

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Geography  
REPORT**

**Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine  
Kenmare, County Kerry  
Roll number: 91503P**

**Date of inspection: 15 September 2014**



**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>	15 September 2014
<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 and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching and learning of very good quality was observed in geography lessons.
- Students' engagement with geographical skills and their overall participation in student-centred classroom activities characterised the lessons observed.
- Lessons were clearly structured and were coherently linked to general learning intentions.
- Uptake of higher level geography, and achievement at all levels in the subject, are strong.
- Collaborative planning is on-going and should now focus on a review of Transition Year (TY) geography.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The translation of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies into evident classroom practice in Geography should be prioritised.
  - A new skills-based TY geography programme should be developed with a particular focus on the learning opportunities offered by the local environment.
  - Map and aerial photograph interpretation skills should be integrated into the curriculum plan for first-year students.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine is a co-educational community school situated in the historic town of Kenmare, Co Kerry. The school has a current enrolment of 494 students and offers the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Students can also avail of an optional Transition Year (TY) programme as their initial year within senior cycle in the school.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching and learning of very good quality was observed in lessons. Each of the classrooms visited presented a very positive learning environment for students of Geography. Relationships and interactions between students and their teachers are very positive and mutually respectful within clearly established classroom routines. The level of individual attention provided to students during geography lessons was particularly noteworthy.
- The planned learning for students in each lesson was generally clear. In some lessons, this extended from a review and discussion of homework, while in other lessons it was set out and shared with students. The overt sharing of a more detailed learning intention on the white-board, and its review as the lesson progresses, should be considered by the geography teachers as a further development of current practice.
- The clarity of the lesson structure, the planned learning activities and the established routines relating to homework, questioning, and classroom activities facilitated very high quality student engagement and participation. There was a very appropriate balance between teacher inputs to scaffold students' learning, in the form of questioning and discussion, and the provision of tasks that placed responsibility on students to engage and participate actively in their own learning.
- Student-centred lessons, particularly in junior cycle, focused very effectively on the development of students' Ordnance Survey (OS) map interpretation skills. The key skills of sketch map production and interpretation, understanding of scale, the calculation of area and location using the national grid, and the introduction of challenging terminology, such as 'easting' and 'northing lines', were central to the planned learning. The skills-based activities that scaffolded this learning were supported by clear step-by-step tasks and worksheets that allowed students to engage while their teacher provided individual attention to students.
- Senior cycle students, in newly formed class groups arising from an open subject-choice process, were engaged with the concept of region at different scales. Central to their engagement with the topic was a very well-constructed and targeted questioning strategy. The open questions posed to the students challenged them to think and to draw on previous learning in junior cycle, and on their own life experience in the local environment. Key geographical interrelationships between economic activities, location and environmental conditions within a regional context began to emerge and were constructed. This very appropriate strategy focusing on question and discussion will facilitate students to engage in higher-order thinking as they progress through senior cycle geography. Mind-mapping to gather the key ideas emerging from the students and short note-making tasks based on the textbook or other stimulus materials could further enhance this very effective student-centred strategy.

- Attention to students' literacy development, and the maximising of numeracy moments, that presented themselves in a number lessons, were very positive. Attention to terminology and spelling, combined with individual reading practice and the requirement to make calculations in relation to OS map interpretation, were good examples of how literacy and numeracy can be continually enhanced at classroom level. The translation of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies into evident classroom practice in Geography should now be prioritised.
- Uptake of higher level, and achievement by students at all levels in Geography in certificate examinations, is strong.

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

- Timetable provision for Geography is reflective of normal patterns in post-primary schools for both junior cycle, and for fifth year and sixth year. Geography is a core subject in junior cycle. At senior cycle an open subject-choice process has resulted in very positive patterns of uptake. In the current year, it is very positive that this level of uptake has resulted in the creation of concurrent timetabled class groups in fifth year.
- In TY, the subject is allocated just two single class periods per week for the full year of the programme. Modular timetabling that would offer Geography in parallel with another subject as two half-yearly modules should be explored. This has the potential to offer both subjects up to four class periods per week as a half-year module. Within the limits of available resources, such a time allocation should be considered as this would facilitate a more intensive engagement with practical and skills-based topics within TY geography.
- Teacher-based classrooms have facilitated the creation of very well developed learning environments for geography students. The classrooms of junior cycle geography class groups are richly decorated with maps, posters and students' projects. A large-scale display of an ongoing traffic survey in Kenmare is a very positive outcome of locally-based fieldwork.
- The provision of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment in classrooms has the potential to enhance students learning in Geography. Equally, it is very positive that fifth-year students have weekly access to the school's computer room to facilitate individual research into topics for study.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Collaborative planning structures are well embedded within a cohesive geography department. The role of coordinator is outlined in the subject department plan and rotates between members of the department. A shared curriculum plan outlines the content areas for each geography class group. Over time, this plan should be further developed to include the intended learning outcomes, geographical skills and key skills associated with each content area.
- A review of TY Geography, with the intention of developing a skills-based programme focusing on the opportunities provided for geographical studies by Kenmare and its hinterland, should be a key planning priority.
- OS map and aerial photograph interpretation skills should also be repositioned from the second year to early in the first year of the curriculum plan. This will allow students to

engage with OS map and aerial photograph interpretation while studying geomorphic processes and resulting landforms during first year.

- Individual teacher planning for Geography is significantly advanced and was observed to inform coherent and well-structured lessons.

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