

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

St John's College De La Salle
Le Fanu Road, Ballyfermot
Dublin 10

Roll Number: 60510M

Date of inspection: 12 November 2015



AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH**

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	11 and 12 November 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documentation• Meeting with the coordinator• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction with the students• Review of samples of student work and of their school diaries• Feedback to individual teachers• Feedback to Irish teachers and to the principal

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or better in a little over half of the classes and fair in the remainder.
- There was too much emphasis on long lists of words and on translation to English as a teaching method in most of the classes.
- The behaviour of the students was very good in all of the classes and they were highly praised for their input.
- Examples were observed in every case of effective use of technology to support learning.
- The Irish teaching team receive good support and leadership from the senior management to increase the rates of student participation and attainment at the highest levels and to improve the status of Irish in the school in general.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the students' expectations regarding the learning of Irish is raised.
 - In order to extend on the examples of good practice observed in various classes, it is recommended that the department reviews the teaching and learning approach and uses the communicative approach in every case to improve the acquisition of the target language among students.
 - It is recommended that the modes of assessment be reviewed. Spoken Irish should be a core part of the assessment in school examinations for every year group in both cycles, all questions on the examination papers must have a clear assessment aim and it should be normal practice to give formative feedback on written work.
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INTRODUCTION

St John's College De La Salle is a voluntary secondary school for boys which is a participant in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme. The school operates under the trusteeship of Le Chéile. There are 434 students on the roll. The school provides a Transition Year programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or better in a little over half of the classes and fair in the remainder.
- Learning intentions were shared with the students at the beginning of every class. Best practice was observed in those cases in which students were informed of what they would be able to do at the end of the class and of the various tasks they would engage in to achieve those intentions.
- Opportunities were created for students in every class to work in pairs or groups. It should be ensured, however, that there are information gaps in the tasks, that the members have a certain role and that they have the language required to do the work through Irish.
- There was too much emphasis on long lists of words and on translation to English as a teaching method in the majority of the classes. It is recommended that a full review is undertaken of this teaching method and that the communicative approach and target language are used instead.
- For the most part, the students used only single Irish words. The students' expectations should be raised and much more emphasis should be placed on developing their oral competence in Irish. As well as that, the learning should be differentiated and relevant planning undertaken in that regard.
- In some cases, the accuracy of the students' pronunciation was checked. This practice should be extended and pronunciation should be central in the planning for learning, especially for first year.
- In one case, no opportunity for new learning was created. It is recommended that effective use is always made of class contact time to develop students' learning.
- Many very good examples were observed of technology use to support learning.
- The behaviour of the students was very good in all of the classes and they were highly praised.
- Students' participation and their attainment in certificate examinations are analysed. The results show scope to increase the number of students who undertake the highest levels and to lower the failure rates significantly.
- The Irish department has developed a strategic plan in collaboration with the management to improve the levels of participation and attainment. As part of the improvement work, it is recommended that the learning of students is carefully monitored and as part of same, that attainment in in-house examinations is analysed and that subject plans are amended as appropriate.
- Oral Irish is not included in the in-house examinations. As was recommended previously in 2008, oral Irish should be a core part of the assessment of learning in Irish among students.

- Home work was given in all classes and a review of a sample of students' diaries show that this is regular practice in certain cases.
- Some examples of constructive corrections were seen on the work of students. It is recommended that this good practice becomes the general practice.
- A review of in-house examination papers showed that the same skill is assessed repeatedly, especially in the case of the lowest levels and that there is too much emphasis on translation to English. A full review of the modes and the aim of assessment in the in-house examinations is recommended.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The senior management afford good support for Irish and to the Irish teaching team.
- Opportunities and encouragement are provided for all students to study Irish.
- Praiseworthy efforts were underway to add to the use of Irish in the school surrounding through an Irish wall, labels on doors and the school's participation in the Gaelbhreach competition.
- There is a whole school policy for homework but not for assessment. The Irish plan includes reference to some assessment modes and it is acknowledged that a strategic plan has been developed so that students will undertake the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate in 2017. A comprehensive policy should be developed for assessment at department level. Assessment modes to be used for the four main language skills in the in-house examinations in the case of every year group should be identified. The same should be done for the correction of homework. The role and responsibilities for the various partners in the process should also be laid out.
- The spoken Irish competence of the teachers for the purpose of teaching was satisfactory in almost all instances. In the case of a minority, there were a lot of mistakes in the material presented to the students verbally and in writing. Participation in an Irish course is recommended to improve the required skills to the benefit of students' learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There is good practice in the co-ordination of the department in that the role is rotated and that teachers take the role for a period greater than one year.
- It is recognised that strategic plans are agreed with the management for the development of Irish in the school. While this work is to be commended, it should be ensured, for example, that they include oral Irish and the impact that implementing plans would have on language teaching, learning and assessment in class.
- The Irish teaching staff have regular meetings. It is recommended that teaching and learning methodologies are included on the agenda and to focus especially on the differentiation of learning, on the development of the main language skills and on the assessment modes which would support the development of the main language skills.
- While planning and preparation is being done for pair work or group work tasks, the language which will be necessary for the students to do that work through Irish should be taken into account.

- Various aspects of the plans which were laid out for the various year groups were of a good quality. The plans which were focussed on topics showed best practice. Nevertheless, and literature to be included, a review should be undertaken of the planning approach. In the case of the Leaving Certificate (Established) and the higher level classes in junior cycle, it should be ensured that a thematic approach is adopted to planning.
- The quality of the plan for Transition Year was fair. It is recommended that this plan be better linked to the experience of the students themselves.
- When planning for first year, it is recommended to consult with feeder primary schools and *Curaclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge* (the primary school curriculum: Irish).
- To support the development that is to be undertaken on the learning of Irish, it is recommended that monitoring and review practices of the plans for the various year groups be developed and that review notes, such as conclusions from the analysis of in-house examinations, be noted in the planning documents.
- Planning and preparation for individual classes was good in most instances and fair in the remainder.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

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 accepts the recommendations outlined in the report and school management and the Gaeilge department are taking steps to address the issues raised.

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

Substantial work has already been undertaken by the Gaeilge department to address the recommendations of the report.

Following the inspection on November 11th and 12th, 2015, the Gaeilge department has worked in a collaborative way to address issues raised by the report. The department meets on a fortnightly basis during their own time to review the teaching and learning approaches used in lessons. Through various teaching methodologies they are now placing much greater emphasis on the communicative aspect of the syllabuses while also including the other skills required.

The department has engaged with the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and significant progress has been made in subject planning, the development of new teaching methodologies and new approaches to learning. All schemes of work are in the process of being rewritten, with the guidance of the PDST, with more emphasis being placed on specific requirements of the curriculum. The teachers in the department have attended three Gaeilge evening in-services with the PDST since the inspection to develop increased accuracy in the language and to learn about new and different teaching approaches for various parts of the syllabuses.

A review of house examinations was undertaken immediately after the inspection and house examination papers for all years have been changed appropriately. Assessment procedures are being developed to include the four skills required to be examined by the Gaeilge curriculum. Spoken Gaeilge is now being assessed as part of the house examinations for 5th and 6th years most immediately, and will be introduced at junior cycle in the coming years.

The Gaeilge department have developed a system for analysing results in house examinations as well as the state examinations. Levels of attainment will therefore be monitored continually and targets will be set to improve attainment rates. One such target is the introduction of the optional oral Irish examination in the Junior Certificate.

The Gaeilge department is confident that by implementing the measures outlined above, attainment levels will increase and with the use of the new methods for teaching Gaeilge in the school, students' learning in the subject will be enhanced.

