



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Geography REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Sancta Maria College
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Ballyroan Crescent Rathfarnham Dublin 16
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	60341P
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	07/11/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/ Date of issue of report	17/12/2024

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. 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.

Included in this subject inspection report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

The board of management of the school 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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> or <i>Bí Cineálta (2024)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.

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

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	06/11/2024 & 07/11/2024
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students, including a focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during 5 lessons• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Sancta Maria College is an all-girls voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of Catholic Education, an Irish Schools Trust (CEIST). At the time of the evaluation there was an enrolment of 574 students. The school offered the Junior Cycle (JC), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good overall with examples of very good and exemplary practice.
- Individual teachers were well-prepared for lessons and offered a range of learning opportunities through a series of meaningful tasks and activities.
- All students used personal digital devices very effectively in lessons to support their learning.
- Subject provision and whole school support for Geography was very good; all students study the subject as part of their JC programme.
- Overall subject planning requires improvement to achieve a good standard.

Recommendations

- While the questioning strategies used in lessons were generally effective, teachers should increase the use of higher-order questions to ensure there is appropriate challenge for all students.
- To build capacity and experience in the subject department, all teachers should be given the opportunity to teach Geography at junior and senior cycle, where the timetable allows.
- The units of learning at JC were not fully developed and should be prioritised to ensure that all elements of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and the subject specification are met.
- Teachers should agree a strategy of providing individual written formative feedback to students to help them progress their learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good overall with examples of very good and exemplary practice.
- Commendably, in the majority of lessons observed the teacher placed a clear emphasis on literacy and numeracy with a particular focus on key geographical terminology.
- Exemplary practice was observed in a few lessons where these key geographical terms were used consistently throughout the lesson and where the teacher explicitly assessed student understanding of these complex terms.
- All teachers demonstrated a passion and enthusiasm for Geography and had very good subject and pedagogical knowledge. Most students responded positively to the various teaching methodologies employed by teachers in lessons.
- Effective assessment was evident in almost all lessons with good use of targeted questioning to assess prior knowledge and understanding, particularly when revisiting content covered in previous lessons. Open questions were used in most lessons to encourage discussion allowing students to share opinions, ideas and experiences with their peers. However, teachers should increase the use of higher-order questions to ensure there is appropriate challenge for all students.
- When setting active learning tasks teachers should allow appropriate wait time for students to engage fully with the task before offering support so students can develop their critical-thinking and reasoning skills.
- Students demonstrated a high level of prior knowledge and in the most effective lessons teachers had designed tasks and activities to build on this knowledge and develop students' geographical skills. While the effective use of maps and visuals was evident in the majority of lessons there was scope in a small number of lessons to develop key geographical skills such as map interpretation, interrogation of visual stimuli and graphicacy.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers made clear cross-curricular links with other subjects, and this added meaning to the learning enabling students to make connections between the knowledge and skills learned in Geography and other areas of the curriculum.
- In almost all instances, teachers shared the learning intentions with students at the beginning of the lesson signposting the content that would be covered. To optimise the impact on student learning, all teachers should link them to success criteria empowering students to track their progress and identify gaps in their learning.
- A key strength of all lessons was the promotion of very positive student-teacher relationships that contributed to an enriched learning experience where students were very engaged and were comfortable asking and answering questions.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively in almost all lessons to support teaching and learning. Teachers introduced a variety of digital tools that engaged students and maintained their focus. As is good practice, where video clips were used to stimulate student interest, they were accompanied by prepared questions or worksheets, and this reinforced the learning.
- There was very good practice evident in relation to group and pair work in the majority of lessons. Where collaborative tasks were set they were most effective when routines and expectations were clear to all students and where they understood their role in the activity.
- In one JC lesson exemplary practice was observed when a group placemat exercise was introduced, and the teacher skillfully scaffolded the learning by explicitly guiding and challenging students to develop their thinking at a deeper level through a series of prompt questions. This facilitated greater discussion on the geographical content being taught and allowed students share their knowledge confidently with their peers.
- Students who participated in the focus group were very positive about their experience of Geography and were able to make connections between their learning and the world outside the classroom, making reference in particular to issues such as climate change and migration.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- Subject provision and whole school support for Geography was very good overall; all students studied the subject as part of their JC programme.
- The subject department was well-resourced and the senior management team ensured that it was provided with the materials and equipment necessary to deliver the individual programme specifications.
- All class groups were taught by suitably qualified teachers who demonstrated very good subject knowledge. However, to build capacity and experience in the subject department, all teachers should be given the opportunity to teach the subject at junior and senior cycle, where the timetable allows.
- There was very good provision for information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning. The school provided a digital platform to facilitate the sharing of resources and posting of student homework.
- It was good that senior management promoted and provided opportunities for teachers to engage with continuous professional development and that Geography teachers were members of their teacher professional network.
- Each teacher was allocated a base classroom that allowed them immediate access to their resources and materials. These were generally print-rich environments to support student learning with examples of high-quality student work displayed on the classroom walls.

3. Planning and preparation

- Overall subject planning required improvement to achieve a good standard.
- The JC units of learning were not fully developed and should be prioritised to ensure that all elements of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and the subject specification are met.
- The Geography subject plan was aligned with the school self-evaluation process and included an appropriate and comprehensive LCE scheme of work, an assessment policy, strategies for supporting students with additional educational needs and resources to support teaching and learning. There was scope however for further development to include cross-curricular planning and strategies to optimise differentiation in lessons.
- In all lessons observed individual teacher planning was good and was designed to deliver student-centred lessons enhancing student experiences. Teachers had developed a range of high-quality resources including slide presentations, visuals, worksheets, quizzes and graphic organisers to support and engage students.
- The geography teachers met regularly to review practice, share experiences, and agreed actions to optimise student outcomes. Teachers should agree a strategy of providing individual written formative feedback to students to help them progress their learning.
- The geography teachers worked collaboratively to plan for classroom based assessments and held subject learning and assessment review meetings using the features of quality to assess student work.
- It is good practice that certificate examination results were analysed annually and areas for improvement were identified.

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.



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

For the students of Sancta Maria
College about their learning in
Geography

Date of inspection: 07/11/2024

What kind of inspection did your school have?



A subject inspection was completed in your school. The inspector observed lessons and spoke with the principal and teachers. The inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning in Geography.

What were the main findings of the inspection?



- Teaching, learning and assessment were good with examples of very good and exemplary practice.
- Individual teachers were well-prepared for lessons.
- JC units of learning need to be developed further.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in Geography?



- Teachers should choose questions that challenge all students appropriately in lessons.
- More written formative feedback from teachers in copybooks would help students make further progress.
- JC units of learning need to be reviewed and amended.

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.

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 welcomes the Geography inspection report, which took place on November 6th and 7th.

The Board notes and welcomes the very positive findings of the report, in particular the recognition of examples of very good and exemplary practice pertaining to teaching and learning.

The Board welcomes the many further positives identified during the inspection, including the promotion of very positive student-teacher relationships that contribute to an enriched learning experience, the very effective use of digital devices in lessons to support student learning, as well as the very good provision and support for Geography in the school.

The Board is very pleased that this report affirms the hard work of the Geography department in the thorough planning and development of comprehensive LC schemes of work, policies and strategies to support students with additional educational needs.

The Board congratulates the Geography Department on their excellent work.

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 Board will address and fully implement all the recommendations in this report, in particular the continued development of Units of Learning at JC.

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 of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	Provision that is excellent is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	Provision that is very good is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	Provision that is good is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective