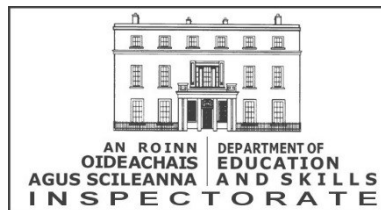


An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Geography
REPORT

Newpark Comprehensive School
Newtown Park Avenue, Blackrock
County Dublin
Roll number: 81001I

Date of inspection: 13 April 2016



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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	13 and 14 April 2016
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 nine class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Very good quality, active and engaging geography lessons that focused on interaction and discussion towards the understanding of key geographical concepts and processes, were observed in the course of the subject inspection.
- Uptake of higher level Geography is very strong; however, the levels of achievement of a small cohort of students at Junior Certificate higher level is an area requiring attention.
- A very good quality visual learning environment is provided in geography classrooms.
- Geography in the Transition Year (TY) programme has been refocused following reflection and review by the geography department.
- The positioning of map and aerial photograph interpretation skills early in the first year of the curricular plan is very positive.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The geography teachers should now focus on further developing the learning coherence of lessons through sharing learning intentions and success criteria with students towards enhancing their understanding of particular topics or planned units of work.
- Strategies to improve levels of achievement for a small cohort of students at Junior Certificate higher level should now be developed and implemented within a time-bound action-planning cycle.
- The recently reviewed and reinstated TY modules for Geography should now be consolidated with a focus on geographical skills and the formalisation of continuous assessment strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Newpark is a co-educational comprehensive school founded in 1972. The school's patron is the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. The school has a current enrolment of 839 students who are offered the Junior Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very good quality, active and engaging lessons were observed in the course of the subject inspection. These lessons focused on interaction and discussion with students towards the understanding of key geographical concepts and processes that were central to the planned learning. This planned learning was framed within a very coherent lesson structure and was achieved within a very positive classroom atmosphere and in the context of mutually respectful relationships that facilitated the articulate, assertive and courteous geography students to engage, and to participate.
- The willingness and success of teachers in facilitating students to engage actively, and therefore to participate in planned classroom activities, was a key strength of the geography lessons observed. In the most effective lessons observed, linkages and interrelationships between the key concepts were established, discussed and then applied to a range of settings.
- This approach was used to very good effect in a junior cycle lesson through a discussion that focused on the settlement of polders in the Netherlands. Discussion and questioning drew on previous learning regarding settlement patterns in Ireland and then extended students to discuss and explore the uniqueness of the creation of, and settlement on, polders. In another lesson, students were challenged to discuss and explain settlement patterns on the Irish landscape, as sketched on the white-board. They were then tasked with identifying and locating these patterns on an Ordnance Survey map of a familiar locality. The practice and the application of geographical skills to all appropriate topics in junior cycle represents very good practice.
- The classification of economic activities from a survey of family occupations of a class group became a very engaging task for first-year students. They were challenged to classify the occupations and were then further challenged to contrast the profile of these occupations with other more peripheral regions in Ireland. Key geographical patterns and interrelationships were highlighted by these very simple yet very effective strategies.
- At senior cycle, similar very good practice was observed in the study of the complex factors that interrelate within a biome and in the study of the Indian sub-continent. Key skills relating to sketch-mapping engaged students in their review of significant relevant points (SRPs) relating to India while processes such as deforestation were explored within the theme of man's role in changing the landscape in another lesson. A framework of cause, effect and solution was used to challenge and engage students in a high-level discussion that was grounded in up-to-date aerial imagery and statistics for Amazonia. The emerging ideas were then very effectively funnelled and distilled, through discussion, to meet the requirements of the discursive higher-level examination questions on this topic.
- The very effective practice in the lessons observed was centred on guided discussion that progressed learning through very effective questioning and prompting. Students' thinking

was stimulated by visual materials and through appropriate and achievable tasks that facilitated both students and teachers to assess learning.

- Where recommendations were made relating to the lessons observed, they concerned the over-reliance on teacher-led discussion leading to students becoming passive rather than active agents in their own learning in a small minority of lessons. Opportunities which might have been taken to link with previous learning, with other aspects of the geography syllabus and with opportunities for numeracy integration, were also discussed.
- To develop current practice, geography teachers should discuss how the sharing of more detailed learning intentions and success criteria with students could further develop the coherence of lessons. This practice should then be introduced within a self-evaluation action-planning cycle.
- Teachers and school management have high expectations for students within the mixed-ability geography class-group configuration. It is very positive that patterns of uptake of higher level Geography are very strong. Levels of achievement of higher level Geography at Junior Certificate level, by a small cohort of third-year students, are however, an area requiring attention. It is clear that a group of students, while attempting higher-level, are not achieving a higher-level grade in Geography in their Junior Certificate. This pattern should be considered and addressed.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetable provision for Geography is very positive, as is the quality of classrooms as visual learning environments. These rooms have been enhanced by an information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure.
- TY provision for Geography is now very good as two modules, one labelled as Geography and another labelled as Social Studies, have been developed and are provided for students within the programme.
- This provision is complemented by a long-established annual geographical fieldtrip to the Aran Islands that allows second-year students to engage with, and to enjoy, the unique landscape and socio-cultural environment of the island localities. This fieldtrip provides strong visibility for Geography in the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Collaborative planning for Geography is well established and is progressive. Key structures are in place and the commitment of teachers to both the subject and to students of Geography ensures that the visibility and momentum of the subject should be maintained, notwithstanding recent staff changes.
- The positioning of map and aerial photograph interpretation skills, early in the first year of the curricular plan, is very positive as this allows for both the practice and the application of these key skills as students progress through their study of Geography in junior cycle.
- The geography modules in TY should be named clearly as Geography to ensure that appropriate linkages are maintained for students that may progress to study Geography in fifth year. These recently reviewed and reinstated TY modules for Geography should now

also be consolidated emphasising a geographical-skills focus and through formalising continuous assessment strategies.

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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Published September 2016