An Roinn Oideachais agus Óige
Department of Education and Youth

Subject Inspection: Geography
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Gallen Community School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Main Street Ferbane Co. Offaly
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	91515W
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	04/03/2026
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	02/09/2026

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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

Date of inspection	03/03/2026 and 04/03/2026
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 5 lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Gallen Community School is a co-educational post-primary school operating under the trusteeship of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) and the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise. There were 441 students enrolled in the school at the time of the inspection. The school offered the following programmes: Junior Cycle (JC), including a Level 1 Learning Programme (JCL1LP) and a Level 2 Learning Programme (JCL2LP), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE). The school also had three classes for students with autism known as the Cluny Centre.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning, and assessment of Geography was very good, with notable instances of excellent practice observed in individual lessons.
- Teachers created positive and supportive learning environments and implemented a range of teaching strategies that promoted active student engagement.
- Students engaged purposefully in learning activities, collaborated with their peers and demonstrated increasing responsibility for their own learning.
- In the majority of lessons, students used digital technologies effectively to support learning and develop digital literacy skills.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for Geography were very good.
- The overall quality of subject planning for Geography was very good.

Recommendations

- Teachers should provide formative written feedback more consistently and ensure that students have opportunities to act on this feedback to consolidate their geographical knowledge and skills.
- Students would benefit from more time and opportunities to reflect on their learning. While a range of very effective strategies to support reflection and assessment were evident, the subject department should collaborate to develop and implement a more consistent approach to providing structured opportunities at the end of lessons for students to review and monitor their progress in learning.
- The junior cycle units of learning should be further developed to ensure that all aspects of the subject specification are fully implemented. Greater integration of learning outcomes from multiple strands within units of learning would support the continued developed of a non-linear approach to planning and strengthen connections across students' learning.
- Teachers should collaboratively design key assessments, with clear success criteria, ensuring a shared understanding of expectations and supporting students' understanding of progress and achievement.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching, learning, and assessment of Geography was very good, with notable instances of excellent practice observed in individual lessons.
- Teachers established very positive relationships with students and created a respectful and affirming classroom environment. Teachers acknowledged students' contributions, encouraging participation, curiosity and sustained engagement in learning.
- Teachers maximised lesson time and structured lessons in a clear and coherent sequence. Students engaged in retrieval of prior learning before progressing to new content. This very effective structure enabled learning to build incrementally.
- In most lessons, students engaged purposefully in starter activities. For example, students identified services in their local area using mini whiteboards, while the teacher circulated and provided individual support. This very effective approach enabled immediate formative assessment and ensured active participation.
- Teachers very effectively shared the learning intentions. Action verbs, such as "explain" and "describe" were displayed on classroom walls and pasted into students' copybooks, while posters on desks supported students' understanding. These prompts were referenced to clarify expectations and supported students in engaging with the learning intentions.
- Teachers shared success criteria with students to clarify expectations and support the quality of their work. Success criteria were co-created with students, for example, when constructing a line graph representing the cross-sectional area of a river and for drawing a labelled sketch of a V-shaped valley. Teachers modelled each step and provided exemplars. Students used the co-constructed criteria during peer assessment, and all students completed and accurately labelled their work. This demonstrated very effective implementation of assessment strategies.
- In the majority of lessons, students experienced very high-quality learning through structured peer interactions and varied learning approaches which provided multiple ways for students to engage with geographical concepts and demonstrate their learning. Pair work, mini whiteboard responses and teacher questioning very effectively supported active participation and enabled highly effective monitoring of students' understanding. Visual resources and short video clips supported students in developing their knowledge of fluvial processes, patterns and associated landforms, while map-based activities developed students' geographical skills in map interpretation.
- In a lesson on glaciation, the teacher integrated experiential methodologies very effectively. Students progressed from visual diagrams to video stimulus and then to a simulation activity modelling glacial processes. This progression from abstract representation to concrete experience deepened student understanding.
- In a minority of lessons, students engaged in less effective activities like notetaking; the use of more structured note-making approaches would further support student autonomy and consolidation of learning.
- Commendably, teachers used a range of high-quality formative assessment approaches, including retrieval activities and class discussions, to assess students' prior learning and understanding during lessons. This information informed teacher feedback and subsequent lesson planning.
- Teachers used a combination of targeted, open-ended and whole-class questioning to check students' understanding, probe student thinking, and identify misconceptions in real time.
- Peer assessment practices reflected the school's self-evaluation (SSE) focus on effective formative assessment. In one instance, students assessed each other's work. A "Positive Peer Feedback" prompt sheet was available at each desk to support students in providing feedback. Students referred to agreed success criteria when discussing responses, and whole-class feedback followed to consolidate learning. This structured approach promoted student participation and supported students in reflecting on and improving their work.

- Formative written feedback was evident in copybooks. In most of the copybooks examined, students were not always provided with structured opportunities to respond to feedback, for example through correcting and improving work or completing tasks linked to teacher comments. Providing dedicated time for students to respond to feedback would further support students' progression in developing their geographical knowledge and skills.
- In the majority of lessons, digital learning was embedded purposefully and reflected the school's SSE focus on digital technologies. The teacher modelled the use of digital mapping tools before independent student work to support effective engagement. Students also used digital platforms to complete matching activities and quizzes to consolidate key geographical terminology. These strategies increased motivation, supported retrieval practice and provided immediate feedback.
- In a minority of lessons, students reflected on their learning. In one instance, the lesson concluded with a short reflection activity that encouraged students to identify what they had learned and to consider areas for further learning. This reflection supported consolidation of learning and informed teacher planning. Greater opportunities for structured reflection should be embedded more consistently across lessons to support students in reviewing and monitoring their progress.
- In a geography lesson observed in the Cluny Centre, students engaged in differentiated activities aligned with their individual learning targets. Students worked on personalised activities that supported the development of communication, literacy and life skills. The teacher circulated throughout the lesson to provide individualised support, while assistive communication devices supported students in communicating and participating in learning.
- During the student focus group, students spoke positively about their experience of learning Geography. They valued the use of visual materials, interactive quizzes and hands-on learning approaches. Students reported that project work supported a sense of ownership, autonomy and responsibility for their learning. They commended opportunities for collaborative learning and highlighted the benefits of structured lessons. Students appreciated outdoor learning and expressed a desire for more fieldwork to experience geographical processes. Students valued "Geography in the News" and indicated that they would welcome it more regularly in lessons.

2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- Subject provision and whole-school support for Geography were very good.
- Geography was offered as an optional subject at Junior Cycle; there was no first-year class at the time of the evaluation. It was a popular subject choice at Leaving Certificate. All Transition Year (TY) students completed a ten-week module in Geography.
- The role of subject co-ordinator was rotated every two years, effectively building leadership capacity and ensuring shared responsibility for subject development.
- Senior management ensured effective digital provision. Each teacher had access to appropriate technologies. Teachers had access to a shared platform to support collaboration and resource sharing. This provision supported highly effective lesson delivery and the integration of digital resources into teaching and learning.
- Teachers had their own base rooms, which was beneficial as it enabled visuals and subject-specific materials to enhance learning. Classrooms were print-rich and reflected strong subject identity. Student work was displayed prominently, while additional projects were showcased on corridor displays outside the geography classrooms, reinforcing geographical vocabulary and celebrating student achievement.
- The geography department maintained a dedicated noticeboard in the school corridor. This contributed positively to the visibility and profile of Geography within the school community.

3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of planning for Geography was very good. Schemes of work were in place for all year groups and supported structured progression in Geography.
- The geography department should review junior cycle units of learning as a priority to ensure all aspects of the subject specification are fully implemented. Teachers should ensure that units of learning adopt a more non-linear approach, incorporating learning outcomes from multiple strands. Greater use of action verbs, such as “describe” and “explain,” when analysing learning outcomes would further strengthen clarity, relevance and student engagement.
- Teachers should collaborate to design key assessments with clear success criteria to support students’ achievement of the intended learning outcomes. This alignment would support a more consistent and effective framework for evaluating students' learning and providing objective, actionable feedback.
- Team teaching was observed in one lesson and represented highly effective collaborative practice. Clear role allocation, shared responsibility and professional communication were evident. This very successful approach supported differentiation, reduced waiting time for support and increased opportunities for feedback and student participation. Students benefited by enhanced engagement and inclusive classroom practice.
- Geography teachers met regularly, and records of meetings were maintained on the school’s digital platform. Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings effectively supported the sharing of good practice.
- Teachers carried out a detailed analysis of Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate attainment data as part of a “SCOT” (Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats) review within subject department planning. This highly collaborative and evidence-informed process effectively supported reflective practice, targeted action planning and a structured focus on examination techniques, differentiation and strategies to enhance student progression. To strengthen the impact of this process, students should also use their “Record of Achievement,” available in the student journal enabling them to monitor their ongoing progress.

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

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

Date of inspection: 04/03/2026

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?

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good.
- Teachers produced high-quality resources to support student learning.
- Students said they enjoyed learning Geography and valued the variety of activities in lessons, including videos, quizzes and practical tasks.

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

- Teachers should give students more time to respond to written feedback in their copybooks so that they can improve the quality of their work.
- Teachers should provide more opportunities for students to reflect on what they have learned and identify areas where they need further support.

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