

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Geography**  
**REPORT**

**St Mary's Secondary School,**  
**Macroom, County Cork**  
**Roll number: 62320R**

**Date of inspection: 2 October 2014**



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

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	2 October 2014
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was consistently good.
- There was a very positive learning atmosphere created during the lessons visited and students were consistently engaged with their learning tasks.
- Teachers in the department work well together as a team.
- Individual and collaborative planning was of a good quality.
- Department meetings are held regularly and are mainly focused on the administration of the geography department.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The department should consider developing a range of collaborative learning strategies linked to key areas of the syllabus for which such an approach would be appropriate.
  - The department should analyse the reasons behind the relatively low uptake levels for the subject at senior cycle and formulate a plan to raise the profile of the subject among senior students.
  - The department should undertake an ICT audit in order to ascertain and consolidate the available hardware and software resources, which could then form the basis of an ICT plan for Geography.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St. Mary's Secondary School is a Catholic voluntary secondary school for girls. Founded by the Mercy Sisters and now under the trusteeship of CEIST, the school has a current enrolment of 309 students. The school provides the Junior Certificate programme, a compulsory Transition Year programme (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was consistently good. Lessons were well-prepared and learning intentions were generally made clear to students at the beginning of each lesson. Links to previous learning were made through homework activities, or through appropriate questioning, which helped to structure learning throughout the lesson. Teachers used information and communications technology (ICT) appropriately in their lessons although more use could be made of the interactive potential of the available technologies, such as eBeam, for example.
- There was a very positive learning atmosphere created during the lessons visited and students were consistently engaged with their learning tasks. Collaborative learning opportunities, when used, added value to the learning experience of students. The department should consider developing a range of collaborative learning strategies linked to key areas of the syllabus for which such an approach would be appropriate.
- Homework was regularly set and monitored with many examples of formative comment apparent which help to support student learning through assessment. Literacy strategies, based on a keyword board, were visible in the lessons observed while tables and graphs were regularly used to illustrate a variety of geographical concepts.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Subject provision and timetabling for Geography is generally in line with syllabus recommendations. First year students are timetabled for two lessons per week which increases to three lessons per week for the remainder of junior cycle. Geography is optional within a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme and is currently studied by the majority of TY students. These students are allocated three lessons per week for a half school year. The TY Geography programme includes modules on natural disasters, global warming, regional themes and a local study. The methodology section of this programme is particularly well developed. Students are taught in mixed-ability classes. Uptake levels in Geography at senior cycle are relatively low. The department should analyse the reasons behind the uptake levels for the subject at senior cycle and formulate a plan to raise the profile of the subject among senior students. The views of all geography students could be an important part of this analysis.
- The school actively supports the attendance of geography teachers at relevant continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) or other organisations. The geography teachers are members of the local branch of their professional subject association which is becoming increasingly important in terms of keeping up-to-date with changes and future developments in the subject. Teachers in the department work well together as a team and have access to a shared folder on the school server which can facilitate communication

and collaboration. Geography teachers have regular professional contact with each other through formal and informal meetings and a student-teacher in Geography is currently being mentored by an experienced staff member.

- A range of teaching resources is available to the geography department. Fieldwork equipment is regularly shared with the science department while each classroom is equipped with a networked computer, data projector and an interactive capability. The department also has access to a visualiser while the *Scoilnet Maps* resource is also used by some geography teachers. The department should undertake an ICT audit in order to ascertain and consolidate the available hardware and software resources, which could then form the basis of an ICT plan for Geography. This plan could focus on the potential for collaboration and communication between teachers and students which would further support learning in Geography. The eBeam interactive tool and *Scoilnet Maps* could form the basis of a CPD programme for the department.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Individual and collaborative planning was of a good quality. Teachers developed their own short-term plans within the context of a long-term planning framework for the subject. The subject planning template is mainly comprised of syllabus content and could be developed by adding sections which relate to literacy and numeracy in Geography, resources used, skills developed and opportunities for review. These changes to the current digitalised version of the department plan would facilitate regular revision based on classroom experience which would make the plan more dynamic and effective as a tool which focuses on collaboration, teaching and learning in the subject.
- Department meetings are held regularly and are mainly focused on the administration of the geography department. Other initiatives related to literacy, Leaving Certificate results analysis and the department plan have also been discussed at meetings. The department should consider including a permanent, teaching and learning agenda point for their meetings.
- The department has developed a fieldwork programme in Geography which is based on local studies in junior cycle and Transition Year while senior students study coastal erosion along the Cork and Kerry coasts. The department should continue to develop local opportunities for fieldwork across all geography classes and levels. Opportunities for cross-curricular fieldwork initiatives with other subject departments should also be explored. The department is conscious of its role in the development of an awareness of active citizenship among geography students. This is reflected in the various Trócaire, Concern and West Cork Development Partnership (WCDP) projects which are facilitated by the geography department.

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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 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.

*Published April 2015*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

### **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The school is very pleased that the report gives affirmation to the quality of teaching and learning in geography, the positive learning atmosphere and the engagement of students in learning tasks.

### **Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.**

As part of our policy for improving teaching and learning at St. Mary's the recommendations of the report will be considered and discussed by staff. In particular the department will look at ways of increasing the popularity of geography at senior cycle.