

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

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

**Corran College**  
**Ballymote, County Sligo**  
**Roll number: 72300R**

**Date of inspection: 28 September 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	28 September 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion with principal</li><li>• Discussions with geography teachers</li><li>• Meeting with subject coordinator</li><li>• Review of relevant documents</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- A high standard of teaching was observed in all lessons and good quality student learning was evident.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used very effectively to enhance and clarify the material taught.
- A variety of methodologies provided for a productive and participative learning environment, however there is scope to extend the use of directed questioning strategies.
- Whole-school support for Geography is very good and the geography department is very well resourced.
- Teachers display a strong commitment to the subject, set high expectations for learning and engage in ongoing professional development
- Collaborative planning for Geography is well advanced and individual planning for lessons was very good.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills should be a central focus in planning for teaching and learning.
  - The first-year teaching programme should be reviewed and redeveloped in view of the diverse range of students' abilities.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Corran College is under the aegis of County Sligo Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and is one of two providers of post-primary education in Ballymote. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills to combat educational disadvantage. The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) are available to the mainstream enrolment of 98 students.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- A high standard of teaching was evident across the department during the course of the inspection. Good quality student learning was also evident in each lesson observed.
- All lessons were very well prepared. A range of well selected resources and methods were used to cater for the diverse learning needs of the mixed-ability class groups. ICT was very effectively deployed as a visual learning aid to illustrate and explain processes and concepts and to engage students.
- Teacher instruction was comprehensive. Lessons were purposeful and structured in line with the shared learning outcomes. The pacing of lessons was appropriate to students' abilities and the material being taught.
- A range of teaching strategies, including differentiated methodologies were effectively utilised. Students actively participated in lessons through questioning, group work and individual tasks. Questioning was used to very good effect to develop higher-order thinking skills and to check understanding. It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on targeted questioning rather than global questioning, to ensure that all students are challenged and included across the range of abilities.
- The textbook was suitably integrated and referenced to support student learning.
- Good practices were noted with regard to the development of literacy. Geographical terms were explained and reinforced throughout the lesson. Students have keyword notebooks to record subject terminology.
- In one lesson two special needs assistants (SNAs) supported students in accessing all the materials required for the lesson.
- Classroom management was very good. Students were very well supported in a positive and ordered learning environment.
- Students demonstrated good evidence of learning relative to their abilities and displayed much interest in the subject. There are significant variations in the standard of students' written work across the range of abilities. It is recommended that the geography teachers plan for the implementation of a range of strategies to support students in developing their writing skills and improving the presentation and quality of their work. The use of writing frames, graphic organisers and assessment criteria are suggested in this regard.
- Homework is regularly assigned, there is appropriate variety in the tasks set and a good level of work was noted in the sample of students' copybooks viewed. Students' work is corrected and provided with good quality feedback by teachers.

- High expectations are set for learning and strong emphasis has been placed on increasing uptake of the subject at higher level in the Junior Certificate examination. Very good progress has been made in this regard.

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

- Geography is a core subject in junior cycle. Time allocation to the subject is appropriate. The introduction of Geography as a Leaving Certificate subject is part of the school's development plan for 2014. The opportunity for students to continue their study of the subject to senior cycle would be a worthwhile development given the commitment and expertise of the geography department.
- All students participate in the JCSP and study Geography as part of this programme. The geography teachers work closely with the learning support department to ensure that students are adequately supported.
- Teachers have availed of professional development opportunities in a number of areas including ICT, literacy and involvement with the State Examinations Commission. Networks have also been established with the geography departments of other schools within Sligo VEC to enable teachers to share their expertise and resources.
- The geography department is very well resourced. The geography room is well equipped with ICT including an interactive whiteboard and Apple TV to facilitate the use of iPads and iPods. This room is decorated with maps, students' work and other materials to create a geographical learning environment. It is recommended that large maps of Ireland, Europe and the world be displayed in the other room in which geography lessons are held to facilitate the ongoing teaching of locational Geography.
- Good summative procedures supported by regular class tests are in evidence. Parents are kept well informed in relation to students' progress and participation through parent-teacher meetings, school reports and the student journal.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- An effective geography department is in place underpinned by the appropriate deployment of staff and ongoing planning for the subject facilitated through formal and informal meetings of the geography teachers.
- A collaborative and reflective planning culture was in evidence. Teachers engage in professional dialogue, an analysis of outcomes in certificate examinations and in the development of a shared folder of resources on the school server.
- The subject plan provides a good overview of practices within the department. The schemes of work developed for each year group provide a clear focus on learning outcomes. These schemes should be further augmented by referencing the resources used on a topic-by-topic basis to support student learning.
- The planned teaching programme for first-year students consists of the linear sequencing of the most technical areas of the syllabus. Given the range of students' abilities it is strongly recommended that this provision be reviewed. The programme should include topics of varying levels of difficulty and the development of map and photograph skills. The more challenging areas of the syllabus should be taught in an incremental manner over the three years of the junior cycle programme. This would enable students to revisit

topics a number of times and enhance their access to the curriculum in a more effective way.

- In the course of future planning the geography teaching team should prioritise a focus on methodologies to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills in the subject within a strategic action-planning cycle guided by the principles of school self-evaluation.
- Planning for the inclusion of field trips in the local area is good practice.
- Very good individual planning was evident in all lessons observed.

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