

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Glanmire Community College
County Cork
Roll number: 76064F

Date of inspection: 24 September 2012



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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	24 September 2012
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the geography lessons observed.
- The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) has been advanced in the teaching of Geography.
- An ethos of care and concern for students' well being is evident in the geography lessons.
- Uptake of higher-level geography is increasing at senior cycle.
- Collaborative planning for Geography has been advanced.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Geography teachers should review classroom practice, as observed in some lessons, in the context of the level of student participation and engagement relative to teacher inputs in the lesson.
 - The geography teachers should now prioritise initiatives to increase levels of achievement in Geography at higher-level Leaving Certificate based on their success in improving levels of uptake of the subject at higher level.
 - The Transition Year (TY) module for Geography should be revised to provide an effective skills-based link for students to bridge the gap between Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Geography.
-

INTRODUCTION

Glanmire Community College is a co-educational school with a current enrolment of 873 students. The school is managed by County Cork Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and offers students the Junior Certificate, a TY programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. Geography is a core subject in junior cycle and in the optional TY programme. It is offered as an optional subject to Leaving Certificate level.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good, as evidenced by the extent to which students were actively engaged in their own learning in the lessons observed. All lessons were well prepared and syllabus appropriate. Students were both attentive and well behaved in very positive and caring classroom learning environments. However, the extent to which they participated in lessons, beyond being required to listen to their teacher and observe the visual stimuli that were used, varied.
- Student-centred lessons that engaged students actively and ensured their participation in learning activities represented very good practice. In these lessons, visual stimuli and the integration of geographical skills were central to the students' experience. The learning intention was clear and shared with students from the outset and learning was progressed using appropriate visual materials and graphic organisers. Lessons were well paced and the sequencing of questioning, tasks and teacher-led discussion was balanced and effective.
- In some lessons, students were more passive and less engaged or challenged by the planned learning activities. The voice of the teacher dominated interactions in class and the learning was progressed through direct teacher inputs and the use of PowerPoint presentations to deliver key learning points. The absence of student tasks and the limited responsibility placed on students to respond within the lesson created the risk of disengagement.
- Based on some of the lessons observed, geography teachers should reflect on their own classroom practice in the context of the level of student participation and engagement relative to the level of teacher inputs. Greater responsibility for learning should be placed on students through the use of higher-order questions and challenging tasks that demand higher-order thinking and both individual and cooperative engagement. To develop teaching practice across the subject department, best practice in the context of engaging students in the mixed-ability geography class groups should be discussed and shared as a theme for subject department self-evaluation.
- It was clear, in the lessons observed, that the teaching and application of geographical skills was integrated into lessons and these activities were observed to be very effective. The use of a local Ordnance Survey (OS) map extract, as a focus to teach essential map skills, also enhanced these classroom activities and had the potential to draw students into interpreting and understanding the local physical and human landscape. The appropriate and very purposeful development of significant relevant points (SRPs) to prepare senior cycle students to develop their written answers was both effective and timely.
- The use of ICT as a teaching tool has been advanced in many geography lessons and provides students with access to visual stimulus materials, maps, diagrams and synopsis notes on topics for study. Utilising ICT as a learning tool for students remains

a further challenge. Access to *Scoilnet Maps* a web-based mapping application could be an entry point to advance development in this area.

- Uptake of higher-level geography is advancing due to the high expectations set by geography teachers for their students. To build on these successes, the teaching team should now also target increasing levels of achievement for students in higher-level Leaving Certificate in Geography.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography represents normal practice in relation to timetabling, resourcing, allocation of class periods and the positioning of Geography as a core subject in TY and within an open subject-choice process for Leaving Certificate. The support of senior management and the geography teaching team for the on-going development of fieldwork in Geography is acknowledged as this provides a further learning experience for students.
- Strategic ICT initiatives to assist the collegial sharing of teaching resources among the geography teaching team are a significant development. These teacher-led initiatives are encouraged and should focus on advancing students' learning in Geography.
- Plans by school management to rotate the teaching team for Leaving Certificate geography are encouraged as this will assist in building capacity across the subject department.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A collaborative planning process is well established in Geography. The current planned focus on literacy development is clearly evident in classroom practice. Equally, the agreed curriculum plan for Geography is under on-going review. The re-positioning of the teaching of map-skills from the third year to the first year programme plan has been a very positive outcome of these reviews as the introduction of basic map skills in first year will facilitate the application of these skills across the learning of syllabus topics in both second and third year.
- A review and subsequent change in the content of the TY geography module, as outlined in the TY plan, is recommended. The provision of a skills-based and applied geography module based on local settings, issues and projects could be used to bridge the gap for students from Junior Certificate to Leaving Certificate. This process should take cognisance of future changes that will arise from the implementation of the revised Junior Cycle Framework.
- Very good quality individual planning is clearly evident in the preparation of teaching materials and resources, and in the preparation of the stimulus materials used in lessons by teachers. This level of individual planning should inform student-centred classroom activities, and materials prepared should be used to elicit reactions and responses from students in the first instance rather than their immediate interpretation by the teacher.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and the 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.