

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Loreto Secondary School
Fermoy, County Cork
Roll Number: 62270F**

Date of inspection: 8 December 2015



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

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection: 7 & 8 December 2015	
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 6 class periods• Review of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The practice in the majority of classes was successful, and in certain instances was considered highly commendable.
- The use of Irish was to the fore in all classes and, when evident that this was normal practice, students' competence in oral language was commensurate with, or above, their general ability.
- Opportunities were created for interaction during all lessons and certain teachers were adept at managing collaborative learning tasks.
- There was very effective assessment of learning in many classes.
- Teachers displayed an openness regarding the development of their professional skills, in general, and some of them have successfully integrated more contemporary approaches into their own more established teaching methods.
- Preparation for all lessons was very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the acquisition of newly-taught aspects of the language be supported during lessons by giving students opportunities, under the guidance of the teacher, to practice accurate manipulation and pronunciation of the language.
 - It is recommended that assessment of students' oral competence be included in assessments conducted from first year onwards.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto Secondary School is a post-primary school for girls that operates under the auspices of the Loreto Schools Network Ireland. Irish is a core subject of the school curriculum which includes the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (an optional programme), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the established Leaving Certificate programme. There were 629 students enrolled at the time of the inspection and 5% of these students had an exemption from studying Irish. There are five teachers in the Irish department and the majority of these have many years' experience of teaching the language.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning varied across the lessons observed. The practice in the majority of lessons was successful and, in certain instances, was highly commendable. In another small number of cases, aspects of classroom practice were valuable although simultaneously some areas for improvement were identified.
- Irish was to the fore in all classes. All teachers spoke Irish with their students and it was clear that the majority were accustomed to this good practice. Practice was more effective when regular opportunities were created for students to speak Irish. When evident that this was normal practice, students' competence in oral language was commensurate with, or above, their general ability.
- All lessons were clearly structured and, in each case, students' prior knowledge was extended in a manner that enabled them to engage with the new aspects of the language presented. The manner in which students were required, in some lessons, to consult with each other to recall this information was commended. The visual resources and place mats used to stimulate thinking were also very helpful. It was very satisfying that the majority of students managed to complete tasks without difficulty.
- Students' receptive and expressive skills were developed in a balanced way in many lessons. In such instances, the direct method was used effectively to present new aspects of the language to students and to guide practice of the newly acquired language. In support of this input, students were required to undertake practical interactive tasks that consolidated the learning in a very effective way. It is recommended that, in all lessons, the language acquisition process be supported by giving students opportunities, under the guidance of the teacher, to practice accurate manipulation and pronunciation of new language.
- Clarification of time allocation, success criteria and individual responsibilities ensured that collaborative learning tasks were well managed by many teachers. Students accepted greater responsibility for their own learning when they were given sufficient space to engage in discussion with each other when completing these tasks. During this time, some teachers continuously monitored the work, assisting groups or individual students when necessary. The manner in which many teachers attended to students' differentiated needs during these particular lessons was laudable.
- It was good that students were asking questions and seeking help, especially when they were engaged in collaborative learning tasks. Frequently it was a point of accuracy or syntax that presented a difficulty. It is strongly recommended that the language issues that arise from these conversations be shared with the whole class and that the phrases that arise most frequently be practiced with the whole class, under the direction of the teacher.

- There was very effective assessment of learning in many classes. The standard of learning was predominantly evaluated through questioning and through monitoring task completion.
- Students' copybooks indicated that they have to complete written tasks each night and that this work is corrected regularly. The diligence of teachers in this regard is praiseworthy and the constructive comments included in written feedback is of particular benefit. It is also good that students are required to reflect on the progress they are making from lesson to lesson. Students' experience of learning in general would be further enhanced if more extensive use was made of other assessment for learning strategies.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The timetable supports the teaching and learning of Irish and students are assigned to classes in a manner that enables them to study Irish at the highest level appropriate to their ability range.
- While teachers do not have their own classrooms, the information and communication technology (ICT) system has been configured in a manner that facilitates access to electronic resources from any classroom. The pool of additional resources available to the department is kept in a central location in the staff room.
- Teachers display openness to furthering their professional skills, in general, and some of them have successfully integrated more contemporary approaches into their own established methods. Those attending additional workshops provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in order to develop skills that relate specifically to the teaching of Irish are deserving of particular commendation.
- The school's assessment procedures include oral language testing of students in fifth and sixth year. This is good. However, it is strongly recommended that assessment approaches be extended so as to give regular recognition to the spoken language ability of all students from first year onwards.
- A programme of cross-curricular and co-curricular events facilitates the use of Irish outside the classroom. It would be worth investigating the potential for tasks relating to competitions or projects organised by external agencies to be integrated into everyday classwork. It would also be good to have Irish more visible in the school environment and to avail of further opportunities to use Irish in general school life.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Preparation for all lessons was very good in so far as appropriate resources were sourced, consideration was given to the learning intentions of the lesson – including the language structures attached to the content of the lesson – and activities were selected whereby the students could practice these same language structures.
- The subject development plan provides good insight into provision for Irish in general and includes an account of areas that are the focus of school's self-evaluation process. Developing this good work through articulating improvement targets that relate specifically to the provision for Irish would be worthwhile.
- Administrative matters are the issues mainly discussed at subject department meetings. It is recommended that dialogue be extended to include classroom practice. Establishing a

peer observation project, as a support for this, would be well worthwhile as it would provide a clear context for these conversations.

- A commendable effort is made, in the transition year language programme, to provide students with a different experience of language learning to that they have had heretofore.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and with the Irish teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the findings of this report, which affirms the very positive work taking place in the Irish department to ensure that:

- Irish was to the fore in all classes
- Very good preparation was done for all lessons
- All lessons were clearly structured
- Students receptive and expressive skills were developed and students actively engaged in the lessons
- Students are required to reflect on their own progress
- Homework is diligently corrected.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The recommendations contained in this report will be implemented to inform future practice.