

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Geography**  
**REPORT**

**Maria Immaculata Community College**  
**Dunmanway, County Cork**  
**Roll number: 76086P**

**Date of inspection: 30 March 2012**



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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	30 March 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- An excellent standard of teaching and learning was observed in geography lessons.
- The geography teaching team is pro-active in advancing the position of Geography in the school.
- The positioning of Geography as an optional subject for junior cycle limits students' access to the subject.
- Uptake and achievement levels in higher-level geography are rising.
- A very well developed geography room significantly enhances the students' experience of the subject.
- An active subject planning process represents very good practice.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The geography teachers should refocus the content of their first-year curricular plan towards the needs of students who will finish their study of Geography on completion of first year.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Maria Immaculata Community College is the sole education provider at second level in the Dunmanway area and it has an enrolment of 493 students. This co-educational school offers a full range of programmes including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Junior Certificate, the Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme and Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- An excellent quality of teaching and learning was observed in geography lessons in the course of this subject inspection. Teachers were clearly immersed, and enthusiastically engaged, in providing an interesting and stimulating geographical education for their students in mixed-ability classroom settings.
- This quality of teaching and learning was characterised by the teachers' excellent subject and syllabus knowledge and by their confidence in engaging with their own students in the topic for study. The teachers' approach reflected collegiality, a clear rationale for the value and importance of a geographical education for their students, and both collaborative planning and preparedness for daily routine interactions with students in geography classrooms.
- Lessons were visual, skills-based and interactive. The learning intention was clear, outlined for students from the outset and reviewed toward the end of the lesson. Students were engaged by a range of tasks and stimulus materials that required individual oral and written responses. Effective differentiation was achieved through targeted questioning, differentiated worksheets, and through the provision of individual attention and assistance in lessons. The very personable rapport between students and teachers and the inclusive atmosphere of geography lessons contributed to very positive learning experiences for students.
- Clear and established routines were in place in lessons observed relating to homework, questioning and the planned learning. JCSP methodologies were in evidence, including a staged approach to topics, a focus on key words and a variety of tasks for students. Mapwork, photograph analysis and diagram drawing were integrated into lessons. Of particular note was the focus on visual literacy that elicited detailed individual responses from students to a photograph in the textbook, and the very effective and differentiated learning review strategy that used individual student postcards to draw together the key points of the lesson.
- Senior-cycle lessons were practical, interactive and visual. Students worked with a range of soil samples and completed experiments to test for a range of qualities and conditions. This practical work was then translated into key learning points through analysis of datasheets and the interpretation of complex graphs. Students were engaged in higher-order thinking skills and were challenged to apply their learning to their local environment and to other areas of the syllabus particularly in regional geography.
- A range of other developments also contribute to the quality of the students' experience of geography in the school. A geography folder initiative for all class groups allows students to gather and keep worksheets, hand-out materials and homework over a number of years facilitating continuity of study for each syllabus. Good quality fieldwork at junior cycle provides a very positive learning experience for students. The effective

integration of information and communication technology (ICT), and the clear emphasis on numeracy and literacy all contribute to the quality in evidence.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Access to Geography is limited by the unusual positioning of Geography as an optional subject for students on completion of first year. Uptake of Geography is low as a consequence, with approximately one half of the student cohort studying Geography for Junior Certificate and just one quarter of students studying the subject in the current Leaving Certificate cohort. For a number of years, it has not been possible to create a Leaving Certificate geography class due to the limits on uptake that result from the decision to position Geography as an optional subject following first year in junior cycle.
- While all students study the subject in first year, the allocation of just two class periods per week is very low. This allocation is somewhat remedied by an allocation of four class periods per week in second and third year for students who have opted to study Geography to Junior Certificate level.
- It is very positive that Geography is positioned as a core subject in the optional TY programme. Students engage with a range of geographical skills, individual project work and fieldwork. These opportunities enhance and support students who continue with their study of Geography to Leaving Certificate. It equally supports the development of transferable skills and capacities for those who do not continue to study the subject.
- A very well-equipped and good-quality geography room significantly enhances the visibility of the subject in the school. The room presents a visual learning environment for students with displays of students' projects, models, fieldwork photographs, maps and posters. The work of the geography teachers in creating this very positive space for Geography is acknowledged.
- While the number of students studying Geography is low, uptake of higher-level is strong and is increasing. Levels of achievement in certificate examinations are also good with on-going improvement in evidence.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Collaborative subject planning in Geography represents very good practice. A very active planning process has identified and achieved a number of planning priorities for Geography. These achievements include the designation of a geography room, the creation of an impressive geography noticeboard, the provision of fieldwork experiences for all junior cycle class groups, and the introduction of the aforementioned folders for students.
  - The quality of individual planning by teachers is excellent.
  - To build on the very good planning practice in evidence, the geography teachers should refocus the content of their first-year curricular plan towards students who complete their geographical education at the end of first year. The plan should focus on key skills and competencies relating to, for example, mapwork, understanding the weather, and environmental sustainability.
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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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.