

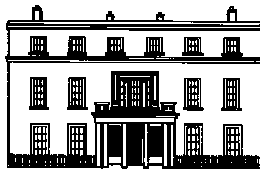
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Coláiste na Mí
Johnstown Education Campus, Navan
County Meath

Roll number: 76173K

Date of inspection: 19 May 2016



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 of inspection	19 May 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with acting principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Review of students' work• Feedback to individual teachers• Feedback to Irish teachers and senior management

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of classes observed, in one instance the quality of teaching was very good; the quality of both teaching and learning was fair in another instance.
- A new team of Irish teachers has been appointed who were very diligent in their teaching duties; they are dedicated to the promotion of the subject by taking a lively approach in class, that is as it should be.
- Teachers were very much to the fore in lessons, too much so in some cases; in these instances, the teachers spoke too much and did not pass sufficient responsibility for learning on to the students.
- The students had great difficulty in speaking about ordinary topics.
- School management strongly supports the aim of embedding Irish in everyday life in the school, as observed in the use of Irish versions of whole-school terms, as well as in other routine customs, such as greeting students in Irish and using Irish at the beginning of whole-school announcements.
- The quality of the Irish department's plan was good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended to include a refresher course in writing Irish as part of the Irish teachers' programme for continuing professional development.
- It is essential to hone the quality of language of the most competent students, especially those who attended all-Irish primary schools.
- It is recommended to review the provision for Irish in first year and second year, or at least in one of those two years.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste na Mí is a newly established co-educational post-primary school, under the patronage of Louth and Meath Education and Training Board. The school opened in 2013. The first group of students will undertake the Junior Certificate in 2016. There were 366 students in total enrolled in 2015/16. Ten per cent of students were exempt from Irish; the school confirmed that the majority of these were approved at primary level. It is planned to provide spaces for 1000 students under the second phase of building work.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of classes observed and teaching was very good in one instance; the quality of both teaching and learning was fair in one other instance.
- A new team of Irish teachers has been appointed who were very diligent in their teaching duties. They are dedicated to the promotion of the subject and to taking a lively, interactive approach in teaching and learning the subject as routine practice; that is as it should be. This means that students should be immersed in the language from the beginning.
- Teachers were very much to the fore in lessons, too much so in some cases; in these instances, the teachers spoke too much and did not pass sufficient responsibility for learning to the students. Emphasis should be placed on the spoken language so that students enjoy being able to use both official languages of the State. Attainment in certificate examinations in Irish should not be the sole objective early on in language learning.
- There were opportunities in all classes to practise active learning. For example, dice were thrown in one particular lesson as part of a language game to encourage part of that work and these activities succeeded up to a point. Students had great difficulty in speaking about ordinary topics, however. In order to better support students' oral language, teaching should be alert to language awareness. For example, an incorrect answer such as "Tá" to the question "*An osclóidh mé an doras?*" should not be ignored. '*Osclóidh mé*' is the correct answer.
- Positive approaches should be adopted to encouraging an interest in the language. In this regard, it would be helpful to share with the students supportive examples from research and the media that demonstrate the Irish people's natural affection for and pride in the Irish language.
- The best example of teaching and learning included students practising a substantial rich vocabulary to create a story to match a series of pictures. Attention was paid to language richness throughout, but students were advised to get used to the phrases first and not to worry about correct spelling at that point. Students responded very well to this freedom; they were not afraid of making mistakes and spoke out.
- Greater attention should be paid to differentiation and to illustrate this to students without discouraging them. Differentiation is important in itself as an illustration of the richness of language; it is essential to hone the quality of language of the most competent students, especially those who attended all-Irish primary schools. The quality of language of these students should continue to develop at post-primary level.

- Students should be made familiar with seeking and giving definitions of Irish words and phrases in Irish. If this is not done, the practice of translation will come to dominate, as was seen in some instances; translation is of very limited benefit, especially in oral language acquisition.
- In one particular case, what was very praiseworthy was the display of essential vocabulary, such as the following, with no corresponding English translation as guidance for the students in asking questions: *‘What’s the Irish for . . .?’*; *‘What does the word . . . mean?’*; *‘Could you repeat that please?’*

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for junior cycle Irish is good in third year; provision in first year and second year is more limited. It is recommended to review provision in either first or second year, at least. Increased provision should assist the school’s aim of creating a firm foundation for the subject.
- Good collaboration and cooperation were observed among the Irish teachers; they were focused on creating a firm foundation for Irish as a subject and as a fundamental element of life in the new school. Management strongly supports this aim and this is seen in the terminology, notices and procedures used in the school.
- The quality of Irish in teaching was very good in certain instances and weaker in others; it is recommended to have a refresher course in writing Irish as part of the Irish teachers’ programme for continuing professional development.
- Attention should be given to collecting printed material in Irish for the library that relates to the students’ ability in the language and their fields of interest. Students should be introduced gradually to a sample of contemporary material, and then the suitability of the material should be reviewed. Guidance material on this topic is available on the website of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of the Irish department’s planning was good; it demonstrated collaborative work and common learning and assessment objectives were agreed for the various levels. Learning objectives were laid out clearly in the schemes of work. It would be worth listing key words, phrases and verbs to be covered in a particular year, and from year to year.
- The teachers prepared carefully for individual lessons; there was a recognisable beginning, middle and end to lessons to illustrate and review learning objectives. There should be a better checking with the students that they have a clear understanding of the learning objectives.
- Teachers’ professional development in the subject was well recorded in the plan. This should be built on by agreeing peer-reviewing opportunities and building on each other’s practice accordingly.

The draft findings and recommendations arising from this evaluation were discussed with the acting principal, acting deputy principal and 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

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

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

The Board accepts the report and agrees with all the recommendations. How the recommendations are to be implemented is set out below.

- All teachers in the Irish department will continue with the programme of continuing professional development that is in place and will attend refresher courses in Irish, with the objective of developing and improving their written and oral competence as part of that programme.
- First year students will be assessed at Christmas, and if deemed necessary, the most academic students at Irish will be placed where their needs will be best met so that they are appropriately challenged (especially students who have attended the local primary Gaelscoil).
- The school has already implemented steps to address the recommendations in relation to provision for Irish on the timetable. The provision for Irish in second year has been increased from 4 class periods per week to 5 and management plans to implement a similar change with first-year provision in the next school year (2016/17).
- The Irish department held a meeting after the report was issued and it was decided to devote more time in each lesson to spoken Irish; we would be hopeful that as a result spoken Irish will show a significant improvement in the future. Every class will be entered for the optional oral Irish examination in the Junior Certificate examination with effect from 2016/17.

(The above text is a translation of the school response to the report submitted by the Board of Management).