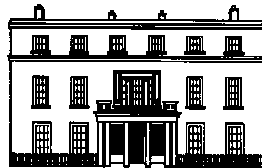


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Carrigaline Community School
County Cork
Roll number: 91388S

Date of inspection: 27 January 2016



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	26 and 27 January 2016
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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principals and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning of consistently very high quality were observed in geography lessons.
- Strategies to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills were clearly evident in Geography lessons and reflect whole-school initiatives.
- Assessment strategies in Transition Year (TY), as evident in TY geography lessons, reflect very good practice.
- Uptake of higher level Geography, and achievement at all levels in certificate examinations, are strong.
- Collaborative planning for Geography is embedded and is significantly advanced, based on identified developmental priorities.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- An agreed strategy to provide written formative comment on students' written work should be devised and implemented by the geography teaching team.
 - The content of the current TY geography modules should be reviewed in the context of their effectiveness in providing a skills-based experience for students who may progress to Leaving Certificate Geography.
-

INTRODUCTION

Carrigaline Community School is managed under the joint trusteeship of the Diocese of Cork and Ross and the Cork Education and Training Board (ETB). This co-educational school has a current enrolment of 1136 students who are offered junior cycle, an optional TY programme, Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. A recently completed school extension, and the addition of a centre for students on the Autism Spectrum, have significantly enhanced the school campus. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning of very high quality, were in evidence in all geography lessons observed. Classroom practice was characterised by clear routines relating to seating, order, expected behaviour, engagement and homework, in the mixed-ability class configurations. In this context, all the geography teachers created a very positive classroom environment within which students could learn through mutually respectful interactions, through engaging with visual-stimulus materials and through the completion of tasks that were appropriate, relevant and challenging.
- Individual planning resulted in a clear and coherent structure to lessons that focused on engagement, discussion and questioning. Lessons had clear aims that were sometimes expressed as learning intentions. Each teacher, within their own individual practice, clarified and reviewed the learning for students as the lessons progressed and allowed homework, or study for the approaching pre-examinations, to become the focus for the consolidation and progression of that learning. In all lessons, topics were presented using methodologies that were pitched at a level that both interested and engaged the students.
- These methodologies included the very effective use of visual-stimulus materials to develop and illustrate learning points. All lessons included illustrations using PowerPoint that included these key learning points. Photographs and numerical data sets were also incorporated into these presentations to support students' learning. Pair work and group work strategies that were well-structured, and that were a familiar process for students, were used to good effect to develop students learning through collaborative engagements. In some lessons, it was clear that group construction was planned to aid differentiation of the learning as students of varying abilities were strategically placed in groups. Similarly, in all cases, these collaborative practices allowed teachers to focus on the individual needs of some students.
- Strategies to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills were clearly evident in lessons and reflected whole-school initiatives in this area. In the context of literacy, while the overall emphasis was on comprehension, a focus on subject-specific terminology, on spelling and on the correct labelling of diagrams, added further emphasis and effectiveness to these strategies. Opportunities to focus on numeracy were also identified and used appropriately by teachers. These were particularly effective in the context of using Ordnance Survey (OS) maps and in the analysis of demographic patterns.
- A review of the learning intention or lesson's aims, as the lesson ended, added coherence to the learning and facilitated teachers to assess students' learning and understanding. Previous learning was assessed through the review of homework and through consequent discussion, while feedback from group and pair work, responses to the skilled questioning

by teachers that challenged students to develop and extend their responses, allowed teachers to assess understanding. These approaches reflect very good classroom practice.

- In revision lessons for students preparing for the pre-examinations, intense questioning was very effectively combined with visual-stimulus materials to assess students' learning and understanding of key points in response to examination questions. Some provision of 'wait time' for students to think before responding should however be considered in such contexts.
- To build on, and to enhance, current practice, an agreed strategy to provide written formative comment on students' written work should now be devised and implemented by the geography teaching team.
- Assessment strategies in TY, as evident in TY geography lessons, are particularly noteworthy and reflect very good practice as they focus on the assessment of project work, fieldwork and tasks undertaken by geography students.
- Patterns of uptake of higher level Geography, and patterns of achievement at all levels in certificate examinations, are strong. Uptake levels of the subject in fifth year, while generally strong, are however somewhat uneven. While this may clearly reflect the open subject-choice processes that operate in advance of entry into fifth year, the geography department should monitor these patterns closely.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for Geography is generally in line with normal provision in junior cycle. However, the reduction from three to two class periods per week in first year presents challenges for teachers of geography in the context of the demands of the syllabus. Timetable provision for Geography in TY is very positive with the allocation of one double class and one single class period per week to students who opt to study Geography in TY. The provision of five class periods per week for Leaving Certificate Geography reflects normal practice in schools.
- To address the aforementioned uneven patterns of uptake of Geography in fifth year, a whole-school review of current TY procedures that require students to choose their subjects for TY towards the end of third year, should be considered. A compulsory core range of subjects, provided on a modular basis, should be considered in TY. This would allow all TY students to experience a half-year module of Geography, along with other subjects, within the programme. This strategy could facilitate students to choose Geography, for study to Leaving Certificate, from a more informed position having completed a TY module in the subject.
- The quality of the base classrooms provided to geography teachers is very good. Furthermore, the maintenance of two specialist rooms for Geography, combined with the very good quality information and communications technology (ICT) provision in all rooms, provides a very positive, visually rich, learning environment for students.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collaborative planning for Geography is significantly embedded and reflects a team approach to the achievement of whole-school strategies and identified priorities that are specific to Geography. The recent review of map-work skills, to agree on a specific list of

key skills, and their re-positioning into the first-year geography plan, represents very good reflective planning practice.

- The aforementioned review of TY subject-choice procedures should be supported by a review of the content of the current full-year geography modules. This review should focus on their effectiveness in providing a skills-based experience for students who may progress to Leaving Certificate Geography.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals, and subject teachers, at the conclusion of the evaluation.