

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Rockwell College
County Tipperary
Roll number: 65300D

Date of inspection: 6 February 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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	6 February 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in Geography was very good in all lessons observed.
- The very positive classroom atmosphere and rapport between students and their teachers significantly enhanced the interactive and communicative quality of the lessons observed.
- Teaching strategies were observed to be very effective in placing students' learning at the centre of classroom activity.
- Uptake of higher-level geography is significantly strong and examination outcomes for students are very good.
- Teacher-based classrooms provide a visual and print-rich learning environment for geography students.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To clearly establish the connection between subject planning and teaching and learning, the geography teachers should outline the learning intention of their lesson and link this to the syllabus and to the intended learning outcomes that are already specified in the subject plan.
 - The geography teachers should focus on students' literacy and numeracy in Geography as a collaborative planning priority within a time-bound action-planning cycle.
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INTRODUCTION

Rockwell College is a voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 516 students. This co-educational school provides for the needs of day students, day-boarders and longer-term boarders. Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are offered to students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the geography lessons observed during the subject inspection. Lessons were carefully structured, were syllabus appropriate and presented a significant learning challenge for students. While the intended learning outcome was not specifically outlined for students, the topic for study was very clear as it linked to students' previous learning and was progressed at a pace that suited the mixed-ability composition of the class groups. A clear presentation of the learning intention of the lesson at the outset of the lessons would further enhance current effective practice. The learning intention could be reviewed on completion of the lesson, linked to the appropriate syllabus key idea and could then be used to assess learning in the form of homework or more formal tests or examinations.
- Learning was advanced in lessons through teacher-initiated discussion, questioning, student responses and note-making of the salient points. In some lessons, these key points were presented on a PowerPoint presentation while in others the main points were stressed and reinforced by the teacher and written on the whiteboard. In other lessons, students were invited to demonstrate their learning and understanding at the whiteboard. Students' were also observed to work individually or in pairs on task-related worksheets that reinforced or expanded the learning. All of these strategies were observed to be very effective in placing students' learning at the centre of classroom activity.
- Appropriate and well chosen visual materials had a significant positive impact on the students' experience of the planned learning. Topics, including settlement, tertiary activities and the principles relating to climate and weather, were illustrated and exemplified by maps, charts, statistics and a video-clip. In each case, these visual-stimulus materials enhanced students' understanding of the learning point of the lesson and facilitated them to respond and question, as appropriate.
- Junior cycle students produced very good quality projects and models to illustrate their understanding of topics in physical geography. These projects form an assessment component in junior cycle house examinations and the students were very clear in the articulation of their learning in the context of these projects. This aspect of learning in junior cycle is very effective as it allows students to use a range of skills and aptitudes in their study of Geography.
- Students were active participants in all lessons and responded with interest and purpose to the topics for study and to the tasks that were integrated into lessons. The very positive classroom atmosphere and rapport between students and their teachers significantly enhanced the interactive and communicative quality of these lessons.
- Geography is a core subject in junior cycle. Uptake of higher-level is significantly strong and reflects both the quality of teaching and learning, and the high expectations that teachers have established for their students. Uptake of higher level in senior cycle is also very good, as are outcomes for students in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for Geography as a core subject in junior cycle and TY, and as an optional subject for Leaving Certificate, is in line with normal practice. The subject-choice process in advance of entry to fifth year is based initially on a survey of students' preferences and Geography experiences strong uptake in this situation. Geography is also provided as a replacement subject at senior cycle for students with exemptions from Gaeilge.
- A system of teacher-based classrooms has been established. These provide a very interesting and equally stimulating learning environment for geography students. Teachers have decorated their rooms with maps, photographs, posters and a range of students' projects. The provision of information and communication technology (ICT) also enhances the quality of these spaces. In each case, rooms have been personalised by the teacher but with attention to providing a very positive place for students to study geography.
- Fieldwork is facilitated at junior cycle and in TY, often in combination with Physical Education (PE) activities. Two of the Geography teachers have qualifications in PE and, with appropriate planning and a balance in activities, the combination of aspects of the school's sporting culture with geographical fieldwork represents a very positive synthesis.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Individual planning, as evidenced in both written documents and in the observation of classroom practices, is of a very high quality. Individually, teachers have gathered and adapted a range of materials both from electronic and paper-based sources to support their teaching in the classroom.
- Collaborative planning is advanced in Rockwell with the development of a subject plan and agreed teaching schemes for each year group. It is clear that teachers engage in professional dialogue, support for beginning teachers and the analysis of outcomes for geography students in examinations. To build on this good practice and to link subject planning with teaching and learning, the geography teachers should now, as a routine in their classroom practice, outline the learning intention of their lesson to establish a clear link to the syllabus and to the learning outcomes that are already specified in the subject plan.
- To advance collaborative planning, it is also recommended that the geography teaching team focus on students' literacy and numeracy in Geography as a priority within a time-bound action-planning cycle. This would support the Department of Education and Skills' literacy and numeracy strategy that outlines the role of subject departments and the work of individual teachers in supporting students' literacy and numeracy development in normal classroom practice.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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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