

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Drogheda Grammar School
Drogheda, County Louth
Roll number: 63870L

Date of inspection: 6 April 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

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| Date of inspection | 6 April 2011 |
| Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students• Meeting with subject co-ordinator | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers |

MAIN FINDINGS

- Very high quality teaching was observed in most of the classrooms visited.
- Students in most lessons demonstrated a good knowledge of their courses and are developing a range of geographical skills.
- Classroom management was generally effective; however, students became disengaged for part of the time in some lessons.
- There is scope to improve the quality of students' written work and to improve student attainment.
- Very good progress has been made in implementing recommendations made in a previous subject inspection report.
- A very comprehensive subject department plan has been developed, monitored and amended by the collaborative efforts of the members of the geography department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Student disengagement in some lessons needs to be addressed through more careful planning by teachers and very specific learning outcomes for each lesson and the cultivation of a more responsible attitude on the part of some students.
- The inclusion of learning outcomes in the curriculum plan for the junior cycle and the TY is recommended.
- Assessment for learning (AFL) strategies should be used to improve the quality of students' written work and to improve student attainment.

INTRODUCTION

Geography is a core subject for all classes in the junior cycle and is included within the compulsory Transition Year. It is offered as an optional subject for the established Leaving Certificate where the uptake of the subject is in a healthy state.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very high quality teaching was observed in most of the classrooms visited. Teaching was most effective where clear learning outcomes were outlined to students at the start of lessons. This should become standard practice in all lessons.
- The use of active learning strategies by teachers, such as pair work and the use of clearly defined tasks, supported students' learning. Pair work was most effective where students were provided with a clear task, with supporting materials, and where feedback was taken in a whole-class setting.
- There was a good focus on literacy as new terms were introduced and carefully explained. The display of key words in classrooms is encouraged.
- Visual learners were very well catered for by the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and students were further supported by one-to-one attention during group work. Teachers are paying attention to the learning needs of students and are developing resources to support students. Consideration should be given to team teaching as a means of supporting students with special educational needs.
- Students in most lessons demonstrated a good knowledge of their courses and are developing a range of geographical skills. Teachers used questioning strategies that required students to develop their answers, thus facilitating the development of higher-order thinking skills.
- Classroom management was generally effective; however, students became disengaged for part of the time in some lessons. Identifying specific learning outcomes, setting clear tasks for students and the closer monitoring of student activity will help to minimise the loss of tuition time in those lessons. A small number of students need to take responsibility for engaging more effectively with the planned learning activities.
- Displays of maps, charts and particularly students' work created stimulating and attractive learning environments.
- Homework was set in all lessons observed. In some instances this provided an appropriate level of challenge for students.
- Teachers assessed students' progress in lessons through focused questioning. Students' written work is monitored and they have been provided with some feedback on their work. There is scope for more specific and detailed feedback to be given to students. The quality of written work in some students' copybooks was poor. Agreement among teachers on strategies and standards to be achieved are recommended in order to improve the quality of students' presentation and written work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Time allocation for Geography is in line with syllabus recommendations and lessons are appropriately distributed across students' timetables.
- Students are provided with an open choice of subjects for the established Leaving Certificate before option bands are generated. This is in line with best practice.
- Teachers have developed a wide range of resources to support teaching and learning, with the support of school management. These resources have been catalogued and are available to all teachers. The upgrading of the school's ICT facilities is being used effectively by teachers to enhance the quality of teaching.
- The members of the geography department liaise with the learning-support department in providing support to students with special educational needs. Support teachers are made aware of topics currently being studied by students.
- It is noteworthy that the members of the geography department provide students with an opportunity to engage in fieldwork as a means of stimulating interest in Geography and of enabling students to learn and to develop appropriate skills.
- A whole-school homework policy is in place. Homework is regularly set, corrected and monitored by the geography teachers.
- Teachers have availed of continuing professional development and their engagement with their professional organisation, the Association of the Geography Teachers of Ireland is commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning is well established and teachers work collaboratively to share their professional expertise. This has resulted in the development of a very comprehensive plan for the department which was the subject of a recommendation in a previous subject inspection report. This plan contains all the organisational arrangements for the subject along with long-term curriculum plans. There was clear evidence that teachers have been engaged in evaluating this plan and amendments have been made to the long-term curriculum plan.
- It is noteworthy that the junior cycle curriculum plan contains a good balance between physical and human geography and the development of key geographical skills in each year of the programme. Further detail could be included on the integration of map and photograph skills throughout the long-term curriculum plan.
- A subject co-ordinator is in place and this role is rotated in line with best practice. Teachers also share resources and common tests for year groups are in place. Examples of these tests provided during the evaluation were of high quality and were based on models used by the State Examinations Commission.
- Teachers maintain good records of attendance, homework and class tests which are used to report on students' progress to parents.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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