An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in Geography

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Loreto Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Letterkenny County Donegal
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	62840U

Date of Inspection: 17-05-2018

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

SUBJECT INSPECTION

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Geography under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

The board of management 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.

CHILD PROTECTION

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

SUBJECT INSPECTION

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

Dates of inspection	17 and 18 May 2018
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Loreto Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school which operates under the Loreto Education Trust, with a current enrolment of 932 girls. The school provides the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programmes.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was observed to be very good with excellent practice noted within individual lessons.
- Active student engagement in learning was evident in all lessons.
- Very effective questioning, which encouraged critical thinking, was observed in most lessons.
- In the majority of lessons, students were sufficiently challenged with the learning tasks; in some instances, there was scope to challenge students further during activities.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for Geography are very good.
- Teachers' collaborative practice is very good overall; there is scope for greater analysis of student attainment in the certificate examinations.

Recommendations

- Teachers should ensure that the planned learning tasks provide appropriate challenge for all students.
- A more thorough subject department review of student attainment in Geography in the certificate examinations, using all the available data, should be conducted.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was observed to be very good, with excellent practice noted within individual lessons.
- Teachers prepared high-quality resources and, in almost all lessons, integrated them in meaningful ways to support and advance student learning. Resources in many instances

were tied to the local area thereby contributing to high levels of enthusiasm and student engagement.

- Active student learning was observed in all lessons. Purposeful individual or collaborative activities to engage students with the content, and to advance and consolidate learning, were evident in almost all lessons. In a few lessons, the collaborative task used was insufficiently challenging. When planning collaborative tasks, teachers should ensure the task provides appropriate challenge for all students.
- Commendably, opportunities were provided within lessons for students to develop ownership and responsibility for their learning through the facilitation of student-centred activities.
- Geographical skill development was integrated very effectively into the general work of lessons. Students developed their use of grid referencing while plotting the location of volcanoes on a global map. Local aerial photographs were used to develop students' skill of locating items, to introduce urban functions or to assess students' knowledge of urban function on an aerial photograph.
- Teachers made worthwhile use of technology. The electronic visualiser was used to demonstrate a skill, correct common student errors or, in a few lessons, as a means of facilitating students peer assessment of both classwork and homework.
- Learning intentions were shared in all lessons, and, in most instances, used effectively to guide and assess the learning. In a few lessons, there was scope for further use of the learning intentions when assessing student learning.
- Classroom environments were very positive. Students were comfortable answering questions and expressing their opinions. Displays of students' projects, posters, and models created a visual environment conducive to learning Geography.
- Very effective questioning, which challenged students to think critically and advance their knowledge and understanding, was a feature in most lessons. In a few instances, there was opportunity to vary questioning strategies to ensure inclusion of all students.
- The students' copybooks reviewed contained a large quantity of written material. In some instances, effective self and peer assessment, and constructive teacher feedback to progress learning were evident. In a few instances, while high-quality teacher-created material was noted, there was scope to improve the learning value of these resources.
- In almost all lessons, teachers differentiated the learning activities, worksheets and homework. For example, in a revision lesson on weather, students were sufficiently challenged through differentiated group tasks and worksheets. This good practice should be extended where appropriate.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school provision and support for Geography are very good. Timetabling in both junior and senior cycle is in line with syllabus guidelines.
- Geography is a core subject at junior cycle and optional at senior cycle: both are taught in mixed-ability settings and this arrangement is working very well in the school. There is a wide variety of options at senior cycle and uptake of Geography has been consistently high, with two classes in both years in senior cycle. The geography department actively promotes the subject informally and should consider more formal promotion to aid students further in making informed decisions.

- TY class groups receive two classes per week of Geography for half the year. A skill and practical-based approach is taken incorporating the local geographical environment, affording students good opportunity to develop their practical skills. The various modes of assessment used in TY Geography foster independent learning and enhance students' research and presentation skills in an effective manner.
- Almost all teachers have base classrooms and suitable information and communications technology (ICT) is provided to support teaching and learning. Senior management plans to develop an electronic shared platform to support collaborative planning and sharing of resources and methodologies; this would be a welcome development.
- Through the school self-evaluation (SSE) process, senior management has begun work informally on sharing of methodologies through collaboration and peer observation. Going forward, the school should set formal targets in this area.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Overall, collaborative planning and preparation are highly effective. Teachers meet informally and formally, and work very well as a team.
- The subject plan, including the schemes of work, at both junior and senior cycle are of a very good standard. Commendably, geographical skills are taught in all years in junior cycle. However, they are taught currently as a single unit in each year. When planning for the introduction of the new junior-cycle specification, teachers should further integrate opportunities to develop geographical skills, where appropriate. In senior cycle, a similar approach to integrating skills should be considered.
- Field work takes place as part of the compulsory core unit in senior cycle and as a part of the TY geography module. Future collaborative planning should provide additional opportunities for students to develop practical skills to broaden and enhance their geographical experience.
- Uptake and attainment of higher level in certificate examinations are positive. The geography department works collaboratively to increase uptake of higher level where appropriate. To provide a wider perspective, a more thorough review of student attainment in Geography in certificate examinations, using all the available data, should be conducted.
- Teachers' individual planning was very good overall. In a few lessons, the pace of the lesson required adjustment to allow sufficient time for new learning or to allow consolidation and assessment of new learning to occur within the lesson.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management and Geography department of Loreto Secondary School welcome the findings of the Geography inspection report. We find the main findings to be very positive, including:-

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was observed to be very good with excellent practice noted.
- Active student engagement was evident.
- Teachers' collaborative practice is very good.
- There was very effective use of questioning which encouraged critical thinking.
- Subject provision is very good.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

Loreto Secondary School will endeavour to carry out the recommendations outlined in the report.

THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	***Very good*** applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is ***outstanding*** and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	***Good*** applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a *very good* standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	***Satisfactory*** applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	***Fair*** applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	***Weak*** applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;