

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

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Borris Vocational School
Borris, County Carlow
Roll number: 70400L**

Date of inspection: 13 March 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(s) of inspection	13 March 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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The standard of teaching and learning ranged between very good and good with examples of exemplary practice observed in certain lessons.
- The use of Irish as the language of instruction, management and interaction was very good in the lessons observed.
- The use of information and communications technology (ICT) to support the teaching of Irish is commended.
- Teachers' enthusiasm and work undertaken by them in accumulating and sharing resources via a school server is commended.
- Extra work undertaken by teachers to expand and develop students' experience of Irish as a living language is commended.
- The Gaeltacht grant scheme organised by the school is commended.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the provision of opportunities to communicate in the target language, beyond answering the teacher's questions, is ensured in all Irish classes.
 - There needs to be more focus on accuracy in students' written Irish.
-

INTRODUCTION

Borris Vocational School is a co-educational vocational school with 468 students currently enrolled. The following programmes are available in the school: the Junior Certificate, a Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of teaching and learning ranged between very good and good with examples of exemplary practice being observed in certain lessons.
- The use of Irish as the language of instruction, management and interaction was very good in the lessons observed. The teachers are commended for their commitment to the use of the target language. It was felt, however, that not enough opportunities were given to students to speak Irish during lessons, apart from answering the teacher's questions. It is recommended that working in pairs, working in groups, role play and language games are regularly used to encourage students to speak. This work is essential to enhance students' confidence in speaking the language.
- Highly positive communication between teachers and students was observed during lessons. Students were participating in learning, although they did not have sufficient opportunities to make functional use of their Irish.
- Questioning was regularly used to assess students' knowledge and understanding. This approach is commended, although it is recommended that an element of peer assessment be implemented by having students question each other. In addition, complete sentences should be sought as answers, rather than accepting single-word answers.
- Appropriate efforts were made to link the subject of the lessons to the contemporary life of the students. This approach is highly commended as it places language learning in a contemporary context for the students, which in turn increases their interest and participation in lessons.
- Two lessons were observed in which ICT was effectively used to support students' learning. In these cases students had to carry out internet research for their own projects. Students must be reminded, however, to be careful regarding grammar, correct spelling of words and language structure. The use of online dictionaries could support students' work in this area.
- It is recommended that teachers discuss various strategies that would assist in directing students' attention to accuracy in written Irish. Strategies such as games and competitions could be used to increase students' knowledge of grammar and to enhance their understanding of the importance of this in language acquisition.
- The whiteboard was used to illustrate new words and phrases to students in certain lessons. This practice should be expanded to all lessons. Students need to gain knowledge and experience of new words and phrases in a variety of ways to ensure that they have acquired the new material.
- Classroom walls were adorned with students' work, in the form of posters and charts relating to language learning. Some of this material was used to support students' learning in one instance observed, an approach which is recommended. Wider use could be made of displaying material to assist students and to support the school's literacy strategies.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabling for Irish is reasonably satisfactory, with four periods per week provided in first and second year, and five periods per week in third year. There are three periods in TY and five in fifth and sixth year.
- Appropriate efforts are made in the school to expand and develop students' experience of Irish as a living language through a wide range of events organised during Seachtain na Gaeilge, participation in quizzes, occasional debates, attending plays in Irish and through additional weekly conversation classes. "Fainní" are presented at the school awards ceremony. The work of teachers and the support of management in all these events are commended. It would be worth considering running an Irish Club for students periodically to give them further opportunities to speak the language.
- Teachers have done considerable work in accumulating and sharing teaching resources on a school server.
- There is a grant scheme in operation and this extra support provided by the school is commended. It would be worth assessing the effect of these grants on students' learning and progress in Irish to ensure best use of money spent. A summer non-residential course for primary school sixth-class pupils is held in the school and some of the incoming first-year students benefit from this.
- The school's Irish teachers benefitted greatly from the in-service courses organised by the Second Level Support Service for Irish and one of the regional development officers was invited to come to the school to speak to them. Teachers would be well advised to consider registering with Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- One teacher is nominated to act as planning coordinator for teaching and learning Irish. This responsibility is rotated between teachers, which is a good practice.
- The teachers regularly meet informally and formally to discuss the work of the department. For the last two years a review has been carried out on the teaching of the subject and the results of state examinations. This is a good practice. The school intends to prepare students for the oral examination component of the Junior Certificate in future.
- A plan for teaching and learning Irish was provided on the day of the assessment and it was apparent that much work and effort went into its preparation. It is recommended, in developing the plan in future, that it be set out in an integrated manner with topics or themes linked to teaching methods, use of teaching resources and facilities, recognised learning goals and assessment methods.
- Students' ability to communicate in Irish is currently included in the school's assessment arrangements in fifth and sixth year via an oral examination. It is intended to extend this practice to Transition Year from next year onwards. It is recommended that this arrangement be implemented from first year onwards and that the results of the oral examination be included in the reports sent to parents twice yearly. This approach will help to enhance students' understanding of the importance of developing the spoken language from the start and will support teachers' efforts in preparing students for the Junior Certificate oral examination.

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

We welcome the acknowledgement and commendation of the standards of teaching and learning.

The endorsements of the appropriate use of ICT and of opportunities for students to experience Irish as a living language are welcomed.

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

Discussion and planning have taken place in the light of the recommendations; the following actions have been taken:

An increase in provision of timetabled lessons in Irish has been made in Transition Year. The number of lessons has been increased from three lessons per week to four. An additional 8-week Irish module has been added to the programme for all Transition Year students.

Complete banding for the subject is now a feature for all Junior and Senior Cycle exam year groups.

All students now have a Key Word journal for Irish.

It is planned to display material to support the school's Literacy Plan.