

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

**Subject Inspection of Irish**  
**REPORT**

**Kylemore College**  
**Ballyfermot, Dublin**  
**Roll number: 70240P**

**Date of inspection: 16 November 2010**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE**

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

---

## **SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Kylemore College, Ballyfermot. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of the teaching and learning in Irish and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed the teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, the deputy principal and to the subject teachers. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

There are three classes in each year-group in the Junior Cycle in Kylemore College. First-year students are allocated to two streamed classes and one which takes part in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). Students in Kylemore College take Irish mostly at foundation level or at ordinary level. There are two mixed-ability classes in Transition Year (TY), an arrangement which accords with Transition Year philosophy. For the Senior Cycle, students are divided between the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). One class takes the established Leaving Certificate course at either ordinary level or foundation level.

At the moment, the provision for Irish on the school timetable is not the same for the two streamed classes in each year group in junior cycle. School management are commended for the decision to provide three periods of an hour per week for each of the two streamed classes every year from now on. The classes involved in the JCSP have two hours a week as do TY students, which is satisfactory provision.

The hour-long class-periods throughout the school are the outcome of ongoing discussions to determine the arrangement which best serves the learning needs of the students in the school. It was felt that two or three hour-long class-periods would better serve continuity of learning in all subjects than would four or five forty-minute periods, which would entail students' movement from class to class too frequently. This arrangement is regularly reviewed, a praiseworthy practice.

Certain efforts are made in the school to extend the students' experience of Irish as a living language beyond the classroom. *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is celebrated, for example, by organising competitions and a couple of events during that week. Up to ten Gaeltacht scholarships are provided annually for students through the Vocational Education Committee and local partnerships. A great effort is made to award those scholarships to students who would benefit most from them. It is recommended that all the teachers of Irish build on what has been achieved to date in the co-curricular area and design an extra-curricular and co-curricular programme

which would give the students a wider flavour of Irish as a living language and would last for the whole school-year rather than for just one week.

The teachers of Irish have their own classrooms, a situation which affords them a great opportunity of creating a stimulating Irish environment to help in the teaching and learning of the language. There was interesting attractive material on display in some classrooms and that material was effectively used during lessons. There was only a meagre amount of material on display in other classrooms. It is recommended that every teacher would put attractive supportive material on the walls of his/her classroom, so that they could refer to it during their classes to support the students' learning.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The teachers of Irish meet formally as a group once a term. On the day of the evaluation, minutes of only one of these meetings were available and the co-ordinator for Irish reported that they do not normally keep minutes of their meetings. It is understood that this practice is not in line with the school's policy of keeping minutes of all planning meetings. It is strongly recommended that minutes be kept, as a record of matters discussed and discussions made. The one set of minutes available, however, showed that a wide range of topics was discussed, including class administration, the use of Irish, the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in class, time management, resources and class work.

A co-ordinator has been nominated among the teachers of Irish to plan for the teaching and learning of the language in the school. This is a post of responsibility in the school at present. It is recommended that this arrangement be reviewed and that the duties of co-ordinator be rotated among all the teachers of Irish, in order to afford everyone the opportunity of taking a leadership role in co-ordinating planning and in promoting the language in the school in general.

On the day of the evaluation a plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the Junior Cycle was made available. Although some praiseworthy work has been done to date on planning, on individual schemes of work in particular, it is evident that planning for the teaching and learning of the language is only at the initial stages as yet. The one and a half page general plan includes a description of the aims and objectives for teaching and learning Irish in the school. It offers basic information on class management, on continuous professional development of the teachers and general information on the department of Irish. The schemes of work prepared by individual teachers were also made available. The presentation of these schemes varied from teacher to teacher, some typewritten, some handwritten. Some were written in Irish on an English template, while others were laid out in Irish on the teacher's own template. It is recommended that the teachers agree a common system and that schemes of work be laid out for all the yeargroups and levels in the school.

The plan for the teaching and learning of Irish should incorporate the following: a precise description of the department of Irish in the school, the aims and objectives of the department, common schemes of work for each year-group, detailed information on cross-curricular and co-curricular planning, information on differentiation, class and time management and catering for students with special needs. The use of ICT in the Irish-teaching classroom and how its use will be initiated should also be covered in the plan. The Irish-teaching staff should also undertake planning for the teaching and learning of the language in fifth and sixth year.

The common schemes of work should include precise information on subjects and topics to be covered, on teaching methods and active methodologies, resources to be used during lessons,

learning objectives and assessment methods. It is recommended that the schemes be laid out so that the topic to be covered can be read side by side with the methodologies to be employed, the resources to be used, the learning objectives and the assessment methods for the different lessons.

A plan was made available for the teaching and learning of Irish in Transition Year. The plan was laid out on the basis of school terms and is focused mainly on revision of the Junior Certificate course. The work is laid out on the basis of lists of topics and learning objectives, with no reference to interactive methodologies or to the resources that will be used. It is recommended that the layout of the plan be re-aligned taking account of the missing information referred to earlier. It is also recommended that an effort be made to embark on fresh content and activities, to sustain the students' interest in the language. Transition Year offers teachers an opportunity to teach subjects in innovative, creative ways. It is recommended that teachers avail themselves of that opportunity in Kylemore College and that they make an effort to broaden and develop students' experience of Irish as a living contemporary language. It would be worthwhile to consult teachers of other subjects, to consider whether cross-curricular material might be developed for the Transition Year course.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The use of Irish as the language of management, teaching and communication was very good in some of the classes observed. A few cases were observed, however, where most of the teaching was done through the medium of English and it is recommended that this practice be reconsidered without delay. It should be remembered that Irish class is the only opportunity that some students have of hearing the language. It is necessary that they hear Irish spoken and get an opportunity of using the target language on a regular basis. It is recommended that the teachers of Irish discuss this situation again and agree a common policy. Some teachers made great efforts in class to avoid translation from Irish to English in trying to ensure that the students understood the subject-matter of the lesson. This approach is commendable. In other cases, however, translation was continuously used. It is recommended that the teachers of Irish devise sensible strategies for avoiding overuse of translation. Effective use can be made of charts, posters and other materials on classroom walls to illustrate and explain vocabulary to students without resorting to translation and it is recommended that such methods be used.

The provision of opportunities for students to communicate with one another through the use of pair work, in certain classes observed, is commended. In those cases, pages with questions and answers presented on them, or work-sheets, were given to the students and those activities were very successful. In other cases, students were reminded to speak Irish to the teacher and answers in Irish were required of the students. The work done in these cases is laudable. In some lessons, however, the only opportunity the students got to speak Irish was in answering the teacher's questions and, in those cases, all that was required, frequently, was translation to English of Irish words or sentences. It is necessary to afford students opportunities to speak the target language on a regular basis in their Irish classes. It is recommended that teachers use communication strategies such as pair work, group work, language games and role-play, according to the age and ability-level of the students in the class. Those teachers who are not using the target language and who are not creating opportunities for students to use the target language should review their teaching methods. It is essential that there be a common approach to using effective teaching methodologies in place among all of the teachers of Irish.

The way that ICT was used in a couple of lessons observed is commended. This resource added to the effectiveness of the lesson and enabled students to benefit from what they learned. It is recommended that the use of ICT be extended to all Irish classes, to stimulate and foster students'

interest in learning the language. It is also recommended that a wider range of teaching-aids be used in Irish classes. The use of resources helps to contextualise the lesson content for the students. It is therefore recommended that music, photographs, posters, podcasts, film and clips from television programmes be used regularly during Irish lessons. The provision of support to the teachers of Irish by management in the area of in-service courses in ICT, as needed, would be greatly welcomed. It would be worthwhile seeking advice from the Second Level Support Service for Irish, as appropriate.

The learning objectives and aims of the lesson were recorded on the white board in a couple of cases observed. This approach is commended because it makes the students responsible for their own learning. It would be advisable to use such an approach in every class. The fact that a variety of tasks and activities was part of the majority of classes observed is praiseworthy; it meant that the lessons moved at a good pace. In a couple of classes observed, all the language skills – listening, speaking, writing and reading – were very well developed and this approach is strongly commended. Students’ pronunciation was corrected during certain lessons and repetition was used in other cases to ensure that students were able to enunciate new vocabulary and phrases correctly. It is recommended that that be done in all the Irish classes, to enhance students’ self-confidence and their willingness to use the target language.

During certain lessons, significant help and support was given to students who did not have a good command of the language, by recording key-words on the white board, and by using memory cards, notes and worksheets. Use was also made of differentiated teaching methods and that approach is laudable – this was the cases in approximately half the classes observed. It was felt, however, that in some cases it was necessary to provide more effective support for students who had difficulty in learning the language. It is recommended that the teachers of Irish discuss this problem with the learning-support staff in the school to devise and agree strategies and approaches to support students’ learning.

There was a pleasant atmosphere in a good number of the classes observed. Students were attentive and well-behaved on the whole, except for a small number of instances in classes where not enough opportunities were made available for active learning. In certain cases, students made great efforts to participate in the lessons. Teachers walked around the classrooms, talking to students, correcting their work and answering questions. In certain cases, students who made an effort during the lesson were continuously affirmed. It is recommended that the teachers consider arranging the furniture more effectively, in the case of small classes in particular. It was felt during the evaluation that the students might be spurred to greater efforts and managed more effectively if the layout of the classroom were changed. This type of arrangement would also support active learning in the classroom.

## **ASSESSMENT**

In-school tests are organised twice a year, at Christmas and in the summer. Reports are sent to parents after those tests. Contact is maintained with parents in other ways also – through parent/teacher meetings, the school website and the homework diary.

All sixth-year students take a ‘mock’ oral exam in preparation for the state exams. It is strongly recommended that every student in the school take an annual oral test and that the results of those tests be made available to parents as a separate item in the school report. It is also recommended that a letter be sent to all the school parents, reminding them that changes are imminent in the state exams in Irish and that in future there will be an extra emphasis on oral competence in the language.

There was evidence of plenty of work in some of the copybooks inspected. In half of the classes observed copybooks had been carefully corrected, with references to the standard of the students' work and to the progress they are making. There were other copybooks, however, where it was difficult to identify the teacher's correction. It would be advisable for the teachers of Irish to implement an agreed correction system which would ensure that the students would learn from their mistakes.

Many of the students in the school take Irish at foundation level in the state exams. The teachers are making great efforts at present to persuade and encourage more students to attempt ordinary level or higher-level Irish in the Junior Certificate. At present there are a small number of students taking higher level and the teachers' work in encouraging these students to take the subject at this level is commended. It is recommended that the teachers continue their work in this regard at Junior Cert. level for a start, in the hope that their efforts may influence the number of students taking ordinary-level Irish for the Leaving Certificate. It should be set as a medium-term target that more students will take Irish at higher level for the Junior Certificate initially and for the Leaving Certificate examinations eventually.

#### **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The teachers' efforts to broaden and develop students' experience of Irish as a living language beyond the classroom by celebrating *Seachtain na Gaeilge* are commended.
- There was attractive, stimulating material relevant to the learning of Irish on display in certain classrooms and it was used effectively during lessons to support the students' learning.
- The use of Irish as the language of management, interaction and teaching in a few of the Irish classes observed was very good and some teachers' commitment to using the target language is commended, as are the strategies they used to avoid overuse of translation.
- The effective use of ICT in a couple of classes observed is commended.
- Opportunities for communicating in the target language were provided for students in a couple of classes observed, and this is a laudable strategy on the part of the teachers. Opportunities for communication were closely linked to the use of the target language in the classroom.
- A good work atmosphere was evident in some of the classes observed and the students were polite and willing to participate in all the class activities in those classes.
- During a couple of lessons observed; all the language skills were appropriately catered for.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the responsibilities of co-ordinator for Irish be rotated among all the teachers of Irish, so that every teacher gets an opportunity of playing a leadership role in co-ordinating planning for Irish and promoting the language in the school in general.
- It is recommended that the plan for Irish be developed, both the general plan and the schemes of work.

- It is recommended that the teachers of Irish agree a policy on avoiding overuse of translation from Irish to English and that regular opportunities be created for students to communicate in the target language during all Irish classes.
- It is recommended that the Irish teaching staff request the help of the learning support team in the school, to agree on strategies to support the learning of students who have difficulties with learning Irish.
- It is recommended that all students in the school take ‘mock’ oral exams in Irish, from first year right through.
- It is recommended that the teachers of Irish focus on encouraging more students to attempt ordinary level or higher-level Irish in the State exams, according to their ability.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Irish, the principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation, meetings at which the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

*Published October 2011*