

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT
Blakestown Community School
Dublin 15

Roll number: 91316Q

Dates of inspection: 4 April 2014



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

Date of inspection	4 April 2014
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, teaching and learning were of very good quality in the lessons observed with some excellent practice evident.
- Teaching and learning took place in a positive and well-disciplined environment during all lessons evaluated.
- Group work was used very effectively to enhance teaching and learning in the majority of classes visited.
- Very good progress has been made in the effective integration of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching and learning and ICT is used very effectively in subject planning.
- The uptake of Leaving Certificate Geography is very high.
- There is a very strong tradition of geography fieldwork and project work in the school.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater use should be made of the local area at all levels as projects and case studies based on the Blakestown and west Dublin areas will help to promote and to stimulate greater interest and involvement of students.
- There needs to be a more regular, consistent and co-ordinated approach within the geography department to correcting students' copy work.

INTRODUCTION

Blakestown Community School is a multi-denominational, co-educational community school in west Dublin. The current enrolment numbers 501 students. The students come from a wide variety of social, cultural and economic backgrounds. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the established Leaving Certificate, and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, teaching and learning were of very good quality and some excellent practice was evident in the lessons observed. Teacher instruction was clear. Key concepts and skills were well explained in all lessons.
- Teaching and learning took place in a disciplined and an affirming environment during all lessons evaluated. There was very good rapport evident between teachers and students.
- Lesson outcomes were clearly stated at the beginning of lessons and were usually returned to at the end. The lesson outcomes are clearly outlined in the subject department's yearly schemes of work.
- Active methodologies were observed in many lessons. Group work, for example, was used effectively to enhance teaching and learning in the majority of lessons visited. Questioning strategies were generally effective but questions needed to be more targeted towards individuals in some classes. Students reading aloud promoted student engagement in a number of lessons. Brainstorming was also used effectively.
- Many classes had print-rich environments. The display of first-year students' projects in their classrooms on the topic of volcanoes was both impressive and motivational for students.
- Very good progress has been made in the use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning as evidenced by the good and appropriate use of data projectors to provide engaging visual material and to provide up-to-date case studies and exemplars in the lessons observed. The use of Scoilnet maps and other digital maps is particularly commended.
- Some examples and case studies from the local area were used in the lessons observed. However, greater use of the Blakestown and West Dublin areas should be made in teaching and learning at all levels. Locally based projects, especially when they combine the human, historical, physical and economic aspects of the subject, have strong motivational and promotional benefits. They also promote cross-curricular learning and teaching.
- Homework is regularly given and students' written work is well monitored. There are some good examples of developmental feedback by teachers of Geography in students' copybooks. However, a more consistent and co-ordinated approach needs to be taken to written correction of copy work. Comments towards improvement should be written on students' copy work more consistently.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabling arrangements for the teaching of Geography are good. There are three periods a week for Geography in junior cycle and five periods per week are allocated at Leaving Certificate level.

- Uptake of the subject is very strong among Leaving Certificate students. For example, there are three class groups in the current sixth-year cohort studying Geography.
- The subject is well resourced by management.
- Teachers are facilitated and encouraged by management to attend relevant professional development courses.
- The use of ICT in teaching and learning and in subject planning is very actively promoted by management at whole-school and subject levels.
- Teacher-based classrooms facilitate the gathering, storage and display of hard copy resources such as maps, photographs and charts. Print-rich environments were very much in evidence on the classroom walls.
- The school's involvement in the Green Schools programme is indicative of whole-school support for environmental and geographical issues.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is a good team spirit evident within the department. Geography team meetings are held termly and are minuted. The business of these meetings is focussed and well structured. However, the formal subject meetings need to be more reflective and strategic. They should focus in particular, on what is working well and on how improvements in teaching, learning and assessment can be achieved.
- There is an able subject co-ordinator in place and the agreed role of co-ordinator is clearly outlined in the geography department folder.
- The quality of individual teacher and subject department planning is very good. Plans are stored electronically which facilitates easy access to them. A detailed individual scheme of work has been developed for each year group.
- The use of a student and teacher evaluation survey in TY Geography to inform future planning and review is commended.
- Formal school assessments take place twice yearly. Regular class tests also take place which helps to focus students and to track their progress. Though the numbers of students who achieve higher-level grades is on the increase, there is insufficient target setting for improvement in examination results within the geography department. Student attainment in examinations should become an integral part of the self-evaluation and review processes within the subject. Examination results are analysed annually and compared against national norms. This analysis of student attainment should form the basis of focussed target setting for improvement within the context of whole-school evaluation and self-review.
- The gathering, storage and regular sharing of a large volume of good quality electronic resources by the geography teachers is very impressive. Geography teachers have developed common programmes of work and have worked impressively on sharing ICT based resources and on sharing expertise in project and fieldwork development.
- There is a very strong tradition of geography fieldwork and project work in the school. The second-year fieldtrip to Glendalough is highly commended.

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.

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