

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

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

**The Abbey School**  
**Tipperary Town,**  
**County Tipperary**  
**Roll number: 65490L**

**Date of inspection: 12 May 2015**



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

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

---

**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	12 May 2015
<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, deputy principal and geography teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Teaching and learning that ranged generally from good to very good quality was observed in lessons.
- Uptake of higher level and achievement at both levels in Leaving Certificate Geography are strong.
- Lower levels of achievement in Junior Certificate higher-level Geography are an area of concern.
- History and Geography share a timetable slot at junior cycle that is currently labelled as History.
- The deployment of teachers of History to teach Geography to some junior cycle class groups is impacting negatively on achievement in higher level in Junior Certificate Geography.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A formal strategy of peer mentoring, focusing on pedagogic and curricular advice, should be developed within the geography department to support colleagues who are currently teaching the subject at junior cycle.
  - Patterns of achievement at higher level in Junior Certificate Geography require improvement.
  - It is essential that separate and distinct timetable provision for Geography be provided at junior cycle within the current time allocation to both Geography and History.
  - Over time, and within the limits of available resources, school management should move to deploy teachers with specialist qualifications in Geography to teach junior cycle class groups.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Abbey School is a voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools' Trust (ERST). It has a long history of providing second-level education to boys from Tipperary Town and its hinterland. The school has a current enrolment of 442 boys who are offered Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching and learning that ranged generally from good to very good quality was observed in geography lessons. The classroom atmosphere in all cases was positive and supportive with evidence of mutually respectful relationships.
- Almost all lessons observed had been well planned and prepared. In most cases, lessons were coherent and were experienced by students at a pace and level appropriate to the mixed-ability nature of their class group.
- Where very good practice was observed in junior cycle, it focused students on tasks and on scaffolded activities that were paced at a level appropriate to syllabus requirements. A development aid lesson used continental maps, Human Development Index (HDI) data and digital images to lead students towards the establishment of key relationships and an understanding of the complex issue of development. Commendably, this was achieved without polarising or stereotyping countries at diverse positions on the HDI. This approach integrated the key elements of knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes and values to the study of Geography.
- In other junior cycle lessons, it was clear that the planned learning was not challenging students relative to the requirements of the syllabus. In one case, while the strategies used were very active and engaging for the students, the focus of the physical geography lesson did not fully reflect the requirements of the syllabus and the demands of the Junior Certificate examination. In another lesson, junior cycle students were engaged in learning basic map-work skills without firstly gaining an understanding of the key underpinning concepts of scale, relief, symbol and direction. Students clearly demonstrated confusion that could have been avoided by a more informed approach based on syllabus requirements and an awareness of the demands of the Junior Certificate examination.
- Recommendations for improvement at junior cycle focused on the need to provide students with a fundamental understanding and experience of the Ordnance Survey (OS) map as an item of spatial information focusing on scale, distance, area, relief and symbol, in advance of progressing students towards the skill of using grid references to establish location. Similarly, lessons should focus on the formation and location of rocks types in addition to the identification and description of same.
- At senior cycle, the strategies observed had a clear and very effective examination focus. A very well-chosen video clip of a river course became the entry point for very purposeful questioning and discussion that focused students on the key interrelationships that underpin geomorphic processes and features. The discussion also focused students on the significant relevant points (SRPs) required for written examination answers on these topics.
- A formal strategy of peer mentoring, focusing on pedagogic and curricular advice, should be developed within the geography department, to support colleagues who are currently teaching the subject at junior cycle.

- Patterns of uptake and achievement, at all levels in Leaving Certificate Geography, are strong and are increasing. Patterns of uptake of higher level Geography at junior cycle are equally strong. However, patterns of achievement at higher level require improvement.

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

- Geography and History are timetabled as one subject, labelled for students as History, throughout the three years of junior cycle. While the time allocation to both subjects within this timetabling construct is adequate, the responsibility for the subdivision of time for each subject becomes the responsibility of the teacher. This could lead to an unequal allocation of teaching time to either subject by individual teachers. It is essential therefore that separate and distinct timetable provision for Geography be provided at junior cycle within the current time allocation to both subjects.
- In addition to this timetabling construct, a number of history teachers are deployed to teach both History and Geography to class groups at junior cycle. Overtime, and within the limits of available resources, school management should move to deploy teachers with specialist qualifications in Geography to teach junior cycle class groups, as is currently the case at Leaving Certificate. The current situation, whereby teachers of History are deployed to teach Geography to some junior cycle class groups, is impacting negatively on levels of achievement at higher level in Junior Certificate Geography.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- While planning meetings are currently shared with History, a subject planning process for Geography is in place and a curricular plan has been developed. A common assessment policy for Geography is also in development.
- The teaching and application of geographical skills in the context of OS maps and aerial photographs should be placed within the topics for study for first-year students in the current curricular plan for Geography. The positioning of other topics in the curricular plan should also be kept under review.
- The aforementioned recommendation relating to the separation of History and Geography on the timetable for junior cycle should also be reflected in a division of the planning process for both subjects.
- Planning priorities relating to levels of achievement at higher level in Junior Certificate Geography, and the aforementioned formal strategy of peer mentoring, should be addressed within a time-bound action-planning cycle.

---

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.

*Published October 2015*