

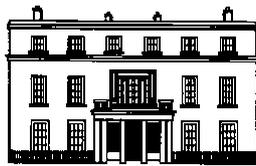
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT**

**St Gerald's College
Castlebar, County Mayo
Roll number: 64580H**

Date of inspection: 10 October 2013



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	9 and 10 October 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.
- A range of good quality resources and effective methodologies were used to engage students and support their learning.
- The very high uptake of higher level Geography and student achievement in certificate examinations reflects the high expectations set for learning.
- Provision for Geography is very good in the school.
- The geography teachers work well as team, however, there is scope to develop a greater level of collaborative planning for the subject.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The more consistent use of targeted questioning and differentiated methodologies is recommended to support the range of abilities in mixed-ability lessons.
- Assessment practices should provide for the greater provision of formative feedback in some cases, as well as to facilitate a range of assessment modes and promote student self-assessment.
- The transition year (TY) geography plan should be further developed and a geographical investigation should be included in this plan.

INTRODUCTION

St Gerald's College is a boys' voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. The school has a current enrolment of 483 students. The curricular programmes provided include the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good in the lessons observed.
- Classroom management was very good and a positive and affirming atmosphere prevailed in each lesson.
- There was a very good level of preparation for the lessons observed. This was evident in the advance preparation of some high-quality resources including worksheets, PowerPoint presentations, a video clip and other visual stimuli. The increased integration of information and communication technology (ICT) as a dynamic and interactive teaching and learning aid should be further developed across the department. In this context the use of Scoilnet maps to support students' learning in Geography is recommended with all class groups.
- Questioning strategies were generally used to very good effect to advance the lesson, interact with students and to develop higher-order thinking skills. In some cases there is scope to increase the level of targeted questions so that all students are challenged and to evaluate the learning across the class.
- In some lessons summary points were provided and these gave students a good summary of key material. This good practice is recommended in all lessons and the use of mind maps or other graphic organisers should be considered for this purpose.
- Individual learning tasks and pair activities were integrated in some instances and these actively engaged students in the learning. This practice should be extended to cater for the variety of learning styles and to ensure a good balance between teacher talk and student input.
- There was some good evidence of differentiation by questioning, by use of visuals and by a focus on terminology. In the context of mixed-ability classes the use of more differentiated approaches is recommended. This could be achieved by a greater level of teacher intervention during tasks, use of summaries and the further development of keyword approaches.
- Homework copies are regularly monitored. However in some instances, homework should be more regularly assigned, the success criteria for homework exercises should be identified in advance and a greater level of formative feedback should be provided to students on how to improve the quality of their work. Students should follow up on the corrections provided and further strategies to promote peer assessment and self-assessment should be implemented.
- There is a very high uptake of higher level Geography in certificate examinations and students achieve well.
- The display of maps, charts and students' work created a motivational and colourful learning environment in classrooms.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school support for Geography. Time allocation to the subject is in line with syllabus recommendations and class periods are appropriately distributed across the week. In so far as possible, teachers should retain class groups from second year to third year to support continuity of learning for students.
- Geography is delivered as a module in TY and consists of a study of glaciation and aspects of globalisation. In line with the ethos of TY the geography programme should place greater emphasis on developing students' geographical skill-set in a more experiential and innovative manner. In this context a local fieldwork study should be included in the programme as well as the opportunity for students to report on the findings of such an investigation. This provision would effectively support the progression between the junior cycle and senior cycle.
- At senior cycle Geography is an optional subject offered within an open choice structure. Approximately one-third of students take the subject at this level.
- The geography department is well resourced with subject materials and teacher-based classrooms are fitted with ICT facilities. The department should now plan for the acquisition of equipment so that fieldwork activities can be conducted in the local environment.
- The geography teachers have attended professional development courses and the department is affiliated to the Association of Geography Teachers of Ireland (AGTI). One of the teachers has availed of training in Scoilnet Maps. A means of disseminating these skills across the department should now be identified to support the extended use of this interactive mapping resource.
- The facilitation of co-curricular activities including Geography Awareness Week is commended as a way of enriching students' learning in the subject.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The geography teaching team meet formally once a year and one teacher acts as co-ordinator. It is recommended that additional formal meetings are facilitated so that teachers can engage in a greater level of professional dialogue and collaborative planning for the subject. The department has identified developmental priorities across a number of areas including literacy, numeracy and ICT. An action-planning cycle should now be agreed to advance these priorities in a strategic manner.
- Common curricular plans are in place for each year group, however these are primarily content driven and should focus more on strategies to guide teaching and learning. These plans should identify the key learning outcomes in terms of students' knowledge and skills in relation to the various units of the syllabus and link topics to appropriate resources, methodologies and assessment strategies. This work should be undertaken on a phased basis and should provide very good opportunity for the sharing of practice and resources. The agreed curricular plans should be adhered to in all cases to facilitate the use of common assessment across year groups.
- The first-year programme has a marked emphasis on the delivery of physical Geography in a sequential manner. As these are the most technical sections of the syllabus, topics of

varying levels of difficulty from different sections of the syllabus should be combined with this provision. Map and photograph skills should also be introduced from an early stage in first year so that they can be developed in an integrated manner within the planned teaching programme.

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. 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.