Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Coláiste Pobail Osraí
Kilkenny
Roll number: 70641K

Date of inspection: 5 March 2010
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Pobail Osraí, Kilkenny. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of 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 one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed 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 and the subject teachers. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

Coláiste Pobail Osraí is an all-Irish college where all subjects are taught through the medium of Irish. There is one class in each of the year groups at present, as the school is relatively new, but the management expects that it will grow in the future and that there will eventually be at least two classes in each year group. Irish is taught at Higher Level in all classes at present, although arrangements are made for students who wish to take the Ordinary Level paper in the state examinations following consultation with the Guidance Counsellor and the students’ parents. Only a small minority take Ordinary Level papers.

All classes in Junior Cycle have four class periods of Irish per week, as is the case with Transition Year also. Five class periods per week are allocated for Fifth Year and Sixth Year classes. This allocation is generally satisfactory, considering that the students have opportunities of acquiring Irish throughout the whole school day while engaging with the other school subjects. There are three teachers of Irish in the school. They are all graduates in Irish and the majority of them have years of experience of teaching the subject.

Because Coláiste Osraí is an all-Irish college, there is a strong emphasis on Irish in school activities, both cross-curricular and co-curricular. Numerous events and occasions are organised, inside and outside the school, with a view to providing the students with opportunities for speaking Irish naturally. For example, students participate in the events of Irish Week, the regional all-Irish colleges’ quiz, radio programmes, ‘Scléip’ (a competition for all-Irish colleges), the Young Scientist and Technology exhibition (through Irish), Gaels Linn debates, the TG4 film competition and the Foinse essay competition. In addition, students attend plays in Irish and invitations to the school are issued to a wide range of visiting speakers including poets who write in Irish, resident writers and Artscope, which conducted a variety of workshops with the students this year. The management and Irish teachers of the school are complimented on the extensive range of interesting, attractive events which are available to the students of the college. Such a programme of events helps to consolidate and nurture the Gaelic ethos of the college. Specific support in Irish is given to First Year students who come from English-medium primary schools,
so as to assist them in coming to terms with the Irish-medium curriculum of the school, and this is commendable.

Particular note was taken of the manner in which the school corridors were decorated with posters and other materials in Irish, as well as the various items being displayed on the notice boards which were especially attractive. The general appearance of the school environment, and the signage in Irish which was visible, are commended. However, the same could not be said of some of the classrooms and it is recommended that additional material in Irish should be put on display, including the work and projects of the students themselves.

It was indicated that every effort is made to encourage and motivate students to speak Irish among themselves in the school environment outside of the classrooms. This remains a continuing challenge in the country’s all-Irish colleges and the difficulties associated with attempting to change students’ linguistic behaviour away from the mother tongue are acknowledged. Nevertheless, it is essential that Irish would be consolidated and nurtured as the language of communication among students, so as to reinforce the effective acquisition of the language. It is recommended that there should be on-going discussion among staff on the implementation of the Irish policy of the school, and that this issue should be put on the agenda of the Students’ Council.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The teachers of Irish hold meetings once a term in order to discuss a range of issues arising from the teaching of the subject. The minutes on these meetings are available. These indicate that among the matters discussed were the acquisition of Irish, language awareness, the organisation of events during Irish Week, changes in examination papers and the Irish policy of the college.

A plan for the teaching and learning of Irish was made available on the day of the evaluation. It was clear that effort and time had been expended on the various aspects of planning for the subject. Particular commendation is due for the work done on the Transition Year plan and on the support programme for First Year students from English-medium schools. However, it was apparent that much of the plan had been compiled from the plans of individual teachers, some of which were more detailed than others and some of which were hand-written. It is recommended that the Irish plan should be made available in electronic form in order that it might be added to and taken from easily. It would be advisable that it would include a description of the teaching of Irish in the school and details on the levels of provision made for the subject. The plan should comprise outlines of the subject matter to be covered with the various year groups, as well as comprehensive accounts of teaching methods and methodologies, communication strategies, the use of aids and resources and methods of assessment. It is recommended that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Irish class should form part of the Irish plan also.

A whole-school plan for Irish was made available as part of the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish. The work done on this plan is commended. However, it is recommended that this whole-school plan and the Irish plan should be developed in such a way as to direct attention towards cultivating accuracy in writing and speaking Irish by means of whole-school strategies in all the subjects. It is recommended that the Irish teachers should discuss this matter with the school management with a view to devising a policy and strategies directed at enhancing the standard of Irish of students in the context of a gaelcholáiste.
The Irish plan for Transition Year was noted and the diversity in the programme drawn up is commended. It is recommended that further details should be given on the literary material to be covered during the year.

Coláiste Pobail Osraí has a reasonably extensive range of teaching aids to support the learning of Irish in class. The work in hand in connection with the installation of an intranet site in the school, on which a wide variety of teaching aids and class notes would be available, is especially commended. As an extension of this work, it is recommended that an inventory of aids and resources would be compiled and that this would form part of the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The use of Irish as the language of management, instruction and communication was excellent in all the classes observed. Teachers made every effort to motivate students to improve the quality of their language, both spoken and written, and this approach is commended. In one instance observed, the aims and learning objectives of the lesson were shared with the students at the beginning of class. This practice is greatly praised and it is recommended that it should be implemented at the beginning of all Irish classes, so that students would be given an understanding of what they had in hand and of what they would have achieved as regards the learning of the language by the end of a lesson.

In order to encourage students to speak and to participate in discussion, interactive activities in the form of paired work and group work were embarked upon in a number of classes observed. Where paired work was initiated, it succeeded admirably and a lively debate ensued from the activity which greatly enhanced the pace of the lesson and the pleasure which the students derived from it. The group work was not quite so successful in one case observed and it is recommended that use should be made of different strategies in differing settings in order to stimulate the students to work and to speak. It is recommended, for example, that only one work sheet would be given to a group so that they would be obliged to consult one another about the work in hand. There was no interactive work done in a number of the classes observed, apart from students listening to the teacher, answering questions and writing. It is recommended that it should be ensured that there would be an interactive element in all lessons and that students would be given regular opportunities of working together, of speaking and taking responsibility for their own learning under the direction of the teacher.

Effective use was made of the white board to illustrate points of grammar, key verbs and the answers to questions, as well as new vocabulary. Work sheets, teachers’ notes and, in one instance, an information sheet in Irish were utilised. Apart from these, no other teaching aids or resources were used in order to support the students’ learning and to awaken their interest in the subject matter of lessons. It is recommended that a far more extensive range of aids and resources would be used in the Irish classes, so as to stimulate the imagination of students, to spur their interest in the subject matter of lessons and to create a context for Irish literature. Regular use should be made of music, excerpts from films and television programmes, original texts, posters, photographs and any other material which would be of assistance in supporting the students’ learning. The manner in which links were established between an Irish poem and English literature, as seen in one class, is commended and it is recommended that on-going efforts should be made to make such comparisons in all classes.

In a number of instances, the students’ attention was drawn to errors of grammar and pronunciation during class. It is recommended that this should be done in all classes without
inhibiting the flow of speech or the self-confidence of students while speaking. Notes can be taken of common mistakes and these can be discussed with the students before the end of class. In one case observed particular care needs to be taken with the Copula ‘Is’. These two aspects of the language, grammar and pronunciation, are extremely important especially in the context of all-Irish education where a high standard might be expected.

Particular praise goes to the use made of a leaflet on health in one class observed. Copies of the leaflet were distributed in class and, having discussed the leaflet itself and its contents, students were asked to work in pairs at designing a leaflet of their own. This was a lively, interesting lesson and links were made between elements of grammar and the students’ vocabulary in the area of food. Students were asked to ensure that their leaflets were written in the imperative mood and this was an effective strategy of teaching that verbal form.

The students were courteous and mannerly during all the lessons. In the majority of classes observed, students made every effort to answer the teacher’s questions and to participate actively in the class. Teachers moved about the classrooms, speaking to students, correcting their work praised continuously, and this practice is commended.

**ASSESSMENT**

In-house examinations are administered in the school twice a year, at Christmas and in summer. Mid-term tests in the various subjects are also given in class. Results for all students are now being entered into a computer, in order that the students’ results can be monitored more closely and more effectively; this work, begun one year ago, is commended. Parents are kept informed by means of twice-yearly reports, parent-teacher meetings and the school journal. Parents are communicated with by telephone as required.

It was clear from the copybooks reviewed that homework is given regularly. Varied practices were seen to apply in relation to the correction of copybooks. Some copybooks had been corrected with the greatest care and the work of these teachers is commended. However, there were deficiencies in the correction of copybooks examined in some classes, and in other cases it was difficult to recognise or to read the corrections. It is recommended to the Irish teachers that they should discuss the issue of the assessment of the work of the school, and that they should agree on a system for the correction of homework which would provide feedback for the students on their work and progress, and ensure that they would learn from their mistakes.

Every effort is made in the school to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements, progress and endeavours of the students and prizes are presented for these on Awards Night. This approach and the attempts made to motivate students to participate in an extensive range of competitions are commended. An analysis is done of school’s examination results and this information is shared with the staff and the board of management. The great majority of the school’s students take Higher Level Irish papers in the state examinations. The level of attainment in Irish in the examinations is good.
SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Numerous cross-curricular and co-curricular events are organised, both inside and outside the school, as supports for the teaching and learning of Irish and for the consolidation and the nurturing of the Gaelic ethos of the school.
- The planning work done to date is commended, particularly the Transition Year plan and the support plan for First Year students coming from English-medium schools.
- Examples of interactive work were observed in the Irish classes which were effective and stimulating.
- The use of Irish as the language of management, communication and teaching was excellent in the classes observed.
- The way in which the achievements and progress of students is celebrated is commended.

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

- It is recommended that whole-school strategies would be discussed, designed to assist in raising the standard of accuracy in Irish, both spoken and written.
- It is recommended that a more extensive range of teaching aids and resources would be used in the Irish classes, in order to put the lessons in context and to make them more interesting for the students.
- A system for the correction of copybooks should be discussed and agreed, which would ensure that helpful feedback is given to students and that they would learn from their mistakes.

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

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