Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Presentation College
Currylea, Tuam, Co. Galway
Roll number: 63170G

Date of inspection: 9 October 2014
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>8 and 9 October 2014</th>
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<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• Good quality teaching and learning was observed with some very good practice in evidence.

• A range of good quality learning aids including excellent visual resources was used to support student learning.

• There was a good level of student engagement in lessons, however strategies for differentiation should be further developed.

• Very good practice was noted in the implementation of key word strategies, however, literacy support for students should also focus on the development of writing skills.

• There is very good whole-school support for Geography in terms of the time allocated to the subject, teacher deployment and provision of resources.

• Subject department planning is collaborative and effective.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The increased use of differentiated approaches and methodologies that actively engage and challenge students across the ability continuum is recommended.

• The development of students’ writing skills in Geography should be a key priority across the department.

• Assessment for learning practices should facilitate and promote student self-assessment and peer-assessment.
INTRODUCTION

Presentation College is a voluntary secondary school for girls operating under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education – an Irish School Trust (CEIST). The school is one of three providers of post-primary education in the town of Tuam. There are currently 460 students enrolled in the school. The school provides the Transition Year (TY) programme as an optional component of the senior-cycle curriculum.

- Good quality teaching and learning was observed with some very good practice evident.
- Positive teacher-student rapport was underpinned by mutual respect and an affirming and caring atmosphere.
- Learning outcomes were shared with students and these were well reinforced at different stages in the lesson to consolidate learning.
- There was very good preparation of materials to support student learning including worksheets and teacher-devised summary sheets.
- Information and communication technology was used in all lessons to complement instruction. Some excellent visual resources were integrated to illustrate and explain concepts in a stimulating manner. However, to optimise the benefit of electronic learning aids they should be displayed on a larger scale so that they are clearly visible to all students.
- Teachers should use Scoilnet Maps to support the teaching of ordnance survey map skills and aerial photograph interpretation. This resource would provide access to an extensive range of maps and photographs, these could be also be displayed centrally and thus facilitate the more effective whole-class teaching of key skills.
- In the lessons observed questioning combined with teacher instruction were central methodologies. Questioning strategies were generally used effectively to interact with students, to advance lesson material and in some cases to develop higher-order thinking skills.
- There was some good evidence of differentiation through the incorporation of visual resources and where teachers provided individual support to students. However, there was scope in some instances to further challenge and engage students across the range of abilities through the use of differentiated tasks and questioning strategies.
- Teacher instruction was clear and thorough. Very good practice was noted where the lesson material was contextualised by reference to regional and national examples and where links were made to the students’ familiar experience.
- The learning environment in classrooms was enhanced through the display of subject materials and students’ project work.
- Subject terminology was well explained, reinforced and integrated in all lessons and students maintain word banks on the topics under study. In some instances there was a good focus on numeracy.
- The use of short, visual key point summaries including the use of graphic organisers is recommended where note-taking is used as a methodology in lessons or where note-taking is set as a homework task.
- Strategies to support students’ writing skills in Geography should be prioritised, particularly in certificate examination classes. In this context, the regular use of extended
questions, the sharing of assessment criteria and exemplars of good work is recommended to support students in the layout and development of answers to these types of questions.

- Homework is regularly assigned and monitored. In some cases very good feedback is provided to students with strengths affirmed and suggestions for improvement noted. To benefit from this students should follow up on the feedback given. Strategies to promote self-assessment and peer assessment should be developed so that students can take a more central role in assessing and improving the quality of their written work.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Geography is a core component of the junior cycle curriculum. In line with the recommendation of a previous inspection report, three class periods per week are now allocated to Geography across each year of the junior cycle. At senior cycle Geography is an optional subject. The move from pre-fixed bands to an open choice subject structure is a very positive development. There is very good whole-school support for students to assist them in the process of subject choice. In both cycles classes are of mixed-ability.

- Geography is not currently included in the TY programme due to reported constraints on available teaching resources.

- Geography is very well supported by school management with the provision of teacher-based classrooms and a wide range of resources. Teachers are deployed to the subject in line with their qualifications.

- Management actively supports and facilitates teachers continuing professional development (CPD). As part of the department’s professional development programme the geography teachers should come together to share and develop their skills in the use of *Scoilnet Maps*.

- Common assessment is in place for all year groups. There is regular formal assessment of students and parents are kept well informed on students’ progress through school reports and parent-teacher meetings. Students’ progress is also tracked through the year head system.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Appropriate structures are in place to facilitate formal subject department planning. The geography teaching team work well together in a collegial manner. Teachers have compiled an electronic folder of geographical resources for shared use across the teaching team. A good quality subject plan and common programmes of work with a clear focus on learning outcomes have been collaboratively developed for each year group. To build on this good planning, it is recommended that ordnance survey map and aerial photograph skills are integrated into the teaching of topics where relevant. In line with good practice numeracy and literacy strategies are appropriately linked to the planned teaching programme.

- A good level of reflection and review underpins the work of the department. Good progress has been made in addressing the recommendations of a previous inspection report. The first-year teaching programme has been amended, resources are catalogued and good progress has been made in the increased integration of ICT. Student attainment in certificate examinations is analysed on a year-on-year basis and records are maintained.
in the subject plan. To further the department’s engagement in self-evaluation a small number of agreed developmental priorities should be selected and advanced annually through the development of an action planning cycle.

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.