

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

Subject Inspection in Spanish

REPORT

School name	St Columba's College
School address	Whitechurch Dublin 16
Roll number	60320H

Date of Inspection: 16-01-2017



WHAT IS A SUBJECT INSPECTION?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in Spanish under the following headings:

1. Learning, teaching and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas 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 school's provision in each area.

Subject Inspection

INSPECTION ACTIVITIES DURING THIS INSPECTION

Date of inspection	16-01-2017
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

SCHOOL CONTEXT

St Columba's College is a co-educational, fee-charging, voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 289 students, serving an urban catchment area in south Dublin. The school offers a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme in addition to the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate. Spanish is offered as an optional subject throughout the school and may be studied alongside French.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed, with elements of very good practice and a few areas for development.
- Teachers' linguistic competence in Spanish was of a high standard and Spanish was consistently used as the language of instruction in the lessons observed.
- Further differentiation in lessons would have enhanced student learning.
- Teacher use of written formative comment marking varied in the student work reviewed.
- Overall, subject provision was satisfactory: not all teachers in the Spanish department are suitably qualified nor registered with the Teaching Council.
- Very good progress has been made in subject planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should further explore and implement differentiation strategies in their planning and in lessons to maximise the learning outcomes for all students.
- The department should extend formative assessment practices through more consistent use of constructive written comments to provide students with clear strategies for improving their work.
- Management should ensure that all teachers are fully qualified and registered with the Teaching Council.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed, with elements of very good practice and a few areas for development.
- Teachers' linguistic competence in Spanish was of a high standard and Spanish was consistently used as the language of instruction in the lessons observed. Various strategies were used to maintain the target languages throughout lessons. Teachers provided students with appropriate linguistic scaffolding where necessary. There was also evidence of a teacher focus

on student pronunciation that was unobtrusive and that successfully modelled correct language usage. This is very good practice.

- Students frequently used Spanish as the language of communication during lessons; this was often elicited by teachers addressing individuals. In a number of instances, students experienced difficulty in communicating in Spanish. In order to improve students' confidence in speaking the target language, teachers should provide further opportunities for students to talk to each other in Spanish about the lesson topic.
- A variety of teaching methodologies was observed. In one lesson however, an over-reliance on teaching grammar limited the opportunities for optimal language learning. It is preferable to contextualise grammar and integrate it within a theme-based approach to learning outcomes.
- There was an effective balance between teacher instruction and student activity. Opportunities were provided for both independent and collaborative learning, including pair and group work. Flashcards were used to revise and reinforce knowledge of vocabulary in one lesson observed; there was scope to develop this activity further through the use of information and communications technology (ICT). Overall, students enjoyed their learning and they were engaged purposefully in the learning activities.
- ICT was used to facilitate lesson delivery effectively in one lesson, where use was made of a learning platform for in-class and homework tasks. Tablets have been introduced for students in first year. There is potential for teachers to explore more creative use of tablets in the classroom within a language learning context.
- Differentiation by grouping of students was observed in all lessons and in one lesson, there was also differentiation by task; this is very good practice and should be extended. In another lesson, which included both *ab-initio* and post-junior certificate students of Spanish, the lesson did not fully stretch the more advanced students. Teachers should give particular consideration to planning meaningful differentiation for the more advanced students. The department should further explore and implement differentiation strategies in their planning and in lessons to maximise the learning outcomes for all students.
- The teachers modelled enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning. Classroom management was very successful. Interactions among students and between students and teachers were very respectful and positive and there were numerous examples of students being affirmed and praised for their efforts by teachers.
- In all of the lessons observed, the learning intentions were shared with students at the start of the lesson. Other formative assessment strategies observed included effective use of questioning to determine student progress in learning and adapting the lesson accordingly. However, there was scope to develop formative assessment further, particularly in relation to students' written work.
- A review of copybooks indicated that work was set and corrected regularly. However, there was over-use of translation and textbook exercises in students' written work. Teachers should create opportunities for students to produce more independent written work. Best practice in homework corrections was observed where teachers' written comments identified strengths and guided students towards improvement. It is recommended that this practice be extended through more consistent use of constructive written comments to provide students with clear strategies for improvement.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Overall, subject provision was satisfactory: not all teachers in the Spanish department are suitably qualified nor registered with the Teaching Council.
- Timetable allocations for Spanish are in line with subject guidelines.
- The inclusion of *ab-initio* students of Spanish in the TY class is not ideal as it impacts negatively on learner experiences in the classroom.

- Management are supportive of extra-curricular activities which enhance student engagement with Spanish, including a school-wide European Day of languages, language evenings, a modern language play and Spanish debating.
- In addition to formal in-house assessments, parents and students receive fortnightly reports reflecting the effort they have made in their studies.
- There is good support for teacher professional development. Teachers are very open to building collective expertise and management facilitate this through peer-observation of teaching and school 'teach-meets' where best practice is shared.
- Not all teachers in the Spanish department are suitably qualified nor registered with the Teaching Council. All teachers of Spanish should have a language qualification in Spanish. In addition, all teachers should undertake appropriate professional development to meet the criteria for registration laid down by the Teaching Council. Management should ensure that all teachers are fully qualified and registered with the Teaching Council.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Very good progress has been made in subject planning. The Spanish plan includes references to appropriate methodologies for students with additional needs as well as references to literacy and numeracy. Curricular plans for each year are comprehensive, outcome driven and well laid out. Some curricular plans are overly influenced by the textbook and should be reviewed.
- Individual planning and preparation for work was very good in most lessons. In one lesson, further differentiated planning would have maximised the learning experiences of all students.
- Record keeping and reporting was very good. Teachers availed of the recently introduced school learning platform to regularly record student progress.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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 the school's provision of 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 schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other schools 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 pupils' learning. The school 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. 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 school 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-school 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;