

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

St Joseph's Secondary School
Castleisland, County Kerry
Roll number: 61260U

Date of inspection: 27 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	27 September 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teacher• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teacher

MAIN FINDINGS

- An excellent quality of teaching and learning was observed in geography lessons.
- Student-centred lessons actively engaged students in their own learning.
- Students responded to visual stimuli, engaged in higher-order thinking and the application of geographical skills thus enjoying very positive learning experiences in the lessons observed.
- Uptake of higher-level geography and achievement in certificate examinations are significantly strong.
- The provision of a very good quality and well-equipped geography room particularly enhances the students' experience of the subject.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A geography module should be developed in advance of the planned introduction of the Transition Year (TY) programme in the school.
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INTRODUCTION

St Joseph's Presentation Convent is a girls' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education, An Irish Schools' Trust (CEIST). The school has a current enrolment of 171 girls. Students are offered Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate Established and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Preparations are on going to provide a TY programme for students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Geography teaching and learning of an excellent quality was observed in lessons. The quality of the experience for students in these lessons was reflected in the subject knowledge and the expertise of the geography teacher, and in the capacity to infuse students with energy and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Very effective lesson planning placed the students' learning needs at the centre of the lessons observed. The learning intention was clear and developed from students' previous learning. From the outset, students in all geography lessons were engaged by a well planned combination of experiences that extended from the lesson topic and that were very effectively woven together into a cohesive and successful learning experience.
- Lessons included very high quality and appropriately challenging questions for students. These questions were differentiated and a suitable 'wait time' was provided to allow students to compose and develop their responses. Students were gently challenged to develop their answers as questioning ranged around the classroom and was targeted at particular students. In all cases, students were named and their responses affirmed. These responses became the basis for a very well-balanced discussion that included the voices of both the students and their teacher. This on-going discussion was combined with the use of stimulus materials, the application of geographical skills and an appropriate focus on literacy and numeracy, to progress students' learning.
- Ordnance Survey (OS) maps provided the skills focus in a number of lessons. The concept of settlement was discussed and applied using the local map extract. This extract was an excellent resource as it allowed students to examine an area with which they were familiar, identify settlement patterns, and understand concepts of scale, relative location and relationships between the human and physical landscape. A discussion of local place-names also added a further dimension to this work. Students were very familiar with using this map to apply geographical concepts and to practise geographical skills. These learning activities represent very good practice in the application of geographical skills, and also in the study of wider geographical concepts.
- The focus of the lessons was on appropriate understanding for students rather than on imparting of facts. In some lessons, learning also focused on the demands of examination questions and students were required to distil their understanding into a framework that reflected the structure and requirements of an examination answer. This was very good practice for students in preparation for certificate examinations.
- The geography room provides a very appropriate setting for these activities and provides a print-rich and map-rich visual learning environment for students. The facilities were used to maximum effect as the maps, displayed using a data projector and other visuals, were very effectively linked with key ideas on the white board. The use of a visualiser as a learning tool could be considered to further enhance the visual quality of lessons. This

could be used to project students' written answers for example, or other visual sources, as a further element of these very effective geography lessons.

- The classroom atmosphere in all lessons was very positive, and a warm, progressive and mutually respectful rapport was evident between student and teacher. Visiting students from other countries were carefully and effectively integrated into lessons and similarities and contrasts between their home environments and that of the Kerry area were incorporated very successfully into the lessons as opportunities arose.
- Homework formed an element of each lessons and work in students' copybooks was of a very good standard. While classes are of mixed ability, uptake of higher-level geography is significantly strong, as is achievement of higher-level grades in certificate examinations.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography reflects normal practice in voluntary secondary schools. Geography is a core subject at junior cycle and, following an open subject-choice process, becomes an optional subject at senior cycle. Uptake of Geography at senior cycle is strong. The provision of a geography noticeboard and support by school management for geographical fieldwork add to the visibility of the subject in the school.
- Senior management is pro-active in developing leadership of learning at classroom level. The excellent teaching practice observed in Geography should be shared and become a focus for pedagogical development at whole-school level.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The excellent quality of teaching and learning observed arose from detailed, on-going and very effective individual planning.
- Collaborative planning for Geography has focused on cross-curricular links with other subjects and on the development of a junior cycle geography and physical education linked fieldtrip to a local river. It is recommended that the planning for a geography module for the proposed TY programme should now be undertaken to provide an effective link between junior cycle and the challenges of Geography at senior cycle.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation.

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Presentation Secondary School, Castleisland welcomes the Report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching Geography and in particular the affirmation of the commitment of Management and Staff.

The Board is pleased to note that the report acknowledges the following points:

- An excellent quality of teaching and learning was observed in geography lessons.
- Student-centred lessons actively engaged students in their own learning.
- The provision of a very good quality and well-equipped geography room particularly enhances the students' experience of the subject.
- Senior management is pro-active in developing leadership of learning at classroom level.