

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Scoil Dara, Kilcock, County Kildare
Roll number: 61691B

Dates of inspection: 17 May 2015



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	17 May 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

- Teaching and learning was of very good quality in two of the lessons observed with excellent practice evident in two of the other lessons observed.
- The geography teaching was relevant and interesting with a wide variety of teaching methodologies being effectively used.
- Learning took place in a very positive, well-disciplined environment during all lessons evaluated.
- Very good use was made of information and communications technology (ICT) to enhance teaching and learning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- There should be more use made in junior cycle of the local area of Kilcock to further stimulate and motivate students.
- There is a need to use more written comments that promote improvement on students' copybooks.
- More regular formal meetings of the teachers of Geography should take place.
- The annual subject planning template needs to be up dated to include more modern approaches to teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Scoil Dara is a large co-educational post-primary school in Kilcock, County Kildare with a current enrolment of 811 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes as well as an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. All junior cycle students study Geography and uptake of the subject at senior cycle is very impressive.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning was very good in two of the lessons observed with excellent practice evident in two of the other lessons.
- Teacher instruction was clear, relevant, and concise. Key concepts and ideas were very well explained during all lessons. For example, the concepts of host and donor countries in relation to the topic of migration were well explained and understood. Work on tourism in South-West USA was relevant and interesting and drew on the teacher's personal knowledge of and experience of the area.
- A variety of effective teaching and learning methodologies was observed. Pair work was used in a number of lessons to promote student engagement, Show-me-boards and effective questioning strategies were used in some lessons to assist in the explanation of concepts and in monitoring of learning.
- Questioning strategies were effective. In one lesson the use of named lollipop sticks to distribute teacher questions and student answers more evenly was effective and should be adopted more widely.
- The focus on knowledge and skill acquisition, learning outcomes and an explicit focus on literacy and numeracy development were evident and are affirmed.
- Learning took place in a positive, well-disciplined environment during all lessons evaluated. There was very good rapport evident between teacher and the students.
- Learning intentions were clearly stated at the beginning of lessons and were reviewed at the end. Strong links were made with prior learning and with students' own knowledge.
- The revision work that was undertaken during the evaluation was effective and was appropriate for the time of year.
- Very good use was made of ICT to enhance teaching and learning. This included the effective use of data projectors, electronic white boards, digital images and video clips. It is important to ensure that rooms have proper darkening facilities such as blinds so that electronically sourced visuals have maximum impact.
- Key word strategies were used effectively to enhance students' literacy. Brainstorming of key words and concepts was used effectively in lessons.
- A print-rich environment, which included the display of maps, charts and students' work, was evident in all classrooms visited. The display of students' work in Geography in a number of classrooms is commended.
- There is a need for greater use of the local area as a resource for the teaching and learning of Geography at junior cycle. A greater focus on the local area would have both promotional and motivational benefits for students and teachers of Geography.
- Homework is regularly given and students' written work is monitored and affirmed regularly. There is a need for more written comments on students' work that promote and guide improvement.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The teaching and study of Geography take place in well-resourced rooms. Three of the four teachers visited by the inspector had teacher-based classrooms. This greatly facilitated the gathering, display, storage and use of resources.

- Timetabling arrangements for the teaching and study of Geography are good. Junior cycle students have three Geography lesson periods per week and Leaving Certificate Geography students have five lessons each week including two double lessons.
- Regular class tests take place in the subject and student progress is tracked.
- Teachers are encouraged and facilitated by management to avail of continuous professional development opportunities for the subject.
- The regular and routine use of ICT in teaching and learning is actively promoted by management and is very well delivered at classroom level within the subject. Classrooms used for Geography were prioritised in the provision of ICT equipment. The effective use of electronically based Scoilnet Maps in one class observed is commended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The teachers of Geography meet informally but they have had only one formal meeting this year. This is insufficient for subject planning and the number of subject meetings in Geography each year needs to be increased.
- The quality of individual teacher planning for the lessons observed was very good especially in relation to clearly identifying learning outcomes, promoting active methodologies and ensuring that there is an appropriate balance between teacher input and student activity.
- The results in Geography were very well analysed by management and by the geography teaching team and were used to set realistic targets for improvement but the lack of subject team meetings restricted progress on results analysis this year.
- The extensive planning folder for Geography includes subject plans for every year since 2007. The template used is somewhat dated. In future, the annual plan needs to be organised around the concepts of learning outcomes, assessment for learning (AfL) strategies and an explicit focus on student literacy and numeracy development. The cross-curricular aspects of the plan also need to be further developed.
- Geography planning should continue to place emphasis on the use of active methodologies and should promote engagement in more local studies at junior cycle.
- Literacy and numeracy planning within the subject is well advanced. There is also recognition of the importance of a focus on cultural diversity in planning for teaching a student cohort that comprises different nationalities.

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.