

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Inspection of a Course  
in an Irish-language College (Coláiste Gaeilge)**

**REPORT**

**Coláiste Eoghan Uí Chomhraidhe  
Carrigaholt, County Clare  
Reference code: CGM011**

**Date of Inspection: 16 June 2016**



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

**AN CHIGIREACTH**

## **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. This report on the Irish-language course is based on observation of the teaching, learning and cultural activities, interaction with students, discussion with management and inspection of relevant documentation.

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

### **Key findings**

- The quality of teaching and learning varied across the lessons observed in that the provision was fully appropriate in two of the lessons while significant scope for improvement was identified in another case.
- Aspects of classroom practice that were commended included the provision of regular opportunities for students to speak Irish, the setting of cooperative learning tasks for students and regular monitoring of their progress.
- The broad programme of afternoon activities created a lot of worthwhile opportunities for students to practice their spoken Irish.
- It was good that students were given a true sense of life in the area in which the school is located.
- Of particular note was the cooperation between staff members, as was the friendly and fun atmosphere that ensured an enjoyable experience for students.

### **Main recommendations**

- A planning template should be developed to guide teachers in preparing lessons and to focus their attention on the areas for development that have been identified in this evaluation.
- Greater attention should be paid to implementing recommendations arising from Department evaluations and particular attention should be paid to the development of resources and certain facilities and on accurate maintenance of policies.

## 1. THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning varied in the lessons observed. With regard to two of the lessons observed, aspects of practice were successful and, for the most part, provision was entirely appropriate. In the other case, however, obvious weaknesses in teaching approaches resulted in unsatisfactory learning outcomes.
- Scope for improvement was identified in the area of planning for individual lessons. While it was evident that the activities to be undertaken had been considered in advance, further planning regarding areas of language that students would acquire as well as the learning activities that would best enable them to practice the newly-acquired language was required.
- The use of Irish was to the fore during all lessons. In the case of two lessons, all participants were clearly accustomed to this good practice and a commendable effort was made to convey meaning without relying on translation into English. In the other case, teaching approaches centred largely on translation and the inspector was of the view that practice would have been more effective if the use of visual resources and other strategies that minimise reliance on English had been deployed.
- While new elements of language were shared with students in all lessons, a weakness that existed in many lessons was the insufficient provision of opportunities for students to speak the language. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that a concerted effort be made to reduce the level of written work completed by students and that greater emphasis be placed on practising orally the accurate manipulation of newly-learned language.
- Practice was most effective when regular opportunities were created for students to speak to each other. The practice in one case, where the classroom was laid out in a way that facilitated interaction among the students, received particular commendation. To support this good practice, dictionaries should be available in all classrooms and exemplars of language that has been taught should be displayed.
- In one lesson, an integrated approach was taken to drawing students' attention points of accuracy and it was evident that the majority understood the related grammar rules. This practice was commended.
- The range of resources used to support the teaching and learning process was significantly limited. The use of authentic, visual material which prompts the participation of young learners is strongly recommended, and the use of material drawn from textbooks should be completely avoided.
- The quality of assessment was good in instances where students were questioned effectively and when class work was being monitored.
- The presentation of awards and certificates in recognition of students' progress during the course is praiseworthy.

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

- There was a wide-ranging programme of afternoon activities which appealed to a range of different interests. It was evident that these activities created opportunities for students to practice their spoken Irish. It is good that the students themselves reported to feeling more self-confident when conversing freely among themselves owing to their participation in these activities.
- It was also very good that many of the afternoon activities gave students a genuine sense of life in the area and of the numerous cultural, recreational and geographical highlights in west Clare.

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

- The course was well organised and all members of staff clearly played a central role in managing and coordinating all activities. The principal/manager of the course is owed particular commendation for overseeing the creation of a team spirit among all staff, as well as a supportive and safe working environment.
- The cordial and fun-filled atmosphere was noted and it was evident that the afternoon activities encouraged the active participation of all students. Due attention was paid to the supervision of students. Management of the college have succeeded in developing a course that gives students an opportunity to improve their Irish. Expansion of the college will depend on management's ability to engage with self-evaluation. Therefore, there should be a greater focus on implementing recommendations arising from Department inspections. It is a weakness that only partial progress has been made with regard to the main recommendations made in 2015 regarding the practice of planning, including maintaining accurate policies, and developing teaching resources and materials. These areas for improvement should be addressed without delay.
- It was confirmed that the college had a plan for the Irish course. It was good that a language programme had been developed that provided teachers with guidance regarding the content of their lessons.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources in all classrooms would be beneficial. As well as this, a collection of resources should be compiled.
- The language programme should include the core principles that guide classroom practice and a template, that would guide teachers when planning lessons, should be devised accordingly.
- The Irish-language course authorities confirmed that the course'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.

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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.