An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Intermediate School
Killorglin, County Kerry
Roll number: 61360B

Date of inspection: 21 February 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	21 February 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

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in all the geography lessons observed.
- Pedagogy reflected a skills-based visual approach that actively engaged students in their own learning.
- Uptake of higher level geography is significantly strong at senior cycle.
- Outcomes for students in certificate examinations are very good in Geography.
- Planning for Geography has been advanced and clear priorities for development have been identified.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- To enhance the very good practice observed in classrooms, the geography teachers should outline and share the learning intention of the lesson with their students.

INTRODUCTION

Intermediate School, Killorglin is a lay Catholic voluntary secondary school under unitary management. This co-educational school has a current enrolment of 745 students and offers Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Geography is a core subject in junior cycle and an optional subject for senior cycle students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in all lessons observed. Teachers applied individual skills and competencies to their teaching in geography lessons thereby engaging students actively in learning. Lessons combined a variety of methodologies that were underpinned by a skills-based visual approach to the topics. This was facilitated by the use of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, census materials and sketch maps that were used to develop the learning. In each lesson, it was clear that students were actively responding to what was routine in geography lessons.

- The progression and pacing of lessons was very appropriate to the level of the class group and their positioning in junior or senior cycle. Junior classes engaged with map-work skills that also provided an entry point into the use of the map to interpret the physical and human landscape. Topics ranged from an understanding of scale, distance and location, to engagement with settlement patterns. In these very effective lessons, students responded to the challenge presented by teacher questioning, group work and the completion of tasks.

- A lesson on migration that used the 1911 Irish census return for a Jewish family provided an excellent entry point to this topic. The detailed examination, analysis and discussion relating to this historic document, accessed from the internet, allowed the key learning points to emerge from the students' observations. In another lesson, students practised the basic skill of sketching a map as an entry point to their study of a sub-continental region. The teacher, using a wall map as a guide, competently drew a free-hand labelled sketch of the region on the white board. As the students attempted their version of the sketch, the physical and cultural texture of the region was outlined in a conversational style by the teacher. The resulting rich lesson provided students with an engagement with sketch mapping and an emersion in the uniqueness of their chosen sub-continental region.

- To enhance the very effective teaching and learning strategies observed, the geography teachers should outline the planned learning intention of each lesson or of a series of lessons. This strategy could further scaffold the students' learning, without limiting their engagement, and could inform assessment and follow-up work. A clear pedagogical link between planning, the lesson experience and assessment could then be established for students.

- The classroom atmosphere in all lessons was calm and was characterised by mutual respect, care and established routine. Lessons provided a clear balance between the challenge to understand, use and apply geographical skills, and the time to enjoy and discover Geography.

- Students are clearly learning in these lessons. The quality of students' responses, the very good work in their copybooks and their confidence in engaging with topics was indicative of the level of learning and understanding. Significant achievement in certificate

examinations, including the achievement of very high grades by a number of students, is also clearly indicative of the level of students' learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for Geography reflects normal practice in schools with the allocation of three class periods to the subject in junior cycle. This allocation increases to five class periods per week in senior cycle. Subject choice at senior cycle arises primarily from students' preferences. Subject-option bands are created based on these preferences. A significant majority of senior cycle students choose to study Geography. A repeat Leaving Certificate programme is also offered to students within which a geography class is created.

- Class groups in junior cycle are either banded or streamed based on the outcomes of assessments completed in first year. Within this organising framework, a significant majority of students attempt, and achieve in, higher level geography in Junior Certificate. It is clear that there are no barriers limiting access to higher level geography and that teachers have very high expectations for their students.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) hardware has been provided in classrooms and in the very good quality school library. In the absence of base classrooms, ICT integration has assisted geography teachers in accessing electronic resources and has limited the need to carry geography equipment to and from each classroom. The geography teachers have identified the need for a shared space to store and access geography equipment as a key developmental priority. School management has agreed to engage in providing this facility with the assistance of the geography teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A committed geography teaching team is particularly reflective in planning to meet the learning needs of their students. Collaborative planning is well advanced. An agreed teaching plan and clear priorities for development have been developed within a well established planning process. The geography teachers should advance the delivery of their identified priorities within a time-bound action planning cycle.
- Individual planning for geography lessons is very good and it informed the very good practice observed in lessons. Teachers had created and gathered a range of resources that facilitated them to provide interesting and stimulating experiences for their students.

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 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

As a Manager, I am delighted with the report and with the inspection. It is very positive and encouraging and it seemingly emphasises the positive and affirms the teachers' and pupils' work.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Merely to compliment and affirm my teachers.