

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Coláiste na Sceilge
Cahirciveen, County Kerry
Roll number: 76068N

Date of inspection: 7 March 2013



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	7 March 2013
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

- A very high standard of teaching and learning was observed in geography lessons in Coláiste na Sceilge.
- Lessons reflected the school's focus on instructional leadership strategies for creating coherent and well-structured, student-centred classroom experiences.
- Visual-stimulus materials, the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) and co-operative learning strategies enhanced students' learning in lessons.
- Uptake of Geography for Leaving Certificate and some patterns of achievement at Junior Certificate level are uneven.
- Collaborative planning for Geography is well advanced, although the Transition Year (TY) programme for the subject is now in need of some review.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography teachers and school management should establish clear developmental priorities to address uptake of Geography at senior cycle and the uneven patterns of achievement at junior cycle.
- The teaching of geographical skills should be repositioned in the subject plan from third year to first year to allow for the application and integration of these skills throughout junior cycle geography.
- The TY plan should be re-visited to focus on local settings and to provide an effective link for students between Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate geography.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste na Sceilge is a co-educational community college under the management of Kerry Education Service. It is the sole provider of second-level education in the western region of the Iveragh peninsula and offers Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme, and an optional TY programme. Current enrolment stands at 468 students. The school provides an Aonad Lán Ghaelach (an All-Irish unit) in junior cycle and has established a number of outreach links to local community education.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Positive relationships, mutual respect, an inclusive classroom atmosphere and active engaging pedagogy characterised the very good quality geography lessons observed in Coláiste na Sceilge. It was clear that geography classrooms provided interesting and engaging learning environments, within which the students could interact, respond and learn.
- The very good quality teaching and learning observed arose from carefully planned lessons with learning intentions that were shared with students. The most successful lessons had the minimum of teacher inputs and teacher talk and maximised opportunities for independent and co-operative student learning, student tasks and student responses to stimulus materials. These lessons also provided the most developed and focused learning intention that facilitated review by both teachers and students as the lessons progressed. Students were familiar with these classroom routines and engaged with enthusiasm toward the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.
- The positive effects of the whole-school engagement with the instructional leadership programme (ILP) were evident in geography lessons. It was clear that teachers' confidence and familiarity with the methods espoused by the programme had resulted in personalised teaching and learning approaches that suited the range of mixed-ability class groups at both junior and senior cycles. It was equally very positive that geography teachers had individualised their engagement with the ILP to match their strengths as teachers and their students' varying needs. To build on the practice observed, the geography teachers are encouraged to reflect on, and share good practices particularly relating to lesson coherence and learning intention in junior cycle lessons.
- An appropriate literacy focus was evident in the lessons observed. Key words that emerged during the lesson, or from the stimulus materials, were highlighted on a designated whiteboard and recorded by the students. The development of students' numeracy skills was less evident and opportunities to integrate such skills should be further developed in the context of all geography lessons.
- ICT was very appropriately and successfully integrated into teaching and, to a lesser degree, into learning in lessons. Digital photographs and PowerPoint were used in a number of lessons to good effect as was *Scoilnet Maps*, a web-based mapping application provided to schools by the Department of Education and Skills. This was used to examine the tourist potential of the local area. The increased integration of ICT into some lessons and greater engagement with *Scoilnet Maps* in all geography lessons is encouraged.
- The quality of student's work in their copybooks and notebooks was good as were the monitoring and assessment by the geography teachers. The whole-school engagement with half-term assessments based on coursework, projects or continuous assessment of homework tasks reflects the ideological framework of the revised Junior Certificate and

offers an opportunity to the geography teachers to further develop their practice in relation to independent and collaborative learning.

- Uneven patterns of achievement in the Junior Certificate examination are a concern and uptake of Geography for Leaving Certificate is low. The geography teachers and school management should analyse these patterns, review examination strategies and the application of geographical skills, relative to the demands of the examination, during revision towards the end of third year. The geography teachers should also review their integration of geographical skills throughout the three years of junior cycle geography. Arising from this review, clear developmental priorities should be identified and a time-bound strategy should be outlined and implemented.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for Geography reflects normal practice. While the allocation of two single lesson periods to TY geography reflects adequate provision, combining these into one double lesson should be considered to facilitate project and fieldwork during TY.
- Base classrooms have been developed, in many cases, into very good quality visual learning spaces. This is particularly the case for class groups that form the Aonad Lán Ghaelach. These rooms provided a print-rich environment for students that emphasised the linkages between the students' language learning and, in the lesson observed, their learning of Geography.
- The provision of ICT hardware and whiteboards to outline the learning intentions of the lesson, to capture the key words and to record related homework tasks, provided scaffolding for the teachers' engagement with the ILP and effective teaching practice. The use of these resources, and the potential gains for students through engagement with them, should be considered as part of the aforementioned review of students' achievement levels in Junior Certificate.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collaborative planning for Geography is well-embedded and advanced. The department is thus well placed to now address the issues of student achievement and the integration and application of geographical skills into teaching and learning. Engagement with map and aerial photograph skills should be re-positioned to early in first-year in the agreed teaching plan. This would facilitate teachers to integrate these skills into their teaching and would allow students the maximum opportunity to engage with these skills that are so important in the Junior Certificate examination.
- A review of the TY plan is also recommended. A skills-based focus on the geography of the local area should be considered while maintaining current assessment strategies based on student projects and fieldwork. This could increase student uptake of the subject for Leaving Certificate by providing a meaningful link for students between junior cycle and the demands of Leaving Certificate geography.
- Individual planning and preparation by geography teachers was of very good quality and was reflected in the quality lessons observed in the course of the evaluation.

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

- We are very happy with the content of the report while acknowledging the recommendations for improvement made in it.
- We were particularly happy to read : ‘A very high standard of teaching and learning was observed’, ‘Carefully planned lessons with learning intentions that were shared with students’ maximised opportunities for co-operative and independent learning.
- The report also acknowledges the ‘positive effects of the whole school engagement with the Instructional Leadership Programme’ to which we have committed.
- We have been keen to develop formative assessment and this too was noted; ‘The whole-school engagement with half-term assessments based on coursework, projects or continuous assessment of homework tasks reflects the ideological framework of the revised Junior Certificate’.

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

- All the teachers concerned have been given a copy of the report prior to meeting at the end of August to consider their observations and look at the implementation of the recommendations of the report.
- Initial feedback to the recommendations for improvement is positive and we look forward to undertaking these.
- As part of our policy for improving teaching and learning at CnS the report will be discussed by staff in a co-operative learning setting at the earliest opportunity.