

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Spanish
REPORT**

**St Benildus College
Stillorgan, Co. Dublin
Roll number: 60261R**

Date of inspection: 1 December 2015



**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 SPANISH**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	30 November and 1 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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and subject teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed was good.
- All teachers demonstrated a very high level of skill and competence in the target language.
- Spanish was not always used as the main language of instruction.
- A wide variety of student abilities was observed in lessons, however, there was scope for development in teachers' approaches to differentiation.
- There was a positive learning environment in the lessons observed which was conducive to learning.
- There was some evidence of assessment for learning practices.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- All teachers should adopt Spanish as the main language of instruction in lessons.
- The department should develop strategies for differentiation to support and extend all students' language skills development.
- Planning for oral development should be prioritised by both individual teachers and the department.
- All teachers should adopt assessment for learning practices in lessons.

INTRODUCTION

St Benildus College is a voluntary secondary school with a student body of 804 boys under the trusteeship of Le Chéile, serving an urban catchment area in South Dublin. It provides the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed was good. In a small number of instances, very high quality teaching and learning was observed, however, at times, there was scope for development, particularly with regard to the use of the target language.
- All teachers were very enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject and revealed themselves to be reflective practitioners. While all teachers demonstrated a very high level of individual competence in the target language, some did not use Spanish as the main language of instruction in lessons and this should be immediately addressed. It is recommended that teachers develop strategies to avoid the use of English in class in order to expose students to the target language.
- When the inspector interacted with students, some had problems understanding Spanish and communicating in the language. While there was an element of student-teacher interaction in the target language in all lessons, students were not given opportunities to talk together in Spanish. It is recommended, therefore, that teachers plan and implement Spanish oral pair work or group work activities for every lesson in order to improve student confidence and competence in speaking the language.
- All lessons observed were well prepared, with resources, which were appropriately selected, used to support teaching and learning. In one lesson, information and communications technology (ICT) was used very successfully to enhance learning. There was very good use of grammar in context in most of the lessons observed, and students demonstrated a clear understanding of grammatical concepts.
- A wide variety of student abilities was observed in lessons, however these differences were not always appropriately catered for. The department should develop strategies for differentiation in order to fully support or extend all students to maximise their learning.
- Students were actively engaged in their own learning; however, there was an over emphasis placed on written work in most lessons. Teachers should endeavour to strike a balance between the four language skills in lessons.
- There was a very positive atmosphere, including lots of positive affirmation of students, in all the lessons observed, which contributed to the learning environment. Classroom management was effective and there were no discipline issues.
- Desks were arranged in single-file or in pairs; consideration should be given to room-layout to provide an environment which is more conducive to collaborative learning.
- Homework is assigned and monitored regularly.
- There was some evidence of assessment for learning practices. In one lesson the use of self and peer assessment was observed and formative marking by the teacher was evident in some copybooks. It is recommended that all teachers adopt these very positive practices. It is also recommended that all teachers include formative comments when marking written work in order to guide student improvement.

- In one lesson, there was very good use of mathematical terms in Spanish to reinforce numeracy. Literacy skills were reinforced in most lessons by drawing students' attention to them as they arose in the lesson which is good practice.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good provision for languages in the school. Languages are mandatory in junior cycle and senior cycle. School management facilitates access for all students to Spanish. Students choose to study either Spanish, French or German before entering the school. Management should consider offering students the possibility of studying more than one language.
- Learning support is provided in Spanish for first, second and fifth years.
- Timetabling is good across all years and programmes, and this enables the department to rotate teachers. Good provision is made for managing resources and the Spanish department shares an office which also facilitates collaboration and collegiality.
- Student progress is measured through in-school examinations at Christmas and summer and continuous assessment. In-school examinations assess all four language skills which is good practice.
- To facilitate the progression of differentiated strategies in the classroom, consideration should be given to teacher professional development in this area.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Overall, planning and preparation in the department is good.
- There is evidence of good collaborative subject planning with references to content, methodologies, homework and assessment. Currently, most plans are content driven and follow textbook outlines. It is recommended that, instead, the department plans in terms of time-bound learning outcomes, with theme-specific methodologies, resources and assessments.
- Evidence of very good professional collaboration was also seen through the use of theme-specific resource folders which are shared electronically. It is suggested that, to further enhance this very good collaborative practice, consideration be given to hyperlinking directly to these resources in the subject plans.
- There is a rotating subject coordinator and regular department meetings are held which are properly documented. The department should ensure that time is allocated within these meetings for discussion of teaching and learning.
- There was evidence of good individual teacher planning in most of the lessons observed, with resources being chosen appropriately to develop lesson content. However, individual planning should be further progressed by planning for the different ability levels within lessons.
- Record keeping is very good at both individual and departmental level.
- Communication with parents is via the student journal, school reports and parent-teacher meetings.

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