

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Coláiste Pobail Bheanntaí
Bantry, County Cork
Roll number: 76090G

Date of inspection: 25 April 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GEOGRAPHY**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	25 April 2012
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 and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Very good quality teaching and learning was observed in geography lessons.
- Geographical skills were integrated very effectively in lessons.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used very effectively in advancing learning in Geography through the display and integration of appropriate visual-stimulus materials in geography lessons.
- Significant levels of uptake of Geography at senior cycle and uptake of higher-level geography are in evidence; however, poor timetable provision in junior cycle could impact negatively on this trend.
- Important achievements in subject planning in advance of the amalgamation process have securely positioned Geography to develop in the context of the new school.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- School management should increase timetable provision for Geography in junior cycle at least to a position of parity with the allocation to History.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Pobail Bheanntaí was officially opened in March 2012 following the amalgamation of St Goban's College and Árdcoil Phobal Bheanntaí. This co-educational school has an enrolment of 629 students and offers Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). It is planned to offer the Transition Year (TY) programme to the current first-year cohort in September 2014. The new school building, built as a public-private partnership, includes a Gaelscoil on the school campus and occupies an impressive and extensive elevated site overlooking the town and Bantry bay.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning observed in geography lessons was very good. Lessons were well paced, used a variety of methodologies, challenged students in their learning and, in all cases, were characterised by a very positive atmosphere and good relationships between students and teachers.
- In all lessons observed, the well-planned strategies of the teachers actively engaged students in their own learning. The planned learning was clear but not always stated in the form of a learning intention. Teachers should consider the merits of outlining the learning intention of the lesson for students and then review the outcomes achieved. Lessons were student-centered with very limited but effective teacher inputs. The voice of the student in interaction and engagement with task, topic or question was the main focus of lessons. An appropriate homework or examination focus linked lessons to previous learning and advanced students' engagement with new topics.
- The teaching of key geographical concepts using Ordnance Survey (OS) maps in junior cycle reflected very good practice, as did the use of pair work, worksheets and individual tasks to integrate maps, diagrams and photographs into lessons. The integration of diagrams, key learning points and photographs relating to geomorphic processes was used to very good effect in lessons. This method allowed students to engage with, and understand, these important processes. Questioning and discussion, that was both challenging and affirming, allowed teachers to assess learning and understanding of both concept and process.
- Very effective geography lessons incorporated local settings, a range of visual-stimulus materials including diagrams, digital photographs, PowerPoint presentations and very appropriate and well-selected video clips provided succinct learning points. In all lessons, these resources enhanced student's learning and the visual impact of the lesson.
- Students preparing for certificate examinations were engaged in well-structured revision based on specific syllabus topics, significant relevant points (SRPs), the application of appropriate geographical skills, and good quality questioning.
- The focus on literacy and numeracy, now established in the new school, was clearly evident in geography lessons, particularly in junior cycle. Key words and terminology were emphasised. The calculation of grid references and the interpretation of graphs were effective strategies used to develop numeracy skills, and the quality of formative assessment of homework demonstrated appropriate attention to students' written work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Geography is a core subject in junior cycle. However, timetable provision for Geography in junior cycle is poor with the allocation of just two class periods per week to students to study the subject. At some times during the school day, these class periods are of just thirty-five minutes duration. This level of provision presents a challenge to junior cycle students and their teachers to complete the syllabus over the three years of junior cycle. Teachers are to be commended for their hard work and for their high expectations of their students resulting in a significant uptake of higher-level geography in these circumstances.
- It is recommended that provision for Geography be increased to at least parity with the allocation to History at junior cycle. This change would represent a decrease of one

period to History over the three-year cycle and an increase of one period to Geography. The provision of three class periods per week to both subjects should be a longer-term aim, within the constraints of available resources.

- The allocation of five class periods per week in fifth year reflects normal provision, while the provision of an extra lesson in sixth year represents very good provision.
- Physical resources to facilitate good quality geography teaching have been provided in the context of the impressive new building. ICT provision is also very good as is the quality of the visual-learning environment of the geography classrooms.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The good quality preparatory work in the pre-amalgamation period has resulted in the establishment of a cohesive geography teaching team and significant achievements in collaborative planning. A curricular plan has been agreed, and the team has focused particularly on ICT and are planning to position Geography within the proposed TY programme. A dedicated geography website is also under development.
- It is very positive that aspects of the curricular plan are already under review in light of experience following the amalgamation. The department is encouraged to action-plan for the development of the subject within clear and short timeframes. Planning priorities should include timetable provision, the content of the TY programme and the embedding of fieldwork in the curricular plan.
- Individual planning and preparation for Geography represents very good practice. To support the aforementioned integration of geographical skills and the effective use of visual-stimulus materials, teachers had produced a range of worksheets, tasks and written challenges for students to actively engage them in the lesson and in their own learning.

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

The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.