An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

St Flannan's College
Ennis, County Clare
Roll number: 61920N

Date of inspection: 10 December 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	**9 and 10 December 2010**
Inspection activities undertaken • Discussion with principal • Informal discussions with subject coordinator • Meeting with the geography teachers • Review of documents and records	 • Examination of some students' work • Feedback to principal and geography teachers • Observation of teaching and learning in classrooms

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

- Teaching and learning in Geography is very good.
- Integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into teaching and learning has a very positive impact on students' learning in Geography.
- Uptake of Geography in senior cycle is strong.
- Uptake of higher-level Geography across the school is significantly strong.
- Achievement by students in certificate examinations in Geography is very good.
- Individual planning and preparation for geography lessons has a positive impact on the students' experience of Geography in the classroom.
- Geography is well supported by school management.

As a means of building on strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- To build on current very good practice, the geography teachers should introduce assessment-for-learning strategies into lessons.
- The Transition Year (TY) plan for Geography should be further developed.
- Intended learning outcomes for students should be included in the subject plan for Geography.

INTRODUCTION

St Flannan's College is a large co-educational, voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 1207 students. The school has a sustained heritage as a education provider in the town of Ennis and beyond. The school has a very large geography department with eleven teachers engaged in teaching the subject. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in all lessons.
- The lessons were engaging and stimulating for students through an appropriate combination of teacher presentation and questioning, the presentation of visual stimulus materials, and tasks set for students within the lesson.
- There was a significant level of student participation, and the methods used by the teachers engaged students actively in their own learning. It was clear that teachers had high expectations for their students. To build on this good practice, the geography teachers should prioritise some assessment-for-learning strategies to include the use of appropriate 'wait time' to allow students to think about their response to questions, the sharing of the learning intention of the lesson at the outset, and the use of formative comment on selected pieces of students' work.
- ICT is significantly integrated into teaching and learning in Geography and was very effective in enhancing students' understanding of the topics for study. Students responded very positively to the visual-stimulus materials presented in lessons. The continued integration of ICT into teaching and learning should be advanced.
- The development of a shared electronic folder of resources by geography teachers and their use of *Scoilnet Maps*, a web-based map and aerial photograph resource, is further evidence of these developments.
- Classroom management and the pace of lessons were very good in all classrooms visited.
- The classroom atmosphere was warm and engaging.
- Questioning of students and a strong emphasis of homework were the main assessment strategies used in lessons.
- While there was evidence of very good work in students' notebooks, some attention should be paid to the accuracy and neatness of diagrams in some cases.
- Formal assessment procedures are appropriate at classroom, and at whole school level, as are procedures for communication between school and home.
- Uptake of higher-level geography is very strong in junior and in senior cycle, and achievement by students in certificate examinations in Geography is very good.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is well supported by school management in the school. It is a core subject in junior cycle and in TY, and is an optional subject for Leaving Certificate. Geography experiences a significantly strong uptake by students.
- While geography classes are organised as mixed-ability groups, there is flexibility and choice for the geography teachers in classroom organisation.
- School management has made significant investment in developing the ICT infrastructure in the school.

- All geography classrooms have a fixed digital-data projector and the board of management has provided financial support for teachers to purchase their own laptop computer. It was clear during the inspection that these initiatives had a very positive impact on students' learning and on teachers' engagement with new technologies.
- The base classrooms available to some geography teachers provide a significant geographical learning environment though the use of posters, maps and photographs that illustrate geographical processes and current events of geographical interest.
- Support for students with additional educational needs in Geography is appropriate. There is good communication between the education-support team and the geography teachers in relation to individual student needs and classroom strategies to support these students.
- Work is progressing on developing individualised programmes of support and on differentiation in mixed-ability classroom settings.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collaborative planning is advanced in Geography and a very comprehensive subject plan has been developed. To further develop this work, it is recommended that intended learning outcomes be included in the common teaching programme. It is recommended that the plan for Geography in the TY programme should be further developed to provide details of the content, resources, methodologies and assessment modes to be employed.
- Very good quality individual planning was in evidence in all lessons. Teachers had prepared folders of notes, work sheets, fact sheets and ICT resources to support their teaching of particular class groups.
- An active geography department has developed in the school. One teacher acts as subject co-ordinator and a subject meeting is planned for each term. Records of these meetings are kept that provide an insight into the teachers' good quality discussion and reflection on issues of concern to the subject.

CONCLUSION

A summary of the draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation was presented to the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. These were discussed with the inspector.

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