

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Geography  
REPORT**

**Killarney Community College  
County Kerry  
Roll number: 70450D**

**Date of inspection: 13 May 2013**



**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>	13 May 2013
<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, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching and learning of good quality was observed in geography lessons.
- Whole-school strategies to develop the quality of teaching and learning and to integrate literacy and numeracy have not been significantly translated into classroom practice in Geography.
- Uptake of Geography and levels of achievement in certificate examinations are being raised.
- Geography classrooms provide very good quality learning environments for students.
- Very good quality individual and collaborative planning informs the students' experience in geography classrooms.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Geography teachers should prioritise the integration of teaching and learning strategies associated with the whole-school initiatives relating to instructional leadership, assessment for learning, and to specific literacy and numeracy interventions, into their daily classroom practices.
  - Teaching strategies to activate and engage geography students in their own learning should be further developed.
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## INTRODUCTION

Killarney Community College is a co-educational post-primary school with an expanding enrolment of 341 second-level students. Managed by the Kerry Education and Training Board, students are offered Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. A range of Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses is also offered to students. The recent re-design of the interior of the school significantly improves the visual quality of the building and provides a modern student-focused learning environment.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning of good quality was observed in lessons. Learning intentions were clearly stated and shared with students. Good practice in all lessons reflected: good planning and preparation by teachers; engagement with topics that were appropriate to the specific syllabus and good subject knowledge that scaffolded students' learning.
- The lessons observed integrated the practice and application of geographical skills particularly relating to aerial photography. Students in a number of lessons worked with these photographs in practising sketch-mapping skills and in understanding the location of features and camera positions from oblique or vertical viewpoints. The opportunity to engage deeply with aerial photographs from the local area that students would be familiar with could be used to further enhance this practice. The map and photograph resources provided by *Scoilnet maps* should be used to further integrate and apply these skills in lessons across the syllabus and year groups.
- Using rock samples and digital photographs to structure a senior cycle revision lesson relating to the rock cycle also represented effective practice as key learning points emerged from these stimulus materials through teacher-led commentary and good quality questioning of students. Similarly, the use of the Ordnance Survey (OS) maps to apply the key ideas of the syllabus relating to tourism was very useful in combining the revision of map skills and an understanding of interrelated concepts in tourism. In all the lessons observed, the very positive relationships between students and teachers and the caring supportive atmosphere of the classrooms were evident.
- To build on and develop this practice, it is recommended that teachers give students responsibility for their own learning by integrating challenging tasks into lessons and through differentiated questioning of students. In some lessons that were overly teacher-directed, the presentation of the key learning points by the teacher's voice in combination with the aforementioned stimulus materials facilitated some students to be largely passive and to silently disengage. Teachers should appropriately integrate well-structured individual or collaborative tasks in combination with higher-order questions to actively engage students in their own learning. This could also ensure a greater balance between teacher and student inputs into lessons. These strategies will increase engagement and participation but could also impact positively on current increases in uptake of higher level and on achievement at all levels in certificate examinations.
- Whole-school initiatives relating to instructional leadership, assessment for learning and literacy and numeracy have been advanced within a collaborative focus on improving the students' experience in the classroom. Beyond the sharing of the learning intention with students, there was little evidence that methodologies associated with these initiatives had been applied within geography lessons. Teachers should engage through lesson planning and through experimentation within lessons with the practices associated with these

initiatives. Similarly, the focus on key words should be extended to encompass a wider engagement with vocabulary, fluency and comprehension as scaffolding to students' literacy development in Geography. Deeper approaches to supporting students' numeracy should also be developed in the context of teaching and learning in Geography.

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

- Timetable allocation for Geography varies across junior cycle. First-year students are provided with one double and one single class period per week, while second-year students have just two single class periods of Geography per week. In third year, three single class periods are allocated. Provision of the equivalent of three class periods per week for each year of junior cycle is the normal allocation in post-primary schools. Within the limitations of available resources and the obvious constraints of timetabling, the allocation of a further single class period should be considered as this could increase students' access to the curriculum and in combination with the aforementioned recommendations relating to pedagogy, could also increase uptake of higher level and achievement in Geography.
- Significant whole-school initiatives reflect a school-leadership focus on the students' experience of teaching and learning in the classroom. Professional learning opportunities have been provided for teachers relating to these aforementioned initiatives. Similarly, a focus on the quality of classrooms as learning spaces included the installation of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment, whiteboards to allow teachers to identify the learning intention and key words in lessons, and re-decoration to create pleasant and comfortable learning environments. The positioning of the data-projector relative to windows and direct sunlight created some visibility issues in some classrooms. These should be addressed where possible.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Collaborative curricular planning is well-established and advanced in the geography department. A very good quality plan for Geography has been developed that is non-linear in its approach to the syllabus and is based on identified learning outcomes. To engage with the recommendations contained in this subject inspection report, to the benefit of their students, the geography teaching team should now engage in a time-bound action-planning cycle that will facilitate both implementation and review of these priority recommendations. The routine maintenance of meeting records, preferably in electronic format, would also assist in identifying and sharing agreed actions and in evaluating achievements.
- Teachers had planned well for the lessons observed and were very well prepared. Individual teachers should now also reflect on their own pedagogical practices to assess their impact in progressing students' learning and understanding, and their acquisition of the key skills that are central to Geography.

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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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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