

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Sancta Maria College
Louisburgh, County Mayo
Roll number: 64660F

Date of inspection: 13 December 2011



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(s) of inspection	12 and 13 December 2011
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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good quality teaching was observed with exemplary practice evident in some lessons.
- Student achievements in certificate examinations reflect the high expectations set for learning.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used very effectively as a teaching and learning tool.
- A good range of methodologies including differentiation strategies was incorporated into lessons; however there is scope to extend the use of directed questions.
- The geography department has access to a wide range of resources and these were used well to support teaching and learning.
- Individual teacher preparation for lessons was of a high standard.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The further development of students' literacy skills should be prioritised in planning for teaching and learning.
 - A focus on learning outcomes should be facilitated at the end of each lesson.
 - Timetabling provision for Geography at junior cycle should be kept under review and double class periods should be facilitated in both years of the Leaving Certificate programme where possible.
 - The planned programmes of work for junior cycle and the Transition Year (TY) geography programme should be further developed to support and guide teaching and learning.
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INTRODUCTION

Sancta Maria College is a co-educational post-primary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 312 students drawn primarily from a rural catchment area. An optional TY programme is provided as part of the school's senior cycle curriculum. Geography is included within the TY programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching observed in lessons ranged from good to very good. It was clear that students were learning in each lesson.
- Effective teaching was observed where instruction was well sequenced, where there was a good balance between teacher talk and student input and where a range of assessment instruments was evident.
- The learning outcomes were clear in each lesson. In order to consolidate and evaluate learning, time should be set aside at the end of lessons to revisit the main learning outcomes. In one lesson a brief summary of lesson content on the whiteboard provided a clear focus on the key points. This practice should be considered for all lessons as a support for students in completing homework and as a revision aid.
- There was excellent use of information and communication technology (ICT) to present lesson content and visual stimulus materials. Particularly effective in supporting learning was the use of digital animations to illustrate and clarify the concepts under study.
- A suitable range of active learning methodologies was incorporated into lessons. Questioning strategies were integrated well and included a good mix of lower-order and higher-order questions. Directed questions to individual students should be more widely used at times to ensure that all students are challenged and included.
- There is good communication between the learning support department and the geography teachers in relation to individual student needs. There was evidence of differentiation in the classroom strategies deployed and in assessment practices.
- Homework is regularly assigned and students' copies had a good range of work. Students' work is monitored and provided with constructive feedback on how it could be improved. In some cases students' work is very effectively evaluated with the application of the State Examinations Commission (SEC) assessment criteria to identify strengths and areas for improvement. This good practice should be extended to all certificate classes.
- There were significant variations in the standard of students' literacy development. The geography teachers should agree a consistent approach towards promoting literacy skills within the teaching of the subject. The use of keyword banks and strategies to support students in the layout and presentation of their work including developing extended answers should be considered.
- Classroom management was excellent. A positive learning environment characterised by warm relationships and very good student behaviour was evident in lessons.
- Uptake of higher level Geography in both cycles is above the national norm as is student attainment in the higher grades at senior cycle.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is a core subject in junior cycle. At this level each class group is assigned the same teacher for History and Geography and a time allocation of five class periods per week is shared between both subjects. In view of the breadth of the syllabus this time provision should be kept under review as it currently places pressure on teachers and students to complete the course.
- At senior cycle Geography is an optional subject provided within subject option blocks based on students' initial preferences. Time allocation to the subject at this level is in line with syllabus requirements. Where possible a double class period should be facilitated in each of the senior-cycle years to facilitate practical activities.
- Continuing professional development is well supported by school management. The geography teachers attend in-service in the subject as it becomes available. It is good practice that the information and advice obtained at in-service is shared among staff on return to the school.
- The geography department has gathered a wide range of good quality subject-specific resources. These are listed in the school plan and are available to all of the teachers. Most classrooms are teacher-based and all are equipped with a laptop and data projector. Given the very good quality of electronic resources developed and compiled by individual teachers, consideration should be given to sharing these at subject department level.
- There is regular formal assessment of students' progress and standard procedures for reporting to parents are in place.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Formal subject department meetings are held each term and there is ongoing informal communication among the teachers. A planning time slot, separate to other subjects should be facilitated at the start of the year so that all members of the geography teaching team are enabled to attend the meeting.
 - A culture of review and evaluation is established in the geography department with strengths and areas for development identified. This is good practice. The fitting amendments made to the first-year teaching programme should be further extended and include the introduction of map and photograph skills from an early stage. Common testing is adopted across the department for each year group.
 - Many elements of good subject planning are in place. To enhance the efficacy of planning for teaching and learning, specific learning outcomes should be aligned to the content included in common programmes of work. In addition, shorter timeframes should be agreed for the planned schedule of topics. The TY teaching programme should be more clearly specified and should be redrafted in line with the framework outlined in the document 'Writing the Transition Year Programme'.
 - Individual teacher preparedness for lessons was very good. A range of high quality resources was well deployed to support teaching and learning.
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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 Board of Management acknowledges the very positive report received. The Board also wishes to congratulate the teachers on the exemplary practices shown in their classes and high expectations of learning set.

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

Based on the recommendations a co-ordinator for Junior Cert has been appointed.
First Year scheme of work is under review.
Literacy word-bank has been established.