

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Coláiste Mhuire  
Johnstown, Co. Kilkenny  
Roll Number: 70600T**

**Date of inspection: 6 April 2016**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS SCILEANNA** | **DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SKILLS**  
**I N S P E C T O R A T E**

# REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

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## INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<b>Date of inspection</b>	6 April 2016
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during 5 class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

## MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to good with significant scope for improvement in various aspects of teaching.
- As regards the teachers, the use of Irish as the language of instruction and communication was good overall but the students' communication skills need to be significantly developed.
- Most of the Irish teachers had some difficulties with linguistic accuracy and in certain cases the lack of competence in Irish hindered the effectiveness of teaching and learning.
- A wide range of methodologies was used to facilitate active learning and those strategies are commended, but it was felt at times that certain students were not benefiting from them.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) was used in certain lessons observed and that use is highly commended, though sometimes material was used which was difficult to read properly.
- A pleasant learning environment was created in the classrooms used for teaching the language, with various materials relevant to teaching the language on display.

## MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that more use be made of the valuable ICT resource, which has been considerably invested in by school management, to add to the students' interest in the content of lessons and to support their learning.
- Some staff members need to be more attentive to spoken accuracy during lessons; teachers should avail of the wide range of Irish-language courses and online courses available to resolve these difficulties.
- The Irish teachers are advised to use the subject planning process to discuss methodologies, the use of ICT, to share teaching resources and common teaching strategies which would ensure students' confidence in speaking the language.
- It is recommended that the valuable work done to celebrate Seachtain na Gaeilge be built upon and the profile of the language raised in the school; the school management would also have an important role in the implementation of this recommendation.

## INTRODUCTION

Colaiste Mhuire is a co-educational school under the auspices of Kilkenny and Carlow Education and Training Board, located in a small rural town but with a very wide catchment area. The school has an current enrolment of 516 students and the following programmes are provided: Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, Leaving Certificate Applied Programme and the established Leaving Certificate. There are 49 students with exemptions from studying Irish. It was reported that many students come from primary school with the mistaken belief that they are entitled to an exemption due to having been removed from Irish classes for learning support classes. These students must undertake the learning of Irish unless they are entitled to an exemption under the criteria of the current circulars.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to good with significant scope for improvement in various aspects of teaching. The teachers made successful efforts to use Irish as the language of management, communication and instruction and this is commended as best practice. There was a question mark about this practice being the norm in one case, however.
- Most of the Irish teachers have certain difficulties with accuracy in the language and with normal communication in the language. In certain cases this lack of competency hindered the effectiveness of teaching and learning. It is recommended that the teachers avail of the wide range of Irish-language courses available to improve this situation, as a matter of urgency.
- Teachers used a wide range of methodologies to encourage the students to participate in the lessons and in the learning. Some of the lessons were well paced and it was clear that learning was taking place. The use of a “bosca focail” (“word box”) to add to the students’ range of vocabulary was particularly commended. The lack of clear instructions regarding some class activities affected learning in certain cases.
- It was good that pair work was used in different lessons to give students the chance to communicate with each other in the target language. It must also be ensured, however, that the students are given the appropriate phrases and vocabulary to undertake this communication in accordance with their abilities.
- It is recommended that repetition be used regularly during lessons so that students can pronounce new sentences and words. Many students lacked the confidence to use Irish and strategies must be agreed among all the teachers to address this.
- The students’ attention was not directed to common errors frequently in lessons. It is recommended that these errors be noted and presented to students generally without affecting the self-confidence of anyone in particular.
- ICT was used in a couple of lessons observed and that use is highly commended. However, it must be ensured that the material displayed is legible and clear. The use of authentic materials from the Internet is commended. If there are different dialects involved in that material, however, this must be discussed beforehand with the students to ensure that they understand the context from which the material comes. It is strongly recommended that the use of ICT be widened to support students’ learning and to raise their interest in the language.
- Careful preparation was made for all lessons observed and in certain cases attractive and interesting material was prepared for distribution to students. Comprehensive notes were provided to sixth-year students to help them prepare for the oral

examination. It is recommended when students are asking each other questions during lessons as practice for the oral examination, that these questions are asked in a different order so that there isn't an inclination to learn answers by heart and to ensure that real communication is involved.

- The classrooms used for the teaching of Irish are decorated in a pleasant way with lots of material associated with the teaching of the language on display. It is recommended that wider use be made of this material during lessons to support students' learning and to support the implementation of the school's literacy and numeracy policy. The way in which the classroom was laid out in one case, which facilitated cooperative learning, was commended.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The provision for Irish on the school's timetable was satisfactory enough with four periods per week for each year group in the junior cycle, four periods per week for Transition Year and five periods per week for fifth and sixth years. It would be commendable if a fifth period per week could be provided for at least one of the year groups in the junior cycle.
- Students in the junior cycle are in mixed-ability classes. Though the principle of mixed-ability classes is commended, it would be worth looking at splitting classes for Irish in third year, into ordinary and higher-level classes. That said, the current practice should be continued of giving each student the opportunity to attempt higher level in the Leaving Certificate if they so wish.
- It is recommended that the valuable work done to celebrate Seachtain na Gaeilge in the school be built upon. The management and teachers were given some ideas and recommendations about this during the evaluation. It would be worth looking at ways to raise the profile of the language in the school to support the efforts of the teachers in the classrooms; the school management would have an important role in the implementation of this recommendation.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- One of the teachers is nominated as planning coordinator for teaching and learning the language each year. This duty is rotated each year among the Irish-language staff members. A meeting is held monthly.
- A plan for the teaching and learning of Irish was provided on the day of the inspection. It was clear that much work and effort had been expended on the plan and that work is commended. It is recommended, however, that the Irish teachers use the subject planning process to discuss methodologies, the use of ICT, teaching resources and common teaching strategies to ensure students' confidence in speaking the language.
- Every effort is made to encourage the students to remain at higher level in the state examinations and there is a small increase in the number of students attempting higher level. It is encouraging that there is a number of students in senior cycle interested in studying Irish at third level.

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 of the school 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.

*Published October 2016*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report**

We welcome the report from the Inspectorate and see this as an opportunity for Coláiste Mhuire to enhance both the quality of teaching and learning through the effective and accurate communication of the Irish language whilst, at the same time, developing the students' own communication skills thus ensuring their own confidence in speaking the language. We recognise that there are both positives and negatives in the report. We welcome the recognition given to the positives such as the wide range of methodologies used, the use of ICT, the valuable work done to celebrate Seachtain na Gaeilge and the pleasant learning environment created in classrooms. We acknowledge the negatives and will strive, in the coming academic year to undertake any action necessary to rectify them.

The curriculum to Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate is followed within the Irish Department of the school with great emphasis being placed on 'Teanga Beo' and all efforts to communicate through Irish is encouraged. 'Is Fearr Gaeilge Briste ná Bearla Cliste' We have always made great efforts to teach Irish in a varied and stimulating way to students of a very mixed ability. In some instances we feel that the communication skills revealed on the Inspection day do not accurately reflect students' ability.

The valuable work done to celebrate Seachtain na Gaeilge has always been high on our planning. It is always our aim to raise the profile of the language in the whole school not only during those weeks but throughout the entire year.

The wide range of methodologies we use to facilitate active learning is something we work on, on an ongoing basis and we build on those over the years with the numerous inservices we have attended. These are discussed at our subject planning meetings.

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

ICT: Teachers have registered/expressed an interest in upcoming inservices in this area which will run in the coming November.

Linguistic Accuracy: Teachers have registered/expressed an interest in attending two upcoming inservices; Cruinneas Gaeilge an Mhúinteora and An Bhéaltíail which will run in the coming January. Definite dates have not been set for these courses at this early stage. They have also been advised of the online TEG course and a number of options given to them by the Inspector which they intend to pursue.

Teachers have also undertaken to enter into a peer mentoring programme along with team teaching over the coming year. Team teaching is currently being practised and is a welcome addition to the Department.

We welcome the positive recognition given to the Department Plan. We will continue to work on improving this and to make it an active plan which forms an integral part of our subject meetings.