An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Castleisland Community College
County Kerry
Roll number: 70520V

Date of inspection: 31 January 2012

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	31 January 2012
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning in the geography lessons observed was very good.
- The provision of opportunities to engage in fieldwork activities in junior cycle geography represents very good practice.
- The positive impact of the school's engagement with the instructional intelligence project is evident in the very good quality teaching and learning observed in geography lessons.
- An interesting and engaging Transition Year (TY) geography programme has been developed.
- Uptake of higher-level geography is uneven as is achievement in certificate examinations.
- Individual teachers' preparedness for lessons and collaborative planning for Geography are of a high standard.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Available school data should be analysed within an action-planning cycle with a view to improving patterns of uptake and achievement in Geography.
- Specific intended learning outcomes arising from the broad statements of learning contained within the yearly plans for Geography should be developed to inform planned learning in lessons and to link directly to assessment of learning.

INTRODUCTION

Castleisland Community College is a co-educational school that serves the town and rural hinterland of Castleisland, Co Kerry. The school has a current enrolment of 304 students and is managed by Kerry Education Service (KES). Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) are offered to students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed in geography lessons was very good. The learning challenge provided by the geography teachers was both interesting and stimulating, and was characterised by syllabus appropriate topics for study arising from a collaborative teaching plan. Students were active and engaged in learning in all lessons and responded very positively to the challenges and visual stimulus materials that were presented by their teachers. The learning was individualised and personalised. This was achieved through appropriate pacing, the range of elements in each lesson, the very positive classroom atmosphere and by the rapport between students and their teachers.
- The school is engaged with KES personnel in a professional learning project involving a focus on teaching and students' experience of learning in the classroom. The geography teachers have taken a very reflective approach to this instructional leadership project and have both used and evaluated elements that were integrated into their geography teaching. The clarification of the learning intention, wait time in relation to questioning and the use of mind mapping were clearly evident in the lessons observed. Note-making and appropriate attention to numeracy and literacy were also evident. It is very positive that the geography teachers are engaged in a professional dialogue in relation to teaching and learning in the context of this project and the good quality outcomes of this ongoing dialogue were evident in the geography lessons observed.
- In all classrooms visited, teacher preparedness was evident and was very effective in advancing students' learning in Geography. Stimulus materials, whether in the form of population pyramids presented using information and communication technology (ICT), maps, photographs or work sheets illustrated the lesson and allowed the students to respond and interact with the topic. Pair and group work facilitated differentiation by task and outcome. The application of map work skills and other challenging tasks set for short periods within the lessons allowed teachers to focus attention on individual students and to assess the progress of the lesson.
- All lessons had an appropriate homework focus that was used by teachers to both assess and advance students' learning. The quality of work in the students' notebooks and copies was very good. A continued focus on literacy and numeracy in lesson tasks and in homework is encouraged to build on existing good practice.
- Students are afforded a very stimulating and interesting geographical experience in TY that both enhances their learning from Junior Certificate and provides an appropriate foundation for those who may wish to continue to study the subject to Leaving Certificate level. The TY plan outlines a variety of topics for study and the lesson observed represented a very good quality TY learning experience in Geography. The students were engaged in a cooperative learning exercise based on the concept of global interdependence and trade. The project had clear aims and intended outcomes while the process engaged students in an excellent learning experience that required negotiation, skill and subject knowledge. The students enjoyed the competitive and challenging aspects of the project.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography is very good in the school in relation to the allocation of time, teacher-based classrooms and access to a resources room to facilitate the sharing and storage of teaching resources. The provision of an extra class period for third-year geography students is very positive.
- A number of the current geography teaching team are newly appointed to the school. Their expertise complements the existing skills and experience of other team members. The facilitation of formal meetings by school management, combined with much informal collaboration, has resulted in the sharing of experience and good practice both within the subject team and at whole-school level. These elements of professional practice are encouraged.
- In creating a curricular plan for junior cycle, school management varies the position of Geography in terms of being a core or an optional subject. In years when the subject is optional, it can be set against practical subjects or modern languages. It is clear that uptake levels of the subject and uptake of higher level at Junior Certificate are uneven. While the subject is a compulsory element of the TY programme, uptake at senior cycle is also relatively low. Achievement in certificate examinations is uneven in both cycles. The geography teachers and school management should analyse data relating to these patterns to assess the possible impact of subject choice in first year on uptake of higher level and outcomes for students in Geography in certificate examinations. This analysis should be time bound and prioritised within an action-planning cycle.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject planning is well advanced in Geography. Planning for fieldwork in junior cycle and in TY that builds toward the compulsory geographical investigation for Leaving Certificate represents very good practice. These fieldwork activities provide opportunities for students to apply geographical skills outside of the classroom and in their local environment.
- Good quality plans that include broad learning outcomes have also been developed for each year group. To build on this good work, the geography teachers should develop more specific intended learning outcomes arising from these broad statements that will inform planned learning in lessons and link directly to assessment of learning.
- Individual teacher planning is also of very high quality and informs very good teaching. Teachers had gathered an extensive range of support materials, details of current geographical events and a range of ordnance survey (OS) maps and photographs. The advanced level of preparation of tasks, projects, work sheets, stimulus materials and PowerPoint presentations is acknowledged.

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.

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