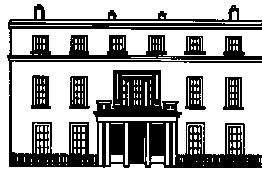


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

St Peter's Community School
Passage West
County Cork
Roll number: 91391H

Date of inspection: 8 December 2015



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

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	8 December 2015
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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the geography lessons observed.
- Teachers' use of active learning strategies and assessment modes promoted students' engagement and their learning.
- Patterns of uptake and achievement in certificate examinations are strong at Junior Certificate level but are somewhat uneven at Leaving Certificate.
- The very good timetable provision for Geography in Transition Year (TY) provides a valuable opportunity to develop students' geographical skills and understanding in advance of subject choice for progression to Leaving Certificate.
- Collaborative planning processes are well established and formalised in the geography department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography teachers should now prioritise strategies to increase uptake and achievement of higher level at Leaving Certificate geography.
 - The TY geography plan should be reviewed to facilitate students to engage with the opportunities for project work and fieldwork provided by the local environment.
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INTRODUCTION

St Peter's Community School is a co-educational school with an enrolment, in the current year, of 368 students. The school, managed under the joint trusteeship of the Cork Education and Training Board and the Sisters of Mercy, is situated on an elevated site overlooking Cork Harbour. Students are offered Junior Certificate, a compulsory TY programme, and Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed. Lessons were presented to students in very positive classroom learning environments that were visually stimulating. Wall displays of maps, posters and examples of students' project work, and, the very good use of information and communications technology (ICT) effectively enhanced students' understanding. In all cases, lessons were underpinned by very positive, courteous and mutually-respectful relationships and interactions between the geography teachers and their students.
- Clarity of learning intentions whether, explicitly stated and shared, or presented as continuity from previous learning, were clear and provided coherence to the lessons for students. Learning was reviewed through the provision of individual attention to particular students while the class was engaged with group or individual tasks, and, towards the end of the lessons, through a review of understanding of the topic.
- Lesson topics varied from a focus on the functional zones in urban areas, as a theoretical concept and as applied to the local area using Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, to exploring the interrelated impacts on global climate at atmospheric level, to understanding the causes of mass-movement in the context of physical geography. In each lesson, students were facilitated to engage actively through the planned, student-centred teaching, learning and assessment methodologies that were employed by their geography teachers.
- Active engagement by students was effected through the very appropriate balance between teacher inputs, in the form of outlining and discussing the key points for learning and understanding, and the responsibility placed on students to engage with individual and collaborative tasks to seek out information or to practise and apply specific geographical skills. This reflects very good practice.
- Students engaged with worksheets and with individual reading of the textbook to develop their understanding of functional zones in urban areas. OS maps of the local areas were also used to engage students in drawing a sketch map to facilitate them to think about, and to show, how local land-use patterns reflect functional zones. Similarly, lessons on mass-movement and atmospheric influences on climate engaged students through the use of the atlas to study latitude and the use of clear visuals and digital photographs to develop understanding of mass-movement in different international settings. In each case, the combination of these strategies with the gathering of key, short summary points for students to transfer into their copybooks, was very successful. The quality of students' work in their copybooks was generally very good with particular attention paid to diagrams and to the provision of some formative comments on work completed.
- In each lesson, while complex theoretical points were under discussion, teachers very skilfully ensured that key learning points and important geographical interrelationships were appropriately simplified. Differentiated questioning, and attention to the composition of pairs and groups, demonstrated teachers' awareness of individual students' needs and challenges in these mixed-ability geography classrooms. Targeting of

questions to named students rather than to students who were most willing to attempt answers would have been more effective in keeping all students on task in one lesson observed.

- It was very positive that the geography teachers placed particular emphasis on key geographical terminology in lessons; a strategy that linked to whole-school literacy initiatives. This was achieved by focusing very effectively on both the meaning and spelling of particular words as the learning progressed. Particular examples were engagement with the term *regolith* in one junior cycle lesson and with *latitude* in another.
- Patterns of uptake and achievement in certificate examinations are strong at Junior Certificate level but are somewhat uneven at Leaving Certificate. Geography teachers should now prioritise stability and improvement in patterns of uptake and achievement of higher level at Leaving Certificate.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for geography in junior cycle follows national norms with the allocation of three class periods per week for second and third year. First-year students are allocated just two class periods per week, which is low. This reduction is accounted for by the provision of a subject-sampling process in first year. It is very positive that the TY geography module has an allocation of four class periods per week, while fifth and sixth-year students are allocated five class periods per week. This very positive allocation takes the form of two double-class periods and one single-class period.
- As with the school building as a whole, the quality of geography base classrooms is very high. Clear attention has been paid to decoration and cleanliness in these bright, well-organised and ordered classrooms.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collaborative planning is well established in the geography department and is advancing. Curricular plans are in place for junior cycle, TY and for Leaving Certificate. It is very positive that students study map and aerial photograph skills early in their experience of Geography in both cycles. This allows for the application of these skills to be integrated into lessons as the students advance in their learning. The development of a digital platform within the school now facilitates sharing of resources between teachers and has the potential to further support students' learning in Geography.
 - The very good timetable provision for Geography in Transition Year (TY) provides a valuable opportunity to develop students' geographical skills and understanding in advance of subject choice for progression to Leaving Certificate. The geography teaching team should now revise the TY plan for Geography to maximise the opportunities provided by the local and wider Cork Harbour environments for fieldwork and the development of geographical skills.
 - Individual teacher planning was of very good quality and was clearly reflected in the quality of the classroom learning experience of students in the lessons observed.
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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.