



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Óige
Department of Education
and Youth

Subject Inspection: Geography

REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name Firhouse Community College

Seoladh na scoile/School address Firhouse Road
Dublin 24

Uimhir rolla/Roll number 70140L

Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation 20/01/2026

Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report 23/03/2026

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(s) 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>Bí Cineálta</i>
1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement (CSS) are prominently displayed near the main door of the school / in the reception area. <i>Following the school's adoption of the updated procedures 2025, it is also required to display a student-friendly version incorporating the name of the DLP beside the CSS.</i> 2. The school's child safeguarding statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment. 3. All teachers visited were aware of who to go to if they had a child protection concern.	1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy using Appendix A of <i>Bí Cineálta</i>, it is reviewed annually (or earlier if required) and includes a student/pupil friendly version that is displayed where students/pupils and the school community can see it. 2. The school's anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, staff, parents and students/pupils. 3. The board of management minutes record that the principal provides an update to the board at each ordinary board meeting that meets the requirements of <i>Bí Cineálta</i>.

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

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	19/01/2026 and 20/01/2026
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including focus groups	• Observation of teaching and learning during 7 lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Firhouse Community College is a co-educational post-primary school operating under the auspices of the Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB). There were 820 students enrolled in the school at the time of the inspection. The school offered the following programmes: Junior Cycle (JC), including a Level 1 Learning Programme (L1LP) and a Level 2 Learning Programme (L2LP), Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE) and had one special class for students with identified needs.

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning, and assessment of Geography was very good, with notable instances of excellent practice observed in individual lessons.
- Teachers created positive and supportive learning environments, engaged students effectively, and affirmed their contributions.
- In almost all lessons, students benefited from thoughtfully planned learning activities, facilitated by their teachers, which encouraged active participation.
- In almost all lessons, students engaged purposefully in collaborative and reflective activities, making meaningful links between their learning and their local environment.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for Geography were excellent, underpinned by senior management's commitment to professional learning and effective resourcing.
- The overall quality of subject planning for Geography was very good.

Recommendations

- Teachers should collaborate to consistently use clear, explicit success criteria, linked to learning intentions, and co-create these with students where appropriate to clarify expectations and support students' understanding of their progress and achievement.
- Teachers should provide formative written feedback more consistently and ensure follow-up, so that students act on this feedback and further consolidate their geographical knowledge and skills.
- The geography department should collaboratively review and amend the junior cycle units of learning, to ensure full implementation of all aspects of the Framework for Junior Cycle and the subject specification. Teachers should adopt a non-linear approach to planning, by integrating learning outcomes from multiple strands.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching, learning, and assessment of Geography was very good, with notable instances of excellent practice observed in individual lessons.

- Teachers established a very positive, respectful, and affirming classroom environment that supported student engagement and motivation to learn.
- Teachers circulated effectively during lessons, providing timely support, adjusting instruction where necessary, and ensuring students remained on task and appropriately challenged.
- Learning time was maximised; in one lesson, highly effective pacing and a carefully sequenced range of purposeful activities, including “think-pair-share”, visual stimuli, a statistics gallery walk, targeted questioning, structured discussion, and exit reflections, ensured sustained student engagement.
- Teachers shared the learning intentions at the beginning of lessons, and in almost all lessons, revisited them during and at the end of the lesson, and explicitly linked them to prior knowledge and subsequent learning. Teachers used learning intentions to structure lessons effectively, guide pacing and provide students with a clear and purposeful focus for learning.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers effectively shared success criteria in advance of tasks and in a small number of lessons co-created them with students for written work, group activities, and peer assessment. Teachers used success criteria to clarify expectations, support self and peer assessment, and improve the quality of student learning outcomes.
- In one lesson, students highlighted key geographical information from text and an exemplar-style question, and a similar essay-style question was assigned for homework. Opportunities to co-create success criteria with students were missed; the inclusion of this practice, alongside scaffolded modelling and sentence starters, would further support students in producing high-quality responses.
- Teachers used retrieval practices effectively to reinforce geographical terms and concepts. In one lesson, students used mini whiteboards to retrieve prior learning, match terms with definitions and share ideas within groups, strengthening retention and confidence.
- A wide range of active and student-centred methodologies was observed, including group work, pair work, jigsaw strategies, and structured discussions. Teachers promoted student autonomy through group roles, independent research, self-assessment and reflection. In one instance, students acted as “experts” on fluvial processes and associated landforms and shared their learning with peers.
- Teachers effectively used a variety of visuals, models, and everyday materials to explain and illustrate processes of rock formation, change and destruction. Image collages and targeted questioning promoted higher-order thinking and supported students in elaborating on responses.
- Teachers effectively used concrete materials and hands-on learning; for example, students examined limestone rock samples and completed structured worksheets requiring geographical descriptions.
- Teachers provided ongoing, affirming verbal feedback, highlighting effective strategies and addressing misconceptions. Whole-class feedback was used effectively to consolidate learning.
- In one lesson, the teacher supported peer assessment through co-creating success criteria, modelling constructive feedback and providing exemplars, which enhanced the quality of students’ learning and developed their evaluative skills.
- Follow-up formative written feedback was evident in most copybooks. Greater consistency in this practice would further support students in identifying learning achieved and clear next steps for improvement.
- Reflection was a consistent feature, with exit tickets, post-it notes and reflection sheets supporting students in reviewing their learning. Reflection on returned assessments was well supported through teacher guidance and whole-class feedback.
- Students benefited from teachers’ strong awareness of individual learning needs, demonstrated through the application of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, including scaffolding, varied visual supports, adjusted questioning, and differentiation strategies, which promoted inclusion and equitable participation.

- Digital technology was integrated effectively. In one lesson, students analysed recent census data to investigate population structures and trends. Through effective teacher modelling and the use of interactive census maps, students developed data literacy, analytical and enquiry skills, and strengthened their ability to analyse demographic data and link national datasets to local contexts, supporting problem-solving and real-world understanding.
- Teachers consistently used local examples and case studies, supported by maps and satellite imagery, to contextualise learning and deepen geographical understanding. Geography in the News, with a particular emphasis on local issues and developments, was used effectively to link course content, enhancing relevance and student engagement.
- Classrooms were print-rich, with subject-specific vocabulary, supporting geographical literacy and reinforcing geographical concepts. Corridors displayed Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) and student work linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), celebrating student learning and extending Geography beyond the classroom.
- In the focus group, students described Geography as interesting, engaging and relevant, valuing the variety of teaching approaches used, which supported different learning styles. Students highlighted the benefits of structured note-making opportunities and regular reinforcement of learning, which supported understanding and retention. Technology was seen as supportive of learning, with students valuing access to videos, visuals, online resources through digital platforms, particularly when absent from school. Students also expressed interest in opportunities for fieldwork and outdoor learning, which would enhance engagement and provide meaningful real-world contexts for geographical investigations.

2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- Subject provision and whole-school support for Geography were excellent.
- All students studied Geography as part of their Junior Cycle programme and, at the time of the evaluation, it was a popular subject choice at Leaving Certificate. All Transition Year (TY) students completed modules in Geography, Biodiversity and Sustainability.
- Senior management ensured effective digital provision, equipping geography classrooms with appropriate technologies and providing a shared platform to support collaboration and resource sharing, and supplying teachers with individual digital devices to enhance teaching and learning.
- Teachers had dedicated base rooms, which was beneficial as it enabled visuals and subject-specific materials to enhance learning.
- Senior management actively supported teachers' engagement in professional learning, including participation in the DDLETB Teacher Leadership Programme (TLP), which informed subject planning and classroom practice. This work supported the development of student-friendly term planning, strengthened reflective practice within the geography department and increased student ownership of learning, in line with the school's self-evaluation (SSE) priorities.
- During the week of the subject inspection, all teachers attended training provided by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), supporting the continued development of inclusive education practices within the school.
- Geography teachers collaborated to design themed learning linked to DDLETB initiatives, including Take 1 Programme and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education for Sustainable Development was embedded through cross-curricular planning and whole-school initiatives such as Eco Week, Biodiversity, Walk for Water, and World Water Day. This approach promoted whole-school engagement and strengthened students' understanding of sustainability.
- Geography teachers supported the Green Schools programme and contributed to the school achieving four Green Flags, demonstrating a strong commitment to environmental education. Students participated actively through monthly, student-led actions and awareness-raising initiatives, including posters, photographs, social media updates and a dedicated digital space, linking classroom learning with real-world action.

- Geography teachers also established links with local primary schools through the Green Schools Committee, supporting continuity in sustainability education and positive transitions into post-primary geography. As part of this work, the Green Schools Committee participated in the Globe programme, developing students' scientific inquiry, data collection and digital skills.

3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of planning for Geography was very good. Detailed schemes of work were in place for all year groups, supporting structured progression in Geography.
- The geography department should review junior cycle units of learning to ensure all aspects of the Framework for Junior Cycle and the subject specification are implemented. Teachers should ensure that all units of learning adopt a non-linear approach, incorporating learning outcomes from multiple strands, and make greater use of action verbs such as describe and explain when analysing learning outcomes, to strengthen clarity, relevance and student engagement.
- Teachers should collaborate to identify and design key assessments, ensuring clear success criteria support them. This alignment should create a clearer framework for evaluating students' achievement of learning goals, resulting in more consistent, objective, and actionable feedback.
- The subject department should prioritise a review of the current TY geography plan to ensure its alignment with the Transition Year Programme Statement 2025.
- Guidance planning is a key component of the school's Whole School Guidance (WSG) Plan; guidance-related learning opportunities and progression pathways were acknowledged and reflected in the geography department plan, with subject option talks, Careers Week, sustainability initiatives and links with the AEN department supporting students making informed choices and understanding progression pathways.
- Co-teaching was observed, which was very positive, as it enabled teachers to collaborate and share expertise in specific topics, supporting colleagues and enhancing inclusive classroom practice.
- Geography teachers met regularly, and records of meetings were maintained on the school's digital platform. Subject Learning and Assessment Review (SLAR) meetings supported the sharing of good practice.
- The use of common assessments was also commendable, as it promoted consistency in learning outcomes, supported collaborative planning and enabled teachers to share insights on student progress to inform teaching and learning.
- Teachers should use a shared assessment tracker with students to support them in monitoring their progress over time, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and engaging them with timely, targeted next steps to enhance learning outcomes.
- Teachers reviewed examination results annually, including certificate examination data, to identify trends, set targets and inform subject planning. This effective analysis supported focused discussions at subject department meetings and contributed to improved alignment between teaching, learning and assessment.

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



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For the students of Firhouse Community College about their learning in Geography

Date of inspection: 20/01/2026

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, with excellent practice observed in some lessons.
- Geography lessons were positive, engaging, and inclusive.
- Students learned through varied and interactive activities.

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



- All teachers should collaborate with students to create success criteria.
- Teachers should give written feedback more often and check that students act on it.

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

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

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board of management of Firhouse Community College welcomes the geography subject inspection report.

It acknowledges the positive findings of the report, in particular, the recognition of the very good quality of teaching, learning and assessment taking place with “notable instances of excellent practice”. Also, the finding that the overall quality of subject planning was very good and the recognition of the “wide range of active student-centred methodologies” in use.

The board is also pleased with the positive finding that classroom environments were print-rich and classrooms provided “positive and supportive learning environments”. The board is happy to learn that students find geography classes “interesting, engaging and relevant”.

In addition, the board is pleased to note that subject provision and whole school support for Geography were excellent and that senior management showed commitment to teachers’ professional learning and effective resourcing of the geography department.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The board of management along with the senior management team will support the geography department in implementing the recommendations.

The geography teachers will place emphasis on providing formative written feedback, consistently, as recommended. Attention shall also be given to ensuring that students act on the feedback in future work.

The junior cycle units of learning will be reviewed and amended, as recommended, to ensure the full implementation of the all aspects of the Framework for the Junior Cycle. Geography teachers will also focus on the use of success criteria linked to the learning intentions as the report recommends.