

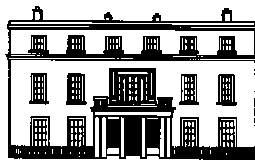
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**St Joseph's College
Lucan, County Dublin
Roll number: 60263V**

Date of inspection: 19 September 2012



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	19 September 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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

Main Findings

- Teaching and learning were good or very good in the classes visited with many examples of excellent practice in evidence.
- Teaching and learning took place in an atmosphere of mutual respect and very good rapport was evident between students and teachers.
- The regular and appropriate use of information and communications technology (ICT) and data projectors is a major stimulus to the teaching and learning of Geography.
- The geography teachers work well as a team and an experienced, dedicated co-ordinator is in place.

Main Recommendations

- There needs to be a greater focus on correction of students' copy work and there is a need for more written teacher comments towards improvement of students' written work.
- The geography plan and planning processes should be less content driven, more reflective of changes made or planned in the teaching and learning process and planning should be more oriented towards improvement and self-review.
- There is a need to build on progress made in the development of literacy and numeracy strategies by developing a structured plan for literacy and numeracy in Geography.
- Much greater use should be made of the local area in the teaching and learning of Geography especially in relation to locally-based project work and the use of local exemplars at junior cycle level.

Introduction

St. Joseph's College, Lucan is a large girls' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). The school offers the Junior Certificate programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme. The current enrolment is 883. Students come mainly from the Lucan area and from a variety of social and cultural backgrounds. All students study Geography in junior cycle. The uptake of Leaving Certificate Geography is very strong with two class groups in fifth year and sixth year.

Teaching and learning

- Teaching and learning were good in all classes visited and were very good or excellent in a number of classes.
- In all classes teaching was clear and focussed. Key themes and concepts were well explained. Students were on task and demonstrated a good knowledge of the subject.
- Teaching and learning took place within a disciplined environment and within a context of mutual respect in all classes. A very strong work ethic was evident among students and teachers.
- Substantial progress has been made in integrating ICT into teaching and learning and classrooms have been well resourced in this regard. Some excellent practice was observed in the regular and routine use of the internet to bring greater relevance and immediacy to the subject especially in relation to the teaching of topics such as earthquakes, volcanoes, weather and climate. An innovative pilot project involving the regular use of social media to dialogue with students is underway and is highly commended.
- Teachers prepared well for their lessons. Lesson outcomes were well outlined at the start of most lessons and good links were made with prior learning. Good directed questioning strategies were used in most classes. Learners contributed significantly to lessons and their input was sought and valued by teachers.
- First-year learners, in particular, were given a lively and interesting introduction to the subject with a focus on such topics as earthquakes and volcanoes.
- Copies and hardback notebooks, in particular, are well maintained by students and regularly monitored by teachers. More written comments from teachers that highlight ways of improving student work are recommended. This would greatly enhance teaching, learning and assessment and would also improve the students' writing skills.
- Literacy and numeracy skills were supported by clear explanations of key terms and concepts, differentiated questioning, use of key word strategies and by good individual attention being given to students. Every opportunity should be taken to exploit fully the huge potential of Geography for literacy and numeracy development.
- In one junior cycle class visited an impressive group-based activity was undertaken while studying Brazil. In other classes there was a willingness to experiment with peer assessment as well as group and pair work. Such activities reduced the amount of teacher talk, allowed for the student voice to be heard and engaged students purposefully.

- Examination results in Geography are strong at both junior and senior cycle. These results are collated and analysed annually at both school and subject levels. The Christmas examination results are also used to identify successes and areas of concern

Subject provision and whole school support

- There is good whole-school support for the teaching and learning of Geography.
- Geography is a well-established subject in the school and is compulsory at junior cycle.
- The uptake of Leaving Certificate Geography is very strong with two class groups in fifth year and sixth year.
- The provision of teacher based classrooms has been a great asset to the teaching and learning process.
- Three periods a week are allocated to Geography in junior cycle and five periods including one double period at senior cycle, which is in line with syllabus requirements.
- The geography department is allocated money for resources on a needs basis.
- Teachers are encouraged by school management to attend relevant in-career development courses including subject-specific courses.

Planning and preparation

- Formal subject department meetings are held six or seven times a year and minutes of these meetings are maintained in the geography folder. These minutes should be more detailed and meetings should have a longer term, more reflective improvement focus. Geography teachers meet regularly and share resources informally.
- The geography department is characterised by a spirit of collegiality and co-operation and is ably led by a committed co-ordinator since 1998. While co-ordination is good it may be time to consider sharing or rotating the role and duties of co-ordinator.
- A detailed subject department plan for Geography has been developed. This plan outlines the aims, learning objectives and content of the Geography syllabuses and is a useful starting point for future planning, self-evaluation and review.
- Subject planning is mainly content driven and needs to focus more on planning for improvement. Agreed sequencing of topics and common examinations are indicative of the co-operation at subject level. Yearly plans and schemes of work are prepared for each year group. These should be less focussed on content and should concentrate more on active methodologies and improvement. It is commendable that topic lists for the year are shared with students.
- There is a need to build on the progress already made by developing a structured plan for literacy and numeracy development within the subject.
- The local area is used to some extent as a resource for the teaching and learning of Geography especially in relation to the fieldwork study at senior cycle. More locally based projects at junior cycle level in particular, will act as a major stimulus for the subject and will be motivating for teachers and students.

- A cross-curricular project between the art and geography departments entitled '*Know your Ireland*' is commended as is a stamp-based fundraising venture for bog land conservation. Co-curricular activities such as the green schools initiative and orienteering in TY are praiseworthy. The school was awarded its first green flag in 2011. Global warming and other environmental projects in TY are both innovative and engaging.
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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 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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