

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

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

REPORT

**Coláiste na nOileán
Tír an Fhia, County Galway
Reference Code: CGC122**

Date of inspection: 23 June 2017



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS
AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION
AND SKILLS**

INSPECTORATE

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 Arts, 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 steering committee of the Irish-language college 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 overall and the spirited atmosphere in which students were encouraged to participate in co-operative learning activities was noted.
- A weakness in college leadership was that implementation of the college's language plan at teacher level was not being appropriately monitored and, consequently, there was no awareness of shortcomings identified during the evaluation.
- While assessment strategies were used effectively at class level, there is still a need to develop a more formal assessment and reporting system, as recommended in the 2016 evaluation.
- Afternoon events were well organised with a wide range of activities offered.
- The quality of leadership and management was considered to be fair owing to an insufficient demonstration of commitment to improvement and also arising from insufficiently high expectations in relation to the language competence of staff and to the preparation and teaching practices of certain staff members.
- Arising from most students' positive experience of learning Irish in class settings and from the various activities that reinforced that learning, it is satisfying that the students themselves reported that their standard of Irish had improved.

Main Recommendations

- It is recommended that the college authorities ensure that the college principal fulfils all duties set out in *Regulations under which Recognition is granted to Irish-Language Colleges 2017*, especially those duties relating to the monitoring of the college language plan, and that appropriate supports to enable individual teachers to improve their practice are made available.
- It is recommended that an assessment system, that provides all participants with an understanding of progress being made by students and the areas for improvement that require attention, be established.

1. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the six classes observed was good overall; practice was highly commendable in one instance and in two other instances areas for improvement were identified.
- There had been appropriate preparation for most classes in that consideration had been given in advance to the most suitable activities to encourage communication between students. Especially commendable was the practice whereby students' pre-learning was developed by affording them opportunities to integrate the language they had already acquired with newly-acquired language.
- In one case, however, it was strongly recommended that the teacher ascertain a more thorough understanding of the students' specific language needs by interacting meaningfully with them, either individually or in small groups, and that, instead of being reliant on the standardised tasks in the teacher's booklet, purposeful tasks be designed which would improve the language competence of all students.
- There was widespread use of Irish as the language of the classroom and many teachers ensured that the students acquired examples of *Gaeltacht* Irish.
- Many teachers exhibited vibrancy and energy in classroom activities, an approach which captured the interest of students and fostered their self-confidence. It was very encouraging to observe cases where students had the self-awareness to seek clarification or extra information on their own initiative.
- Extensive use was made of co-operative learning tasks to enable students to practise the newly-taught language and, where they had received the appropriate encouragement and were being effectively monitored, students undertook these tasks willingly and enthusiastically.
- On identifying areas for improvement in students' competence levels during the monitoring and assessment of groupwork, teachers should give guidance to students. Such advice could be differentiated and given to individual students or groups of students or, whole-class teaching could be employed whereby the advice would be shared with the entire class if appropriate.
- A positive atmosphere was apparent in all classes and in many lessons the result of the learning that took place during the course was noteworthy.

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

- The quality of students' experience of the Irish language and culture was good.
- A wide range of afternoon and evening activities was organised, primarily under the direction of the *ardchinnirí*, which ensured that students were active and were enhancing the language they had learned in other settings.
- The handbook that has been developed, arising from a recommendation made during the 2016 evaluation and in which the terms associated with the various sports are given, is a valuable resource.
- Opportunities to interact with the local population are provided through rafting and kayaking as well as the live *céilí* agus the Masses. Events such as walks and tours give students a flavour of the locality agus of the life and cultural value of the area.
- There is a reliance on the college manager to foster much of the cultural awareness in students and other staff members should assume some of this responsibility.

3. QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The quality of leadership and management on the course was fair.
 - Even though the day-to-day activities of the course were conducted in a satisfactory manner and a certain amount of co-operation was evident between various members of staff, weaknesses which restricted progress were identified, especially in relation to teaching, learning and assessment practices and the implementation of some recommendations arising from previous evaluations.
 - Even though the training events organised for staff before the commencement of the courses were beneficial, the course principal should distribute some duties to other staff members and set aside time to implement the necessary improvements in teaching, learning and assessment.
 - Implementation of the college's language plan at teacher level was not being appropriately monitored and, therefore, there was no awareness of shortcomings identified during the evaluation.
 - Another weakness was the low level of expectations shown at management level in relation to the accuracy of some staff members' Irish and also in relation to the quality of their preparation and planning for teaching and learning more generally.
 - While the assessment carried out at class level on the date of the evaluation was good, the formal system of assessment and reporting should have been developed in keeping with the recommendation made in 2016.
 - The Irish course authorities confirmed that the college's steering committee has formally adopted a child protection policy, as required by the provisions of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011), and that the practice of the Irish course is in line with the requirements of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2011).
 - It was confirmed that a copy of the health and safety statement, the code of behaviour and the anti-bullying policy were available. A health and safety officer was recorded in the college's plan for the Irish course.
 - It was evident that a well-established system of student supervision was in place and the *ardchinnirí* deserved special commendation for their dedication in this regard.
 - It was also good that the students themselves indicated that they were thoroughly enjoying the course and that they felt, as the end of the course approached, that their spoken Irish had improved.
-

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;

