Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Summerhill College
Sligo
Roll number: 65170Q

Date of inspection: 5 February 2014
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of Inspection</th>
<th>4th &amp; 5th of February 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during nine class periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Review of the students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with the principal and with the teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback for the principal, for the deputy principal and for the teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

• The teaching and learning techniques were of good quality in all the lessons observed during the inspection. In the case of some these lessons, exemplary teaching and learning methods were employed.

• There was evidence in the copybooks and in the textbooks that teaching and learning techniques were being used that had an over-reliance on the translational method.

• Good provision is being made for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school.

• All language skills are included in the formative and summative assessment carried out for Irish.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• It would benefit the teaching and learning if the department used more assessment of learning and for learning tools.

• It is recommended that all of the teachers teaching the subject in the senior cycle and in the junior cycle have a specialist qualification in Irish.

• Curricular plans should be developed to teach the language in an integrated thematic way. The suggested headings mentioned in this report, and which were previously recommended in the inspection report on Irish in 2006; should guide this work.

• It would be beneficial, when short-term planning is being carried out, to choose differentiated learning objectives that would be tailored to the range of abilities in the various class groups.

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INTRODUCTION
Summerhill College is a Diocesan School for boys situated in Sligo Town. 782 students are enrolled for the current school year. All of the curricular programmes are provided to the students at Junior Certificate level and at Leaving Certificate level.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• All of the lessons were characterized by good teaching and learning methodologies. Exemplary teaching and learning practices were in evidence in one third of these lessons.

• The learning objectives were not formally shared with the students verbally at the beginning of the lessons as part of the teachers’ general practice, even though there was a written version on the board in two lessons. It is recommended to review this.

• With short-term planning is being carried out, it is recommended to choose the differentiated learning objectives that would be tailored to the range of abilities in the various class groups, and to also include targets for the amount of new language to be learned.

• The best practice was to be seen in those lessons in which various opportunities were created for the students to engage with the subject content in a meaningful across the four main language skills.

• The students complete the various tasks set due to the comprehensive pre-skills work that was done with the students. Pre-skill work should be conducted for every teaching and learning activity, including reading.

• The learners’ needs were well catered for during the task-based work for most of the classes. It would be very worthwhile to use a similar approach on a wider basis instead of the teacher staying separate at the top of the room.

• Good use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) resources and of the board in the classrooms to add to the students’ visual literacy in lessons. It is praiseworthy that the best written record on the board also provided an example to students of how to organise their own notes.

• Irish was used as the medium of instruction by the teachers in all of the classes. Good procedures were used with regard to focusing the students’ attention on language accuracy and on grammar points during most of the classes. It is recommended that a similar strategy be used for dialectal points.

• There was an excessive tendency to use the translation method in the vast majority of the copybooks and the textbooks observed. It would be very worthwhile for the department to discuss the issue of the use of translation in order to implement a unified policy, a recommendation that was also made in the report on Irish in 2006.

• All teachers managed classes well and a positive learning atmosphere prevailed.

• For less than half of the classes observed, care should be taken to ensure accuracy in the oral and written examples that were provided to the students.
• With regard to the learning environment in the classrooms, the quality was exemplary in certain cases but in other cases there was considerable scope to increase the amount and variety of language on display.

• Good developmental work could be seen in all of the copybooks that were examined. Mechanical corrections were made in the books and, occasionally, grades were given as a guide to the merit of the work. It was reported that teachers record the most common mistakes students make in substantial writing pieces and that the lessons are taught based on this diagnostic work. The entire department are advised to use assessment strategies of this type.

• It would be very worthwhile to share the assessment criteria for the four language skills with the students. This would contribute to the process of self-correction and also provide a framework for peer-correction.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

• Good provision is being made for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school.

• The first-year students are examined twice during the school year and students are organised according to levels for the Junior Certificate examination based on this assessment. It is recommended to review the practice regularly and to take into account the advantages for learning accruing from organising the students in mixed-ability groups until the end of the Junior Certificate.

• The department has developed good aids and resources. It is recommended to renew these supporting materials regularly as a matter of priority for the department.

• There is a high number of students to whom the school has given approval regarding exemption from Irish - seventeen per cent of the overall total. It is recommended that the approval of applications for exemption from Irish should be kept under ongoing review to ensure that the provisions of Circular M10/94 are being adhered to.

• Most of the teachers that are teaching Irish in the school are graduates in Irish. It is recommended that all of the teachers that are teaching the subject in the senior cycle and in the junior cycle have a specialist qualification in Irish.

• The students of this school take part in a wide range of joint-curricular and extra-curricular activities involved with Irish during the school year.

• Good systems have been developed to carry out formative and summative assessment for Irish. The four main language skills are taken into account in the regular tests and in the summative assessment. It would be very worthwhile to build on this work and to develop more comprehensive assessment techniques for Transition Year (TY) students also.

• The management began analysing the results of the Leaving Certificate examinations this year. The Irish department are recommended to become involved in this analysis and to also take account of the results of the Junior Certificate. It would be very worthwhile for this analysis to be one of the main sources that guides the planning process for the language.
**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A formal Irish department has been established and a co-ordinator appointed. The department rotates the responsibility of co-ordinator at agreed times.

- It is recommended that an integrated thematic approach be used in all curricular plans. It is also recommended that the learning objectives, methodologies, resources and the assessment methods to be used be included, as was recommended in the previous report on Irish in 2006.

- Good work has been carried out in the TY Irish programme. It is recommended to include the *Portfolio of European Languages* as one of the assessment tools during this year.

- It is recommended to discuss the department’s priorities at planning meetings and to design an action plan based on those priorities and on the main recommendations of this report.

- In the majority of the lessons evaluated, the quality of the short-term planning and preparation for the lessons was in the category between very good and good. There was a need for development in a small number of the lessons.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, the deputy principal and the 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 February 2015*
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 wishes to acknowledge this positive report which not only highlights but also affirms very good learning and teaching in the subject area of Irish.

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

In order to further the very good work being carried out in this area, the Board of Management has requested the Irish Department to furnish it with a plan of actions designed to build on the recommendations of the inspection report. Work on this plan along with its implementation is already at an advanced stage.