An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: Geography
Report

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Holy Child Community School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Pearse St Sallynoggin Co Dublin
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	91330K
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	13/09/2024
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	10/12/2024

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

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>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.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) or Bí Cineálta (2024) 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.</td></tr>
</table>

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

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	13/09/2024
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including a focus group	• Observation of teaching and learning during 4 lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Holy Child Community School is a co-educational post-primary school in Sallynoggin, Co. Dublin. It is under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust.The school had an enrolment of 277 students at the time of the evaluation. The school offered the Junior Cycle (JC), an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme and the established Leaving Certificate. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the action plan of the Department of Education for educational inclusion.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good with some instances of exemplary practice identified; the range of learning activities and resources chosen by individual teachers was very good and provided learners with a platform for progession in Geography.
- Good teacher practice was observed in all lessons where a clear emphasis on embedding key geographical concepts and subject-specific terminology enabled student's learning.
- Assessment practice was good overall; teachers used questioning strategies that allowed students to demonstrate a high level of prior knowledge and understanding.
- A very good atmosphere and positive learning environment were created through respectful interactions and the communication of high expectations in all geography lessons.
- Senior leadership was very supportive of the geography department with good subject provision and whole school support; however the take up at the time of the inspection of the subject at senior cycle was low.
- The quality of planning and preparation was very good with scope to develop JC units of learning.

Recommendations

- To promote active participation and purposeful learning experiences, teachers should ensure that groupwork is co-operatively structured with assigned student roles and responsibilities for all group members. Teachers should provide clear oral instructions to ensure optimum engagement and that all students have an understanding of their roles.
- The senior leadership team and subject teachers should seek to promote the subject at senior cycle by developing a dedicated TY geography module to ensure students remain connected to the subject as they transition from junior to senior cycle.
- The geography department should further develop the JC units of learning by linking learning outcomes from across the three strands of the geography specification to embed a more non-linear approach which allows students make connections between the various elements of geography.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching and learning and was very good with some examples of highly effective practice in individual lessons.
- As is good practice, all lessons began with a review of previous learning and an assessment of student knowledge through the use of a combination of global and targetted questioning enabled students to demonstrate knowledge appropriate to their stage of development.
- Learning intentions were shared in all lessons. In the most effective lessons, these learning intentions provided clarity for students on what they would know, understand and be able to do at the end of the lesson and, in some instances, were linked to success criteria. In these instances students were seen to engage and sustain knowledge attainment across a variety of learning activities.
- A strength across all lessons observed was the positive relationships that teachers fostered with students, contributing to an enriching learning environment in which students were enabled to make progress. Teachers were affirming at all times and students responded enthusiastically to teacher instruction.
- In all instances teachers had a very good understanding of student need and where co-teaching was observed both teachers clearly understood their roles and worked together to support students effectively, optimising learning for the diversity of student need and ability.
- Teachers' very clear focus on subject-specific terminology and key geographical concepts was a feature of all lessons. This emphasis helped to improve students' use of geography-related vocabulary.
- It was good that students had experience of group and pair work in the majority of lessons. However, there was scope to develop this further and group work would benefit from a more structured approach including assigning student roles, enforcing strict time limits for the completion of active learning tasks, and allowing time for meaningful student feedback.
- The quality of assessment practice was good overall. Students were continuously monitored during lessons as the teacher circulated to check on their progress andprovided students with constructive, developmental oral formative feedback on their learning. However, in a small number of lessons the teacher's questioning was insufficiently challenging to facilitate higher-order thinking.
- Excellent practice was observed in one JC lesson where the teacher used a model to demonstrate the process of erosion and the subsequent features that were formed. In this instance, students were very engaged and demonstrated very good understanding in response to teacher questioning.
- Innovative practice was observed in another JC lesson where students formed a river in the classroom and demonstrated their knowledge of various key geographical terms associated with a river's journey from source to mouth. This activity was particularly inclusive with all students participating enthusiastically.
- All participants in the student focus group were able to demonstrate their understanding of geographical issues and agreed that geography lessons broadened their knowledge of the world around them with the majority stating that the teachers' approach ignited their curiosity.
- Students stated that they felt supported by their teachers with a small number of students identifying the positive impact effective oral formative feedback from teachers was having on their preparation for the certificate examinations.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- The senior leadership team was very supportive of the geography department with good subject provision and whole school support for Geography.
- The subject department was well-resourced and was provided with the materials and equipment necessary to deliver the individual subject syllabus and specifications.
- Geography teachers had easy access to resources in base classrooms, with one dedicated Geography room. Commendably, all rooms visited were print-rich environments with high-quality student work displayed on the classroom walls.
- All students studied Geography as part of their junior cycle programme. However, at the time of the evaluation, there was no specific TY geography module and there were no students studying Geography in fifth year. It is recommended that a Geography module is timetabled in TY going forward to ensure students remain connected with the subject. Geography teachers should also consider how they can best promote the subject and increase the number of students taking Geography in senior cycle.
- Timetabled provision was good and a small core team of teachers was timetabled to deliver Geography, making collective planning and the development of subject expertise possible.
- All class groups were taught by a suitably qualified teacher who demonstrated very good subject knowledge.
- The senior management team recognised the importance of subject planning and regular meeting time was set aside to facilitate this.

3. Planning and preparation

- The quality of subject department planning for geography was very good, with clear evidence of regular and ongoing teacher collaboration and reflection; well-developed Leaving Certificate schemes of work were available and JC units of learning, although also well-developed, were in need of review to integrate the various strands of the specification to reflect classroom practice.
- Very good individual planning for lessons was evident; teacher's preparation extended to planning a variety of learning tasks and creating interesting resources to engage students for an extended duration.
- Individual teachers planned and prepared lessons that were engaging and used examples from the local area, where possible, to allow students to make connections with their environment and optimise student engagement.
- The Geography department had a comprehensive subject plan outlining policies and strategies to progress student learning. The plan also contained JC units of learning and Leaving Certificate schemes of work. However, a review of the units of learning is necessary to ensure that they link learning outcomes from across the three strands of the geography specification to embed a more non-linear approach which allows students make connections between the various elements of geography.
- The geography teachers work collaboratively to plan for classroom-based assessments and held a subject learning and assessment review meeting using the features of quality to assess student work. This collaboration also includes planning for common assessment in Christmas and summer examinations.

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

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

For the students of Holy Child Community School about their learning in Geography
Date of inspection: 13/09/2024

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?



- The quality of teaching and learning was very good overall.
- A very positive learning environment was evident in all lessons.
- Teachers carefully prepared engaging lessons to support student learning.

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



- When doing group work in class, all students should be assigned roles and responsibilities so they know what is expected of them.
- A specific TY Geography module should be developed to keep students connected to the subject when moving from junior to senior cycle.
- Some small changes to the junior cycle units of learning are needed.

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

Holy Child Community School (HCCS) is delighted to receive a positive report which noted that the overall quality of teaching and learning in our Geography department was very good, with some instances of exemplary practice. This recognition affirms our commitment to delivering high-quality education and our dedication to continuous improvement.
The school would like to highlight the wide range of additional needs present within our student body and the differentiated teaching practices we employ to address these diverse needs. Our teachers strive to cater for the varying abilities and learning styles of all students, ensuring each individual is supported effectively.
We would also like to clarify a few points regarding our Geography programme:
Current Fifth-Year Students: In the current fifth-year cohort, there are 33 students. As a small school, we endeavour to offer as wide a subject choice as possible. However, in this particular cohort, no student selected Geography as their first option. Conversely, in the academic year 2023-2024, every sixth-year student took Geography as an option. We believe it is important to recognise these efforts, emphasising that all possible options are explored to achieve the best outcomes for learners. Therefore, it seems disproportionate to describe our provision as merely "good," given the extent of our efforts.
Transition Year (TY) Geography Module: In Transition Year (TY), students engage in a module called "How the World Works." The TY year is designed to provide a broad spectrum of activities and subjects, reflecting our philosophy of avoiding engaging in a three-year Leaving Certificate approach. Each subject, while valued, forms part of a broader TY curriculum aimed at developing well-rounded individuals, rather than focusing narrowly on specific courses.
We appreciate the feedback provided and are committed to refining our practices to ensure that all students receive an education that meets their individual needs and prepares them for future success.

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 Geography Department of Holy Child Community School is very happy to have received such an overwhelmingly positive report on the teaching and learning that is delivered in our school on a daily basis. The department is committed to ensuring that active learning is central to the learning experience of the student and we are committed to addressing the roles of every student in group settings to ensure every student has and understands their responsibilities. The department is also committed to promoting the subject in both a classroom and whole school environment to ensure students are aware of how to progress with the subject and we are currently exploring the possibility of a themed week inserted into the calendar to bolster this promotion. It is the opinion of the department that the JC units of learning will be linked across the three strands where appropriate and will very much be guided by student ability depending on the cohort that is studying the subject at any given time. We feel this is extremely important due to the wide-ranging abilities that are observed in the school and we are ready to facilitate the students as best we can, again, in an effort to promote the subject throughout all of the students academic life.

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