

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Saint Brendan's Community School
Birr, County Offaly
Roll number: 91491L

Date of inspection: 30 September 2011



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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| Dates of inspection | 29 & 30 September 2011 |
| Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers in the Irish department• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction with students• Examination of samples of students' work and samples of homework journals• Feedback to individual teachers• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers in the Irish department. |

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning varied from very good in some cases to poor in other instances.
- There is very good cooperation among teachers and very good collaborative planning for the subject and for assessment.
- Student written work is not corrected on a regular basis in all cases.
- The Irish department assessment policy encompasses the principal language skills.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Specific planning for the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a learning tool for students and for its integration with other methodologies in use is recommended.
 - The use of questioning; lesson tasks; and homework is recommended to support differentiation in learning and the development of student higher order thinking skills.
 - It is recommended that the learning outcomes expected at the various levels and stages in learning should be identified in the plans for the various year groups. This recommendation was made previously in the Whole School Evaluation (WSE) report in 2007.
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INTRODUCTION

Saint Brendan's Community School is a coeducational post primary school. It is the only post primary school in the town of Birr and has a current enrolment of 880 students. Transition Year (TY) is offered as an optional programme in the school. A Whole School Evaluation was carried out in the school in 2007.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning varied from very good in some cases to poor in other instances.
- In more than half of the classes observed lessons were very well structured and paced appropriately; a very fitting range of methods and strategies was employed which motivated and supported the active participation of students in their learning.
- Irish was used as the language of instruction and communication in all the lessons observed. In a minority of cases it was evident that it was standard practice to rely on the translation method when other strategies could be employed which would better facilitate students to acquire the language.
- The expected learning outcomes were shared with students in more than half of all lessons. As was recommended in the 2007 WSE report, it is recommended again that this good practice be extended and that students be given an opportunity to reflect on what they will have learned by the end of the lesson.
- Questioning was used in every lesson to assess student progress. It is recommended that the range of questions be extended in order to enhance the development of student higher order thinking skills and to provide students with experience in using more complex structures in their answers. In addition, it is recommended as a general guideline that students be given time to answer oral questions.
- Homework was assigned in almost all lessons and offered appropriate challenge for students in certain cases. In order to support the class work and the progress of learning, differentiation in the homework tasks is recommended.
- Development of student peer-assessment and self-assessment skills was evident in some lessons. It is recommended that these practices be extended.
- Student copybooks and written work were very neat and tidy in more than half of the classes.
- Student written work is not corrected on a regular basis in every case. Best practice was evident where corrections were based on assessment for learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good timetabled provision for Irish across all the various programmes and the allocation of class periods throughout the week is satisfactory.
- Appropriate arrangements operate to facilitate and support students to undertake Irish at higher level in the certificate examinations. In addition, opportunities are provided for those students who have exemption from Irish to study the subject.

- A good range of co- and extracurricular activities, including debating competitions at local and national level, is provided to enhance student experience in using the language.
- The Irish department assessment policy incorporates the principal language skills. It is recommended that the policy includes homework and that, as part of this, teachers of Irish would agree an approach to correcting student work based on assessment for learning.
- Analysis of student achievement in the certificate examinations has been introduced. It is recommended that this be regular practice in relation to house and state examinations and a report on the outcomes of the analysis should be included in the plan.
- Twelve percent of the total number of students enrolled has an exemption from studying Irish. This is a reasonably high percentage and it is recommended that school management monitors trends in this regard.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The work of the Irish department is coordinated effectively. The good practice of role rotation operates among teachers. It is recommended that a period of three years would not be exceeded in any one individual's term.
- In the interest of guiding subject development it is recommended that development targets for the subject be agreed for each coordinator's term, that an action plan be prepared and that this plan be monitored and reviewed as part of the planning work for Irish.
- There is very good cooperation among teachers and very good collaborative planning for the subject and for assessment.
- The subject plan was of a good standard. Long term and short term plans have been developed for the various year groups. In order to link all the plans, including the TY plan, more closely to student needs and to the syllabuses it is recommended, as in 2007, that the learning outcomes expected at the various stages and levels be identified. This would be helpful in providing guidance for differentiated learning; raising learning expectations across the subject department; directing lesson preparation and determining criteria for assessment.
- In a minority of cases it was evident that plans are monitored and amended accordingly. This is good practice.
- When the TY plan is being reviewed it is recommended that more innovative content is included which would offer students opportunity to engage in using Irish outside the traditional areas.
- Teaching and learning approaches are discussed at department meetings. There is scope for further discussion on these areas in the interest of implementing good practice on a whole department basis. In addition, it is recommended that a short account of the classroom practices in use be provided in that section of the plan dealing with methodologies.
- In light of the developments taking place in the school in relation to the provision of information and communications technology, it is recommended that careful planning be carried out for its use as a tool to support student learning and how ICT could be

beneficial in facilitating the development, storage, sharing and accessing of resources, including department subject plans.

- As part of the general work of the department planning should be carried out to support the school's literacy and numeracy plan in the context of the National Strategy.
- In some instances very good planning and preparation, which included the amount of class time available, student ability levels, appropriate resources and authentic texts, was carried out for individual classes.
- Good practice was evident in certain cases in relation to recording student achievement. It is recommended that the marks awarded to oral Irish be clearly recorded in every teacher's diary.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, the deputy 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, 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

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

The board of management would like to acknowledge the work of the Irish department and to affirm the many positive aspects of practice highlighted in the report. The board of management welcomes the recommendations of the report and is confident of the on-going commitment of the Irish department to achieving positive learning outcomes.

The board of management are pleased that the Inspectorate commended:-

- 1 The quality of teaching and learning.
- 2 The supportive learning (environment) atmosphere.
- 3 Co-operation among teachers and collaborative planning.
- 4 The use of Irish in all classes
- 5 Commitment to extra-curricular activities.

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

- 1 We will continue to build on the practices of differentiation/ assessment of/ for learning
- 2 We have streamlined a uniform approach to homework in so far as possible – room for individual teacher methodology.
- 3 We have updated our homework policy.
- 4 Recommendations for ICT have all been implemented.
- 5 Exemptions: Many students studying Irish are exempt.