

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

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

**REPORT**

**Coláiste Mhuire, Loughanure, Annagry  
County Donegal  
Reference Code: CGU 091**

**Date of inspection: 24 July 2017**



**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 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 steering committee of the Irish-language college was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the steering committee chose to accept the report without response.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT**

### **Key findings**

- A positive atmosphere could be seen among the students and members of staff around the college.
- The standard of teaching and learning was satisfactory overall. Among the lessons observed, examples of effective practice were seen.
- The students indicated that they were supported in improving their Irish and that they were enjoying the course.
- As a result of the variety of events organised, the students' development of their awareness of the Irish Language was catered for very well.
- It was confirmed that a copy of the health and safety statement was available; however, the steering committee has not yet carried out an assessment of the hazards in both centres. Despite the fact that this action had already been recommended in the 2016 inspection report, the hazards are not specified in the college's health and safety statement.
- It was reported that the steering committee and teachers had discussed the recommendations made in the 2016 inspection report; however, the steering committee and course staff still have work to do in delivering these improvements.
- The student leaders played a positive role in relation to organising events and supporting students in speaking Irish; nevertheless, there is an opportunity to provide student leaders with a more central role in motivating the students to speak the language outside formal classes.

### **Main recommendations**

- The steering committee must attend to its health and safety responsibilities as a matter of priority. An assessment should be carried out immediately on the hazards present in the external and internal environments in both centres. Also, the hazards recognised must be added in writing to the college's health and safety statement.
- The steering committee are advised to review the four recommendations made in the 2016 inspection report. A strategic plan encompassing measured and well-defined action should be developed in order to implement the appropriate improvements.
- Student leaders should be given a more central role in motivating students to speak Irish outside formal classes. To that end, they should be provided with appropriate training.

### **1. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning was of a satisfactory standard overall. There was variety in the practice observed. Aspects of lessons that were of both a satisfactory standard and a good standard were observed.
- In the best practice observed, the learning objectives of the lessons were clear in the teachers' planning and in teaching. Effective teaching methods were used, such as pair-work, language games and drama. The teachers made a good effort to get the students to talk and to speak Irish.
- In a number of other settings, emphasis was placed on using teaching methods that were focussed on the teacher and, accordingly, the students did not have the same structured speaking opportunities. In certain cases, it would be worthwhile providing better preparation for teaching. In the majority of settings, a lack of resources were used. No information and communication technology (ICT) resources were used in any of the lessons observed.
- Overall, progress could be seen in the students' language skills. However, it was clear that the progress was of a higher level in those settings in which good speaking opportunities were provided.

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

- The afternoon classes were of good quality. Events catering for the diverse interests of students were provided throughout the course. On the afternoon of the inspection, classes in singing, art, tin whistle and dance were organised, as well volleyball, table tennis and rounders. A reasonably good effort was made to promote Irish during these events. The student leaders assisted in the organisation of events and in boosting the self-confidence of students to speak Irish. It was clear from the classes and the afternoon activities that the promotion of the Irish language and culture was the aim of the college.
- During a meeting with the focus group of students, it was reported that the students were enjoying the course overall. It was expressed that there was a positive and friendly atmosphere on the course, that the morning classes were interesting and that the students were enjoying the afternoon and evening events.

### **3. QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

- Overall, the quality of leadership and management was of a satisfactory standard. The principal directed daily course activities effectively and energetically. It was evident that there were good, positive relations between staff and students. The deputy principal, teaching staff, leaders and students all co-operated respectfully and helpfully with the principal in the operation of the course. There was good communication in relation to course events, through illustrative posters displayed in the hallway.
- An effort was made to create an appropriate language and cultural learning environment, with Irish-language posters and spoken expressions hanging on the walls in some classrooms. However, the teachers used very few teaching resources overall. Furthermore, some of the classrooms did not appear overly tidy or organised. Some teachers reported that insufficient teaching resources had been provided for the course.
- It was confirmed that the college's plan for the Irish course was available. Suitable language examples and functions were included in the plan in order to attend to the different language needs of the students. Even though the plan contained an effective planning framework for class teachers, this was not widely followed throughout the college. The implementation of the plan needs to be reviewed through a definite monitoring system in order to confirm that all teachers are adhering to the plan.

- The student leaders had a positive role in the organisation of events and in supporting the students in their use of Irish. Not enough training is provided to student leaders to support them in fulfilling their responsibilities. No particular introductory course is organised for them either. There is now an opportunity to provide student leaders with a more central role in motivating the students to speak the language outside formal classes. To this end, formal training or a specific course for student leaders should be provided.
  - 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. The steering committee has not yet undertaken an assessment of the hazards in relation to the external and internal environments in both centres. Despite the fact that this action was recommended in the 2016 inspection report, the hazards have not been recorded in the health and safety statement. It is now essential that the steering committee fulfils its responsibilities in relation to these recommendations as a matter of priority.
  - In addition to the recommendation referenced above, three other recommendations were made in the 2016 inspection report. It was recommended that the observed effective teaching methods be shared throughout the college through the establishment of a mentoring programme. It was also recommended that self-evaluation be undertaken on the implementation of the teaching plan. The third recommendation focused on making more widespread use of active methodologies and technology: a recommendation that had already been made in the 2015 inspection report. The principal reported that the steering committee discussed all of the recommendations and that the teachers talked about the recommendations in relation to teaching and learning at the start of the course.
  - It is clear that some progress has been made in discussing the recommendations. It is also clear, however, that the four recommendations made in the 2016 inspection report are still to be implemented by college authorities. In order to implement the appropriate improvements in the specific areas identified, the steering committee is advised to review the recommendations made in both this current report and in previous inspection reports. To this end, and in order to support the implementation of the recommendations across the various areas of provision, the steering committee should develop a strategic plan containing measurable and well-defined actions.
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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
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 <b>outstanding</b> 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> 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
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> 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;

