation Secondary School, thus facilitating students from both schools to join shared geography classes in either campus.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning of very good quality was observed in geography lessons. Lessons were largely student-centred focusing on active engagement and participation towards the achievement of syllabus-appropriate learning outcomes. The teacher-based classrooms provided very positive and visual learning environments for both teaching and learning in Geography.
- It was clear in all the lessons observed that lesson topics formed elements of a sequence of planned learning. There was much reference to previous learning to support the introduction or the revision of topics. Students were observed to be comfortable with and engaged by the very effective classroom routines that were employed by teachers. The sequencing of lesson topics reflected the collaborative curricular plan for Geography and was also evident in student notebooks and copybooks as both classwork and homework.
- Lessons, in some cases, concentrated on revision for the upcoming pre-examinations for Junior Certificate. These fast moving lessons focused on the recall of topics and on understanding of process and formation. Soil development, weathering processes and landscape development were presented very effectively combining teacher exposition, questioning, discussion, tasks and visuals. In other lessons, where revision was not the primary focus, teachers used a variety of methods to introduce topics and to develop students' understanding of Irish regions and the pattern and impact of low population density in Mali. The lessons, presented at a slower yet appropriate pace, focused on students understanding of underlying concepts combining summary notes, the textbook, video clips and individual student tasks. The experience of the students in these contrasting lessons was both active and engaging.
- A focus on a small number of key subject-specific terms was used to support literacy development, to scaffold students' learning, and to underpin their understanding of concepts, particularly in junior cycle lessons. This initial focus on key terminology represents very good practice and should be extended and developed in all lessons as the school's literacy strategy is rolled out for all subjects and levels.
- There was an appropriate balance between student and teacher inputs in all the lessons observed. Most lessons were teacher-led but provided opportunities for students to explore topics and issues primarily through responses to questions. In one lesson, the skilled questioning style of the teacher encouraged students to think and to develop their responses. The differentiation and targeting of these questions facilitated these students to build their understanding of complex syllabus topics.
- A focus on questioning strategies could enhance current practice in all Geography lessons. Teachers should collaboratively research and share good practice relating to the ordering of questions, differentiation, targeting and wait-time for student responses. A consideration of lesson structure relating to learning intention and a review of the

learning outcomes that were achieved should also be used to develop current classroom practice.

- Teachers focused on the individual learning needs of students in all the lessons observed. Homework was assigned and monitored. Consideration should however be given to the provision of formal written feedback to students on their work in notebooks and copybooks at reasonable intervals. This process of formative assessment should have a further positive impact on students' learning.
- Uptake of higher level Geography, at both junior and senior cycle, is particularly strong as are levels of achievement at both ordinary and higher level in certificate examinations.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for Geography reflects normal practice in voluntary secondary schools with the provision of three class periods per week at junior cycle and five class periods for fifth year and sixth year. Geography however is not provided within the optional TY programme. It is therefore recommended that such a module be provided for students to allow for the experiencing of the subject within a non-examination environment. This should also support student's learning in advance of embarking on the Leaving Certificate syllabus in fifth year.
- The recent provision of teacher-based classrooms has clearly facilitated teachers to develop print-rich and visual classroom learning environments in most geography classrooms. The development of information and communication technology (ICT) resources and the considered positioning of whiteboards have also particularly enhanced the positive impact of such technologies on the teaching, and on the students' classroom experience, of Geography.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject development planning has been advanced by the current geography teaching team. A collaborative curricular plan has been developed, examination outcomes are analysed and strategies to integrate literacy and numeracy in geography lessons have been initiated. The positioning of map and aerial photograph interpretation within the current curricular plan should however be reconsidered to allow these skills to be practised and applied throughout both junior and senior cycle Geography.
- To build on current planning practice, it is recommended that the geography teachers identify a small number of key priorities for development and implementation within a time-bound action-planning cycle. These priorities should include the further integration of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies into Geography and should incorporate an evaluation of impact within existing school self-evaluation processes.
- Individual teacher planning and the resultant sequencing of learning were observed to be very good. The sequence of learning arose from syllabus key ideas and from the teachers' interpretation of the requirements of certificate examinations.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and the subject co-ordinator 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.

Published June 2014

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The report is an accurate reflection of what was observed, and its positive tone and its clear recommendations are appreciated by the school community. The inspection was carried out in a highly professional manner.

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

- 1) A Transition Year module for Geography and History will be included in the programme for the school year 2014/15.
- 2) Analysis of results for certificate examinations already occurs and school outcomes compare very favourably with national norms.