

The Department of Education and Skills

**Inspection of a course
in a Coláiste Gaeilge (Irish College)**

REPORT

**Coláiste Cholumba
An Cheathrú Rua, County Galway
Reference code: CGC121**

Date of Inspection: 08 June 2017



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EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**

THE INSPECTION

INTRODUCTION

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills evaluates the quality of educational provision in a certain number of courses provided each year by Irish colleges on behalf of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The report on this Irish course is based on observation of teaching, learning and cultural activities, interaction with students and discussion with management as well as the review of relevant documentation.

Inspectors describe the quality of three main areas of provision 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 college's provision in each area.

The Irish-language college steering committee was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, a response was not received from the steering committee.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed and very good in one case; the emphasis was, correctly, on communication.
- The content of the lessons, the classes and the course programme lacked originality as it was too similar to the students' immediate environment, topics which they would have encountered at school already.
- The students' experience of Irish language and culture was of a good standard; the activities were creative and enjoyable.
- A positive aspect of the course was that the focus group of students mentioned that the leaders provided them with the appropriate vocabulary to participate in sports and entertainment activities. This, in turn, enabled them to enjoy participation in these events.
- The standard of leadership and management was very good.

Main recommendations

- A greater learning challenge should be presented to the students who demonstrate the greatest proficiency and interest in learning the language.
- The material used in lessons should be more interesting and enjoyment of learning should be a priority when planning lesson subjects for the course.
- There is further scope to focus on using differentiation strategies during morning lessons in more effective ways.

1. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching was good in the three lessons observed and very good in one case.
- The quality of learning was good in general and very good in one case; the students were fully co-operative in learning and they did their best to take an active part in the lessons even when the opportunities to do so were fairly limited.
- The good skill of the teachers in lesson management, the energetic approach they displayed in questioning the students and in interacting with them stood out among the strongest qualities that encouraged students' participation in lessons.

- The lesson material, which adhered to the topics on the course programme but which were reasonably weak in themselves should be reconsidered and developed. That material was too similar to the immediate environment of the students, like ‘the house, rooms and furniture in the house’ or ‘school and school subjects’ It is a significant challenge to inject originality into lesson material such as this, matter which is likely to have been well covered in the Irish class in their own schools and since they were in primary school.
- There was scope to provide a greater challenge in learning to the students who showed most ability and interest in learning the language. To this end the language should be differentiated through sharing richer language exemplars with students. It would be worth, for example, providing guidance on how knowing a store of adjectives can greatly improve a descriptive account.
- Students’ attention should be drawn to accurate use of the language, providing information, for example, on when to use the article or not to use it, in examples such as “*Béarla*” and “*An Béarla*” (“*English*” as a subject and “*the English language*”) or “*stair*” and “*an stair*” (“*history*” as a subject and “*history*”)
- There was one case where one extra piece of information would have greatly added to the students’ understanding of language accuracy. “*Déanaim staidéar ar Ghearmáinis*” de rogha ar “*Déanaim Gearmáinis*” (“*I study German*” in preference to “*I do German*”)The language requirements of the most able students should not be neglected; that is what differentiation strategy is for.
- Irish expressions, like “*mar a déarfá*” (“so to speak”) or “*díreach*” (“just”) should be put into circulation in the class where it is clear that students casually use English expressions

2. QUALITY OF STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCE OF THE IRISH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

- The students’ experience of Irish language and culture was of a good standard. The activities, which had to be convened indoors due to inclement weather on the day of inspection were creative and enjoyable for the students thanks to the motivation and encouragement of the youth leaders and teachers.
- A core aspect of the activities was the students’ use of language in an enjoyable and beneficial setting; the language was spoken by the students with ease.
- A student focus group , selected at random for interview praised the course highly. They mentioned the friendly, dynamic atmosphere which was routinely present in all the activities. This was how the activities observed appeared to be.
- A positive aspect of the course was that the focus group of students mentioned that the leaders provided them with the appropriate vocabulary to participate in sports and entertainment activities. This, in turn, enabled them to enjoy participation in these events.
- There was a very good mixture of students on the course from rural and city backgrounds, a point which was noticed by the teacher in the planning for a particular lesson and was used to very good advantage to create communication.

3. STANDARD OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The course was very well administered during the inspection thanks to the leadership and management; the principal and vice principal were both very capable in managing their duties; the necessary documents requested were provided promptly and they were in order.
- Attention should be paid nonetheless to the students’ recommendation regarding the long delay, according to them, with the beginning of the college’s daily activities and that they were waiting too long.

- The chairperson of the management committee was present and always available as support and guidance for the management team.
 - The teaching staff were motivated about their duties and encouraged the students' efforts to speak the language in the formal classes and in normal discussion.
 - The Irish course authorities have confirmed that the steering committee has formally accepted a policy regarding child protection, as required by the provisions of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (The Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011), and that the practice of the Irish course complies with the requirements of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (The Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011).
 - A copy of the health and safety statement, code of behaviour and anti-bullying policy was available. A health and safety officer was registered in the college's plan for the Irish course.
 - The college authorities have discussed and addressed recommendations made in prior inspection reports; there is further scope to focus in the classes on using differentiation strategies in more effective ways.
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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 Irish college's provision in 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 colleges in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other colleges 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 students' learning. The college 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. Overall, learners have access to a basic level of provision. 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 college 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-college 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; |

