

Department of Education and Skills

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

REPORT

**Coláiste na bhFiann
Rathcarran, County Meath
Reference Code: CGL092**

Date of inspection: 14 July 2016



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | 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, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The report of this Irish course arises from observation of teaching, learning and cultural activities, interaction with students and discussion with management, and examination of relevant documentation.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Key findings

- The quality of teaching and learning was good and effective for the most part, and of high quality in one particular lesson. There was also scope for development and a need for Irish-language accuracy in some of the teaching.
- A good, positive atmosphere prevailed throughout the course.
- The students gained an experience of the Irish language and culture as a central part of the course in a way they themselves said brought them enjoyment.
- Daily management of the course was good but there was scope for development in relation to the course curriculum.
- The course staff was entirely different from the list of names on the application form.

Main recommendations

- The course curriculum should be reviewed and tailored more to genuine communicative material that relates better to the life of the modern-day teenager.
- Learning intentions should be better identified from the lesson material, the achievement of these goals should be reviewed and learning should be consolidated, as seen in one lesson.
- Irish language accuracy should be affirmed in teaching at all times and differentiation should also be utilised for students who have a high level of aptitude in the language.
- The college management should provide an up-to-date staff list before the beginning of the course.

1. QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning, as observed in the three lessons visited, was good and effective for the most part. There was also scope for development.
- One particular lesson was of high-quality and related to one aspect of using and practising language accuracy. The merit of this lesson was found in the teacher's proficiency in the language, the imaginative communicative approach practised and the consolidation of learning.
- There was a good positive atmosphere in place. All of the teachers and senior leaders (ardchinniri) displayed a positive, supportive personality in all aspects of their interaction with students.
- The teachers prepared well individually for the lessons. An aspect for development at college management level is the course plan and curriculum and the provision of quality guidance to the teaching staff.
- The current curriculum was imbalanced in its emphasis on teaching-method theory instead of learning intentions that can be found in appropriate fit-for-purpose material.
- The course plan should be looked at again; the amount and merit of material specified within the plan should be increased in order to help the teacher teach language

functions based on stimulating material that corresponds to the life of the modern-day teenager.

- Sound efforts were made to base worthwhile lessons on a spiritual hymn and on one of the leading Irish-language songs. More measured and clearer learning intentions were needed instead of what was seen, however.
- The guidance given in relation to Irish language accuracy was not always correct; this much should be ensured.
- As recommended in the last inspection report, differentiation should be practised in the lesson. In certain cases, there were students who were proficient in the language and eager for further learning who did not receive enough attention in the absence of extra challenges or a wider vocabulary; the entire range of abilities of learners should be catered for.
- There was strong evidence that one of the main recommendations made in the last inspection report was being implemented well, i.e. recording self-evaluation of lessons.
- The distinction between the four different types of lesson taught to each class as set out in the course plan/programme of work was very rigid: a heritage class; a language enrichment class; a language development class; a language awareness class. It would be worthwhile integrating these goals.

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

- The course staff made good efforts to create an enjoyable atmosphere rooted in Gaelic activities. A group of students sang the words of Amhrán na bhFiann accurately and proudly without an opportunity to rehearse.
- There was a very evident good atmosphere during break time between the morning classes; the students energetically practised songs and dances in the playground; the positive influence and motivation of the manager, teachers and senior leaders could be clearly seen during these activities.
- A focus-group of students indicated that they were very happy with the organisation of the course; they praised the morning Irish classes for their good atmosphere and for the opportunity to speak naturally about everyday events.

3. THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

- The daily leadership and management of the course was of good quality. A full-time manager of the course had been appointed. The manager was well informed on all aspects of the course and a close eye was kept on all the activities.
- The course staff was entirely different from the list of names on the application form. It was stated that the names on the form were those of the staff from 2015.
- The course curriculum and plan is an aspect for review and development; prayers and responses from the congregation in the Mass were too much of a central part of the course programme.
- The language functions to be taught and practised on the course should be based on genuine communicative material instead of material that promotes learning off by heart in a register of the language that does not properly belong to communication as commonly understood.
- The Irish course authorities confirmed that the college's steering committee has formally adopted the policy regarding child protection, 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 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.