

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Drumshanbo Vocational School
Drumshanbo, County Leitrim
Roll number: 71570S**

Date of inspection: 24 February 2016



REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	23, 24 February 2016
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching was at a beneficial and useful level, the quality of learning was adequate and some aspects displayed room for improvement.
- There were good, but limited, examples in the classroom of an approach that sought to immerse students in the spoken language from the outset, in a natural way, by striking up everyday conversations.
- A positive atmosphere prevailed in all Irish lessons and an encouraging, friendly and gentle approach was evident in all classes.
- It was evident that homework is regularly set and corrected and formative assessment is clearly in use.
- In some cases, the teaching emphasis was too heavily placed on the language as a grammatical challenge to be overcome by students, rather than as a means of communication.
- The availability of the optional oral examination in Junior Certificate Irish is commended.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is scope to build on the positive approach and enthusiasm in teaching that was observed and to seek to infuse lessons and learning with more enjoyment.
 - Teachers should consider being less dependent on textbooks, especially in first year, to concentrate on building a strong base in spoken Irish for students.
 - It would be worth amending the system for assessing house examinations to specifically show students' spoken ability in Irish as a matter of course, rather than only when possible.
 - It is recommended that planning documentation make it explicit that translation to English as a regular practice should be avoided.
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INTRODUCTION

Drumshanbo Vocational School is a coeducational post-primary school that operates under Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Board. Irish is provided in the Junior Certificate and established Leaving Certificate programmes. There is no Transition Year. There are 285 students enrolled for the current school year, 2015/16. In addition to this number, there are 41 Post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) students and a further 37 Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching was at a beneficial and useful level in all lessons observed. Prior preparation was good and resources that assisted in managing the lesson were used. Some aspects displayed room for improvement.
- The quality of learning was adequate and all students engaged with the activities of the lesson. Students need to be enabled to make more oral contributions in class.
- Teaching was undertaken with diligence and enthusiasm in all cases in the interests of encouraging students to participate; this approach led to good outcomes in some instances. There is scope to build on this good practice and seek to infuse lessons and learning with more enjoyment.
- There were good examples of approaches that sought to immerse students in the spoken language from the outset by striking up everyday conversations with them as the opening segment of the lesson. This approach is highly commended. These conversations focused on matters such as that day's date, the name of the month and the work done in the previous lesson. In one lesson on formal grammar, a timely question was asked about what would happen in the country in a few days—a reference to the general election—but it was not discussed further. It is recommended that formal grammar be placed in a real setting, rather than teaching it out of context.
- This conversational approach should be expanded to encourage everyday conversations with and between students; conversations that are based on students' areas of interest. This is the best way for students to gain experience of Irish as a real language of communication rather than a language of the classroom.
- Learning objectives were shared with students at the start of the lesson in almost all cases. The teacher's whiteboard was well set up for this, with headings 'aim' and 'homework' on display. As a result the students were completely clear on the subject of the lesson. It would be beneficial if students could articulate their understanding of the lesson's learning objectives as well; it is recommended that they are asked questions to ensure their understanding.
- A positive atmosphere prevailed in all Irish lessons and an encouraging, friendly and pleasant approach could be observed in all cases. Various strategies were used to direct students' attention to learning, for example reading a section in a textbook during rollcall.
- In some cases, teaching placed too much emphasis on the language as a grammatical challenge to be overcome by students; it is recommended that practising the oral language be prioritised, and that grammar be accorded a secondary role, notwithstanding its importance. This was an illustration of how very committed teaching limited enjoyment of the lesson for the learners. It also illustrated that lessons were largely focused on the teacher and the textbook.

- It is recommended that teachers consider being less dependent on textbooks, especially in first year, to concentrate on building a strong base in spoken Irish for students and gradually building on their confidence in their ability in Irish.
- The senior students' examples of written composition work that were examined showed that they were sufficiently practised in expressing their opinions in writing. Essay titles were demanding and adhered to syllabus guidelines. The students' efforts were very well affirmed in the teacher comment notes.
- It would be well worth collecting exemplars of students' descriptive turns of phrase and overall accuracy in written Irish and distributing them to other students to encourage improvement and progress in the language.
- In conversations held by the inspector with senior students, the wealth of language of certain students was noted. They should be provided with more opportunities to build on this.
- It was evident from students' written work in their copybooks that homework is regularly set and corrected. Formative assessment was clearly used. This was seen in the helpful guidance contained in teachers' comments.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good provision for Irish on the timetable and lessons are spread out equally across the week.
- Two classrooms are provided for teaching Irish, both of which provide a stimulating learning environment.
- The provision of an optional oral examination in Junior Certificate is commended. This option was introduced in 2013. It would be worth amending the system for assessing house examinations to specifically show students' spoken ability in Irish as a matter of course, rather than only when possible.
- To hone language awareness in teaching, it is recommended that staff in the Irish department undertake refresher courses in written accuracy in Irish from time to time. This can be done by distance learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject planning is good regarding the attention given to incorporating the four language skills, and timeframes for teaching are set out for all years. There is appropriate focus on the regular use of TG4 television programmes throughout: a commendable goal.
- Subject planning should keep account of trends in student attainment in the certificate examinations and a realistic and challenging development plan should be prepared for the subject.
- A more complete account of teachers' continuing professional development should be set out in the plan. In this context, it is recommended that the school seek to support the initiation of peer-observation opportunities in the Irish department in order to develop practices that would be based more on developing student participation.

- Planning should include the aim of avoiding translation to English as regular practice in lessons and in students' copybooks. This practice is not prohibited but should be reduced.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and with the 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the practical, constructive recommendations in this report and is pleased that the provision of the Junior Certificate optional oral exam by our teachers was commended by the Inspectorate. The Board believes that this indicates a commitment by our teachers to promoting Irish as a means of communication and may have been a significant factor in the fact that the percentage of our Leaving Cert students that obtained As or Bs from the cohort that did the Higher level in the Leaving Certificate Irish last year was higher than the national average.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

The BOM, in-school management and teaching staff welcome the recommendations and are committed to their implementation. With regard to promoting students' spoken ability in Irish, the staff will continue to provide for the Junior Certificate oral Irish exams. The 2015/16 timetable also provided for one extra period per week for Third Years on a rota basis dedicated solely to oral Irish. The current Leaving Cert students had at least one mock oral Irish exam. In the immediate term, in addition to what is already being done, the current First Year students will have an Irish oral exam as part of their summer examinations.