An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Moate Community School
Moate, County Westmeath
Roll number: 91501L

Date of inspection: 11 March, 2011
SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Moate Community School, as part of a whole-school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Geography and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students’ work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers’ written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Moate Community School is a co-educational school. There is good whole school support for the teaching and learning of geography. Teachers have been assigned base classrooms and a wide range of teaching resources are provided on a needs basis. The current principal is a former teacher of Geography in the school.

At present there are nine teachers of Geography, most of whom are Geography graduates. Geography is allocated three periods a week at junior cycle and five periods a week at senior cycle, including one double period. This is in line with syllabus requirements. Each Transition Year (TY) student spends approximately ten weeks studying two geography modules. At senior cycle, geography is an optional subject and uptake is in a healthy state. There are currently two geography classes in fifth and sixth year. School management is commended for the level of provision and its support of the subject. Some teachers of Geography have attended relevant in career development for the revised Leaving Certificate course, information and communication technology (ICT) training and a course on skilled based approaches to teaching global issues.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The teachers of Geography have engaged in a significant level of collaborative planning and an experienced, committed and competent subject co-ordinator is in place. Subject meetings are held once a term and minutes are recorded and maintained in the Geography file. The use of file synchronisation software and shared folders to build up shared electronic resources and common tests has facilitated collaborative working and is a very positive development.

A subject plan was provided to the inspector. This plan outlines course concepts, skills and attitudes as well as weekly and term topics and themes to be covered. It is recommended that this plan be revised with a view to focusing less on content and more on action-based planning for improvement, teaching strategies and learning outcomes. The TY Plan for Geography needs to be
revised and a greater focus should be placed on cross-curricular local studies. More use should be made in planning for geography classes in general on local case studies and exemplars, where appropriate. Local studies could also be addressed in a cross-curricular context. The fact that the school is on Moate’s main street suggests the town itself should be used more often, and more constructively, in the teaching and learning of Geography.

Schemes of work for the various year groups were also in evidence which emphasised course aims and objectives, concepts and skills, as well as more content-oriented material. There is need for more action-based and improvement-oriented planning in these plans also.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

High standards are set by teachers regarding student behaviour and attainment. The standard of teaching observed during the evaluation of Geography was very good. In all of the lessons observed classroom management was of a very high standard. Learning took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and positive discipline. There was very clear and focused delivery of subject matter. Teacher questioning was focused and well directed. Students felt free to ask questions and they engaged willingly in relevant student tasks.

Teacher based classrooms were an asset to teaching and learning. However, in some of the smaller and more temporary classrooms teacher and student movement was restricted and opportunities for group work were limited. Lesson objectives were outlined at the beginning of most lessons observed. A minority of classes showed practical and innovative demonstrations of key concepts, ideas and processes.

The use of ICT in general and data projectors, in particular, has transformed teaching and learning of the subject by bringing a much more up-to-date, relevant and visual dimension to a subject like Geography that lends itself to such approaches. There is regular monitoring of copy work. However, there is a need for more written teacher comments in relation to written work in order to affirm and improve student’s work.

A number of valuable initiatives are in progress that support the teaching and learning of Geography including a Kenya Project, the Green Schools initiative, and the Young Environmentalist Awards. This co-curricular work is commended.

ASSESSMENT

A variety of formal procedures are in place to monitor and assess student progress. The standard range of term tests and mock examinations are held and reports of these and other results are communicated to parents by means of term reports. State examination results in Geography are collated and analysed.

The development of common testing procedures across a range of year groups is welcomed. Student understanding of key concepts was regularly and informally assessed by relevant and focused questioning. Some experimentation with peer assessment was in evidence but a greater focus on Assessment for Learning principles (AfL) and more focused and regular feedback on copy work, in particular, is recommended.
SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The teaching and learning of Geography is very good in all classes observed.
- There is a large, competent geography teaching team in the school.
- The time allocated to Geography is appropriate and is in line with syllabus requirements.
- Collaborative planning is well developed and is led by an efficient and experienced subject co-ordinator.
- There was an atmosphere of mutual respect and positive discipline in all classes observed.
- The creative use of ICT and data projectors, in particular, has transformed the teaching and learning of Geography.
- A number of valuable initiatives are in progress that are supportive of the teaching and learning of Geography including a Kenya Project, the Green Schools initiative, and the Young Environmentalist Awards.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- The Geography plan needs to be revised in order to make it less content driven. More emphasis should be placed in the revised plan on action planning for improvement, teaching and learning strategies and learning outcomes.
- More locally based examples, case studies, maps and photographs should be used in Geography classes, where appropriate, including Transition Year.
- A Transition Year module focussed on Moate, in a cross-curricular context, should be considered as the school is located in the town’s main street.
- Student copy work is monitored regularly in most classes but it needs to be corrected more regularly and more closely with a view to affirming, and improving student work.
- Consideration should be given to gradually reducing the size of the Geography teaching team with a view to the facilitation of more collaborative working.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Geography and with the principal and deputy principal, at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

The board of management 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 February 2012
Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

As a Department we were very encouraged by the positive comments and appreciate that the hard work of our department has been recognised as a result of WSE. It will be the aim of the Department to fulfil the recommendations outlined by the inspection. While the size of the Department is not within our control we intend to improve our collaboration through the continued use of our Drop box system and regular Department meetings.