An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Subject Inspection: Geography
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Skibbereen Community School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Skibbereen Co Cork
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	91516B
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	21/10/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	16/01/2026

What is a subject inspection?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated learning and teaching in Geography under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

Included in this subject inspection report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Bí Cineálta</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS.
2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of Bí Cineálta, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it.
2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and students/pupils.
3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of Bí Cineálta</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Subject inspection

Dates of inspection	20/10/2025 & 21/10/2025
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including focus groups	• Observation of teaching and learning during five lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal, deputy principal's and relevant staff

School context

Skibbereen Community School, which is under the joint trusteeship of CEIST, the Diocese of Cork and Ross and Cork Education and Training Board (ETB), was established in 2016. It is a co-educational, multi-denominational school. Current enrolment is 953. The school offered the Junior Cycle, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate (Established).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all lessons observed was consistently of a very good quality, with aspects of practice in a small number of these lessons considered excellent.
- Students were highly engaged and demonstrated strong understanding, actively participating in discussions, collaborating effectively and confidently using geographical language.
- Students made clear connections between Geography and their lived experiences. Local Geography was a prominent and successful feature of all lessons.
- In every lesson, the very good use of digital technologies to undertake structured research tasks supported the development of students' digital learning skills.
- Senior management was very supportive of the subject department; subject provision and whole-school support for Geography was very good.
- The overall quality of planning and preparation for Geography was good, while individual teacher planning was of a very high standard.

Recommendations

- As a means of helping students develop a clearer understanding of the specific knowledge and skills expected of them, teachers should use action verbs more regularly when sharing and discussing learning intentions in lessons, as this will enable students to monitor their progress more effectively and to take greater ownership of their learning.
- To ensure coherent evaluation of learning outcomes by teachers and that formative feedback helps students understand their progress and next steps in learning, the subject department should collaboratively design key assessments, with clear success criteria, for junior cycle units of learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all lessons observed was consistently of a very good quality, with aspects of practice in a small number of these lessons considered excellent.
- Students demonstrated a high level of engagement and understanding across all lessons.
- Students had developed strong geographical literacy owing to a deliberate focus on key terms in all lessons. This deepened students' understanding and improved their ability to articulate geographical ideas accurately, as evidenced by their confident use of geographical language during activities.
- Students made clear connections between Geography and their lived experiences. Local Geography was a prominent and successful feature of all lessons. In a best practice example, students examined the topic of fishing by first exploring the local context before extending their understanding to the European level. This exemplary approach allowed students to appreciate geographical interconnections and scales. To build on this strong practice, there is scope in senior cycle lessons to further extend students' analytical and evaluative geographical skills by incorporating more structured opportunities to compare, critique or make judgements about geographical patterns at different scales.
- Maps and mapping skills were used to very good effect in the majority of lessons. In one lesson, the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to visualise and analyse the impact of rising sea levels on the local area was an outstanding way to develop students' spatial awareness and analytical skills. At the same time, they also applied their learning in the real world, aligning with the inquiry-based nature of the Geography specification.
- In most lessons, students benefited from a multimodal approach to learning, consistent with the principles of Universal Design for Learning. Teachers used a variety of resources - visuals, digital tools, written materials and hands-on activities - to support accessibility and engagement for all learners.
- Appropriate pacing of lessons ensured that there was a good balance between teacher-led and student-led learning. In an example of exemplary practice during a lesson on rocks, students acted as "note-makers," using structured handouts and resources to gather information collaboratively. Trading clues encouraged teamwork, while matching rock samples to descriptions reinforced understanding and observation skills.
- Students developed strong digital learning skills. In every lesson, they engaged in structured research tasks using digital learning technologies. They accessed resources, created content, and presented findings, reflecting the commitment to using digital tools to enhance learning outcomes and maximise opportunities for student autonomy.
- Assessment practices effectively supported learning. Questioning was central in all lessons, with teachers using a variety of higher-order and supplementary questions to check understanding and encourage critical thinking. In one junior cycle lesson, inquiry-based learning was particularly effective, with students exploring the content through a sequence of geographical questions supported by visuals. This approach promoted curiosity and independent thinking. More explicit use of success criteria would extend opportunities for higher-order geographical thinking and develop students' evaluative and analytical responses.
- Individual teacher planning was of a very high standard, with all lessons very well prepared and clearly structured to support student learning.
- Teachers demonstrated high levels of subject knowledge and pedagogical expertise. The quality of classroom management was consistently high, ensuring respectful, inclusive and purposeful learning environments.
- In all lessons, teachers shared clear learning intentions, which were appropriately linked to prior learning. In a small number of lessons, these were revisited during the plenary

phase to consolidate learning. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that teachers use action verbs more regularly when discussing learning intentions. This will help students develop a clearer understanding of the level of knowledge and skills expected.

- Differentiation to support student learning was evident across all lessons. In an example of best practice during a junior cycle lesson, student voice was actively incorporated, and opportunities for choice were provided. This approach not only supported individual learning needs but also introduced appropriate challenge for higher-achieving students.
- At the focus group, students were resoundingly positive about their experience of learning Geography, referencing especially teachers' enthusiasm, the strong teacher–student rapport and opportunities for collaborative and active learning.

2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- Overall, subject provision and whole-school support for Geography were very good. Senior management was highly supportive of the Geography department, ensuring that teachers had the necessary equipment, resources, and professional development opportunities to deliver the subject effectively.
- At junior cycle, all first-year students sampled Geography before selecting their optional subjects for second and third year. Although Geography was an optional subject at both junior and senior cycle, it remained a consistently popular choice, reflecting students' positive learning experiences and the department's strong reputation within the school.
- The department should maintain its already reflective and responsive approach to evaluating provision for Geography, as demonstrated by its effective strategies for sharing students' experiences both within and beyond the classroom. Building on this strong foundation, continued attention to ensuring that curriculum content remains engaging during years when Geography is an optional subject will further support student uptake. Ongoing monitoring of the proportion of students selecting Geography, alongside systematic analysis of the factors influencing their choices, will help sustain and strengthen the positive promotion of the subject across the school.
- Lesson observations and departmental planning indicated that teachers engaged very effectively with the school's self-evaluation (SSE) processes. The department has made significant progress in implementing recent SSE targets, particularly in digital literacy and student engagement. Notwithstanding the department's prior SSE focus on student reflection, there is scope to consider how reflective practices can be used more effectively to enhance student learning further.
- Effective systems are in place to enable teachers to share ideas and insights with one another, including formal structures such as departmental meetings and informal avenues like collaborative discussions and the school's digital platforms.
- Timetabling for Geography was appropriate and in line with the subject specifications and Department of Education and Youth guidelines. Ensuring greater consistency in the allocation of teachers to TY Geography class groups would further support ongoing efforts to promote Geography and enhance continuity in programme delivery.
- It is commendable that the Geography coordinator's role is rotated among teachers, as this approach effectively promotes the development of professional capacity, encourages collaboration and fosters a strong sense of shared leadership within the department.

3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of planning and preparation for Geography was good.
- Significant effort had been invested in developing a comprehensive and well-organised subject department plan. This plan reflected a strong culture of collaboration and shared

professional practice, effectively using digital technology to support the sharing and capture of departmental planning and resources.

- Planning for inclusion was a key strength. The department worked closely with the additional educational support team to ensure appropriate support for students with additional needs. The inclusion of students studying aspects of Geography in Priority Learning Units (PLUs) within the Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP) further reflected the department's commitment to inclusive practice. The inclusion of fieldwork experiences for all students was particularly noteworthy and reflected the department's inclusive ethos. These opportunities allowed students to connect classroom learning with real-world contexts while fostering curiosity and teamwork.
- Building on the positive work already undertaken in reviewing the TY Geography plan, consideration might now be given to rebalancing the programme to ensure an appropriate blend of geographical content and skills-based learning. Less emphasis should be placed on content directly aligned with the Leaving Certificate syllabus, allowing for a broader and more exploratory approach suited to the spirit of TY. Evidence gathered during the evaluation shows that the current focus on Leaving Certificate course content reduces opportunities for the type of exploratory, inquiry-based learning central to high-quality TY provision. Shifting towards a more skills-rich, innovative programme would better align the experience with TY aims.
- Junior cycle planning was comprehensive and well-structured, with strong integration of learning outcomes across strands supporting a non-linear approach. The subject department should introduce a module on geographical skills, including mapwork, earlier in junior cycle to allow for greater integration and application across a broader range of topics.
- It is commendable that each junior cycle unit of learning included a dedicated space for reflection. To build on this progress, teachers should collaborate to design key assessments with clear success criteria, promoting formative feedback and greater student ownership of learning through peer and self-assessment. To further enhance this good practice, it is recommended that the department develop a subject action plan informed by reflections shared during subject department meetings, allowing them to monitor progress in key identified areas for development.
- A clear and effective scheme of work for senior cycle was in place. Teachers collaborated very effectively to ensure a positive and well-structured student experience of the Geographical Investigation, demonstrating a high level of professional commitment and organisation.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principals and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

For the students of Skibbereen Community School about their learning in Geography

Date of inspection: 21/10/2025

What kind of inspection did your school have?

A subject inspection was completed in your school. The inspector observed lessons and spoke with the principal and teachers. The inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning in Geography.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

- Teaching and learning were very good.
- All Geography lessons had a friendly and respectful atmosphere, which helped students stay focused and enjoy their learning.
- Learning about the local area was an important part of every lesson.
- In all lessons, students were given opportunities to research topics using digital technology.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in Geography?

- Students enjoyed learning Geography outside the classroom and were keen to have at least one field trip each year.
- The Geography department should start teaching map skills and other geographical skills earlier in junior cycle so students can use them in more topics.

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of Skibbereen Community School welcomes the findings of the report on this Geography Inspection. In particular, the Board welcomes the findings that the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in all lessons observed ranged from a very good quality to excellent and the high level of understanding and engagement demonstrated by students.

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

The Board is committed to ensuring that the recommendations in the report will be highlighted for all members of the teaching staff, with a focus on their implementation across subjects.

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