

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

Subject Inspection in Geography

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Sutton Park School
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Saint Fintan's Road Sutton Dublin 13
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	60381E

Date of Inspection: 20-01-2017



WHAT IS A 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. Learning, teaching 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.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	20-01-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

SCHOOL CONTEXT

Sutton Park School is a fee-paying, co-educational and multi-denominational school under the trusteeship of a board of governors. There are 307 students enrolled at the school currently. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) as well as a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in lessons was very good, with some examples of excellent practice also observed.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used appropriately in the geography lessons observed; there is now scope to further develop the use of ICT in the department to underpin and support student learning.
- Transition Year (TY) is compulsory in the school and Geography is taken as a core subject by all TY students, however the time accorded to the subject in TY should be reviewed.
- School management has consistently supported continuing professional opportunities (CPD) for geography teachers in the school.
- Both individual and collaborative planning are of a high quality across the department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The department should create an ICT plan for the subject which would consolidate existing hardware and software resources and create opportunities for communication and collaboration that would focus on supporting student learning.
- Management should review the time allocated to the TY geography programme so as to ensure that TY students have an appropriate knowledge-base and skill-set with which to bridge the study of Geography at junior cycle and senior cycle levels.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- The quality of teaching and learning in lessons was very good, with some examples of excellent practice also observed. Learning intentions were shared with students at the beginning of lessons and students were generally given time to reflect on their learning at the end of a

lesson. Teachers used local examples of geographical phenomena regularly to illustrate particular topics or themes. In one lesson, the school grounds were used as a fieldwork location for students who were investigating slopes and mass movement. A range of questioning strategies was used by teachers in the lessons observed.

- Students were engaged actively in their learning and were comfortable and enthusiastic when opportunities to collaborate and work together were presented to them. Student voice is encouraged by the department and student reflection sheets form a crucial part of self-evaluation in the department. The work of the department is informed by a supportive special educational needs (SEN) policy and a variety of learning supports are provided to students. Classes are organised in mixed-ability groupings and all students are encouraged to follow higher-level options in Geography at junior cycle and at senior cycle. As the school welcomes a number of international students each year, the department has developed a range of linguistic support structures and strategies to differentiate subject content and learning for these students. This work is highly commendable.
- Homework was set and checked on a regular basis. The department has developed a homework policy designed to support student learning in the subject. The department follows whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies and has customised and integrated them into the teaching and learning requirements of the subject. As part of a strong willingness to engage in self-evaluation within the department, geography teachers are committed to engaging in at least one peer-observation session annually. This positive practice is to be encouraged as an innovative and progressive element of the CPD culture which exists among the geography teachers.
- ICT was used appropriately in the lessons observed. Classrooms are equipped with a computer and data projector, while an interactive whiteboard (IWB) was also available in the department. *Scoilnet Maps* is also used as a digital resource in the department. The use of a visualiser in geography lessons would allow teachers to 'capture' co-created learning and share this learning with students. The development of a learning platform within the department would allow staff and students to communicate, collaborate and share resources with each other. The department should create an ICT plan for the subject, which would consolidate existing hardware and software resources and create opportunities for communication and collaboration that would focus on supporting student learning.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Subject provision and timetabling for Geography is in line with syllabus recommendations. At junior cycle, three lessons per week are allocated to Geography while five lessons per week are allocated for senior-cycle classes. Geography is offered as a core subject at junior cycle and is taught in mixed-ability classes. Less than half of the students in the school choose Geography at senior-cycle level. Transition Year (TY) is compulsory in the school and Geography is taken as a core subject by all TY students. The subject is taught in an eight-week block which equates to twenty four lesson periods. The content of the TY Geography module is adapted annually based on student preference and interests established at the end of the third year of junior cycle. Levels of achievement in Geography in certificate examinations are consistently good and almost all students take the subject at higher level in the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Management should review the time allocated to the TY geography programme so as to ensure that TY students have an appropriate knowledge-base and skill-set with which to bridge the study of Geography at junior cycle and senior cycle levels.

- School management has consistently supported CPD for geography teachers in the use of *Scoilnet Maps*, ICT and in teaching methodologies.
- A dedicated geography room is used by the department and there are extensive published and digital geography resources available to students in the school library. Access to fieldwork opportunities outside the school grounds are facilitated by school management. Teachers in the department work very well together as a team and have developed a culture of collaboration and self-evaluation within their department. Their enthusiasm for their subject was apparent throughout the inspection visit.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Both individual and collaborative planning are of a high quality across the department. A comprehensive, informative and practical subject plan has been developed. Schemes of work are shared across the department and include areas such as learning outcomes, resources, assessment and geographical skills. A review section in the scheme of work would enhance its effectiveness as a dynamic planning tool.
- The department is already engaging with the proposed new geography specification at junior cycle and has mapped the eight key skills and twenty-four statements of learning to both current and future planning in the subject. Student academic achievement data is tracked and compared with co-predicted levels of student achievement at various points throughout the school year. This target-setting is part of the formative assessment process followed by teachers in the department. Levels of formal and informal contact among geography teachers are very good with three formal subject department meetings annually.
- The department has developed a fieldwork programme in Geography which is generally based on local studies. Senior-cycle students engage with their obligatory fieldwork project in fifth year while first-year students take part in a local farm study. Last year, third-year students completed a coastal study in the region and the department is currently reviewing the benefits of that type of fieldwork activity. The school grounds are also used to illustrate geographical ideas and provide an opportunity for geography students to learn and practice subject-appropriate skills. The department should continue to develop local fieldwork opportunities across all geography classes and levels. In this way, fieldwork could be planned to support the learning objectives specific to geographical study in all year groups.

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.

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 is hugely welcoming of this inspection report and notes the positive nature of it. It is particularly pleasing how the quality of teaching was complimented.

It is also pleasing to note the acknowledgement of the support of management for provision allocation and continuous professional development.

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

The recommendations are welcomed and the integration of hardware into the ICT plan is in hand. The Transition Year provision will be reviewed and amended.

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 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 <i>very good</i> 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;