

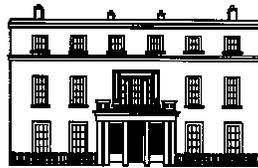
**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Ashton School
Blackrock Road, Cork.**

Roll number: 81008W

Date of inspection: 1 December 2014



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

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection: 1 December 2014	
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 5 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the majority of lessons observed. While the provision was wholly appropriate in the other cases, it was mostly in these instances that areas for development were identified.
- Irish was the primary means of communication in all classes and of particular note was students' oral competence .
- Opportunities for cooperative learning were provided in all classes and, as a result, the vast majority of students were fully engaged in lesson activities.
- It is to be commended that the students' oral ability is assessed as part of in-house examinations.
- Irish has a high profile in the school and, in particular, the emphasis placed on developing students' cultural awareness was noted.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that particular attention is paid to developing students' language competence during all lessons.
 - It is recommended that a wider range of monitoring strategies be used to ensure that all students have a clear understanding of the progress they are making during lessons and in general.
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INTRODUCTION

Ashton School is a co-educational post-primary school which operates under the joint auspices of the Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross and the Cork Education and Training Board. There are 520 pupils enrolled in the school. At the time of the inspection there were five Irish teachers in the school. Irish is a core subject on the school curriculum and the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes are provided as well as transition year (TY) on an optional basis. 7% of the student cohort are exempt from the study of Irish.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The use of Irish was to the fore during all lessons. It was clear that students were accustomed this and they are to be commended for the efforts they made to speak Irish to the teacher and to each other. It was also good that students were given the opportunity to listen to each other. In cases where students are required to listen to other students, it would be worthwhile setting them a task which ensures that their attention is continually focused on what is being said.
- A number of lessons began with open discussion, under teacher direction, about everyday life. This was worthwhile, especially insofar as it encouraged students to make as much use as possible of their own vocabulary and phrase banks when giving accounts of news items. This good practice should be extended by enabling students to manipulate authentic and rich phrases that emerge from the discourse. In situations where it is clear that open discussion is too demanding of certain students, it is recommended that they be given an opportunity to consider the question individually prior to sharing their thoughts with a classmate.
- Students engaged with lesson activities enthusiastically, whether they were given individual or interactive tasks. Work was particularly successful in situations where a progressive approach ensured that students were adequately prepared to complete tasks; advance practice, under teacher direction, of using aspects of language that would later be required was the most frequent approach. Wider use of this worthwhile practice is recommended. Learning was consolidated most effectively when students were involved in a range of activities that sought to practise and repeat newly-acquired phrases and vocabulary. Learning was most effective when students engaged in interactive tasks which, alongside having definite learning intention, provided opportunities for communication amongst the students themselves.
- Lessons in which students were presented with a learning challenge merit commendation. Frequently, it was a point of grammar or the meaning of a word which presented as difficult and in one case, the emphasis was on developing students' presentation skills. In all of these situations, a student-centred approach ensured that students were central to the learning process, be they providing explanations or giving an account to the class or to each other. It is strongly recommended that this good practice be used more widely and that it incorporate accurate manipulation of phrases and language structures.
- Every teacher monitored the work of the class by asking questions and by observing and listening to students'. There was some variation in the quality of monitoring insofar as certain teachers were more adept at acquiring an accurate understanding of individual students ability as well as areas requiring attention. Indeed, the content of some classes was based on learning needs which came to light during other assessment activities. In

the case of questioning, good practice was observed when all students were required to provide an answer, when they were given appropriate time to recall the required information and when the opportunity was taken to expand on the answers provided.

- Samples of students' written work was reviewed and it is clear that homework is assigned regularly and covers a wide range of written tasks. Nonetheless, there was some variation in the frequency and quality of task monitoring. The use of state examinations marking schemes is commended as this means students acquire an understanding of the success criteria which apply when the task is being corrected. It is strongly recommended that wider use be made of this good practice and that the criteria which factor most are clearly communicated to students before they complete the task. In support of this, the good practice observed in one lesson of providing constructive feedback orally to students on the interactive task they had completed should be used more widely.
- There was a courteous atmosphere in all classes. It is clear that good relations have been fostered between teachers and their students. All teachers circulated their classes regularly, providing support, praising efforts and advising students as the need arose. It was also pleasing that opportunities were created for students to move around the class:- interacting with their classmates and taking the role of the teacher.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Irish has a high profile in the school. Speaking Irish outside the classrooms is encouraged and developing cultural awareness is a whole-school priority.
- Overall, the timetable supports the teaching and learning of Irish. However, the number of class periods at junior cycle level will have to be reviewed in the context of the the new junior cycle.
- Students are assigned to class groups in a way that enables them to study Irish at the highest level appropriate to their ability range.
- The vast majority of the teachers have their own rooms which facilitates the storing of resources. There is good access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) resources which encourage vibrancy and innovation in class activities and facilitate communication and cooperation amongst department members.
- The school operates a comprehensive assessment system which ensures that student progress is tested regularly. The Irish Department deserves particular commendation for ensuring that all students undertake two oral examinations during the school year. Irish teachers should be mindful of the many other ways to measure students' oral competence as part of everyday classwork and homework. It is recommended that the possibilities in this regard be explored.
- Teachers are highly commended for the commitment and self-motivation they display in relation to promoting Irish in school life and to engaging with innovations generally in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment. It is in this spirit that they are encouraged to continue developing their professional skills, be it their own language skills or in the area of language teaching methodologies.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- It is commendable that the school has a strategic plan for the promotion of Irish which sets out a vision for the use of Irish in the school environs.
- Teachers engage diligently with subject planning and classroom practice is discussed at departmental meetings. An appropriate balance of topics which are promoted at whole school level and topics relating specifically to the teaching of Irish are discussed. It is recommended that this practice be further embedded and that topics to be discussed in the future should include the use of English during lessons and agreeing a common approach to note-taking and task completion in copybooks.
- The content of the schemes of work is rooted in the syllabi and it is also good practice that specific emphasis is placed on the language functions that relate to the various topics. The self-evaluation conducted by teachers on the implementation of the schemes is noteworthy. A further worthwhile development would be seeking the views of the students on their learning experience.
- The TY scheme was identified as being a particularly strong feature of provision, especially the new approach being trialled this year which divides the programme into modules. The content of the programme should stimulate high levels of student interest insofar as promoting language and cultural awareness are integrated with the development of their communication and ICT skills.
- Overall, preparation for lessons was of a high standard. All teachers had prepared an array of resources to support language acquisition and had considered the steps to be taken to consolidate learning. The quality of learning would be enhanced further if a number of phrases or structures were identified in advance as those that are to be acquired as part of the learning process.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the Irish teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.