

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**Christian Brothers School
Thurles, County Tipperary
Roll number: 65450W**

Date of inspection: 10 May 2013



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	9 and 10 May 2013
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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.
- A range of good quality resources and effective methodologies were used to engage students and support their learning.
- The very high uptake of higher level Geography and student achievement in certificate examinations reflects the high expectations set for learning.
- Provision for Geography is very good in the school
- The geography teachers are engaged in a collaborative and reflective planning process.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The more consistent use of targeted and differentiated questioning is recommended.
 - Assessment practices should facilitate a range of assessment modes, promote student self-assessment and provide for the greater provision of formative feedback in some cases.
 - The transition year (TY) geography plan should be further developed and a geographical investigation should be included in this plan.
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INTRODUCTION

Christian Brothers School is a large boys' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school has a current enrolment of 709 students. The curricular programmes provided include the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.
- Where learning outcomes were outlined and shared with students these provided a clear focus for the delivery of the lesson in terms of structure, pace and coverage of material. This good practice should be extended to all lessons and learning outcomes should be reviewed at the end to assess student progress.
- Students' learning in Geography was supported by the use of information and communication technology to integrate visual materials and to engage students with the topics under study. Effective links were made with previous learning and the local environment was used to explore and clarify concepts. Some classrooms had maps and geographical posters on display. The potential use of the classroom environment as a learning resource should be developed further. It is suggested that strategies are deployed so that students could contribute to these developments.
- Classroom management was very good in all lessons. An affirming and disciplined atmosphere was underpinned by good interpersonal relationships.
- Students' active participation in lessons was achieved through questioning, discussion pair work and independent tasks. Best practice was observed where there was an appropriate balance between global questioning and questioning designed to engage and challenge students across the range of abilities. Greater use of such questioning is recommended in some instances.
- Good attention was paid to students' literacy skills. Subject-specific terminology was well explained and integrated. Very good practice was noted in one lesson where a scaffold approach based on assessment criteria was utilised to assist students in developing their writing skills. As an alternative to the more traditional approach of note-taking and to encourage higher-order thinking in students the greater use of mind maps and other graphic organisers is recommended to develop the skills of note-making.
- Homework is regularly assigned and copybooks examined were generally of a good standard. In some cases very good feedback is provided to students with strengths affirmed and suggestions for improvement noted. The greater use of this good practice is recommended in some instances. To further develop assessment for learning practices teachers should implement strategies to facilitate student self-assessment so that they can take greater responsibility in monitoring and improving the quality of their written work.
- High expectations are set for learning. There is very high uptake of higher level Geography in certificate examinations and students achieve well in these.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is a well-established subject in the school. Geography is a core subject at junior cycle; it is a compulsory element of the TY programme and is provided as an elective subject choice for leaving certificate students. The level of uptake is significantly above the national average of leaving certificate students opting to study Geography.
- Time allocation represents very good provision and includes six class periods in fifth and sixth year and three class periods in TY for the duration of a full year.
- Geography is well resourced and management is very supportive of the subject in this regard. The majority of teachers have designated classrooms equipped with ICT facilities. At the time of the evaluation it was reported by the principal that all teachers were to be presently provided with an iPad. The integration of ICT is well advanced in Geography. The geography teaching team have collaboratively developed an extensive folder of subject resources on the school server. The teachers are highly commended for this work.
- Teachers are appropriately deployed to the subject. A good level of subject capacity has been built across the department as a number of teachers are facilitated to teach in both cycles.
- There is regular formal assessment of students' progress and very good procedures are in place to maintain ongoing communication with parents particularly for certificate and fifth year students.
- Management actively support the professional development of the teaching staff. Member of the geography teaching team have engaged in a number of subject-specific in-services. While some teachers are using the newly developed version of Scoilnet Maps teachers are encouraged to attend in-service as it becomes available to further up-skill in this area.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning is well advanced, is characterised by a strong spirit of co-operation and ably led by a committed co-ordinator. Formal meetings are organised termly and a good quality subject department plan has been developed. Agreed curricular plans place a central focus on learning outcomes and underpin a system of common assessment across all year groups.
- The introduction of map and photograph skills at an early stage in first year is very positive and indicative of the department's ongoing review of the curriculum plan for Geography. Topics in physical Geography are taught in a linear sequence in term two and term three in first year. It is recommended that this provision be interspersed with less technical topics drawn from different sections of the syllabus to further support the range of learning needs within the mixed-ability setting.
- The TY geography plan references the areas to be studied. It should be developed into a more comprehensive document to reflect the aims and objectives of the module, teaching and learning strategies, resources, and assessment and evaluation procedures in relation to each area. The document 'Writing the Transition Year Programme' will provide support and guidance in developing this plan. It is recommended that a geographical investigation based in the local area is also included in the geography plan. This provision would serve as an effective bridge between the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate geography

syllabuses and enable students to further develop key geographical skills in a practical context.

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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