

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Coláiste Chomáin
Ros Dumhach, Béal an Átha, Contae Mhaigh Eo

Roll Number: 72140V

Date of inspection: 29th November 2011



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	25th October 2011
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 three class periods• Review of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good teaching and learning practices were employed in all classes.
- The assessment methods in use were of a very high standard, including assessment for learning, peer assessment and self-assessment.
- There is a very satisfactory provision and support for teaching and learning of Irish.
- Very good work had been done in the planning documentation for teaching and learning of Irish including continuous review.
- There is an action plan to develop the language at subject level and at the whole school level.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It would be very helpful to discuss the teaching and learning methodologies at departmental level in order to share good practices among staff members.
- It is recommended that planning take place to teach the four main language skills and different aspects of the courses in an integrated and thematic manner, consistent with the key syllabus principles.

INTRODUCTION

This is a Gaeltacht vocational school functioning under the patronage of County Mayo Vocational Educational Committee (VEC). Irish is the normal spoken language of the school and 44 students from various sociolinguistic backgrounds attend the school. Transition Year is an obligatory programme which was introduced as part of the school's curriculum this year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Good teaching and learning techniques were observed in all classes during the inspection.
- There was a developmental order to the stages of all lessons and the teaching and learning objectives were recorded and shared at the start of each lesson and at various points in one lesson.
- Good links were made with the students' prior learning by having a brainstorming session with the students in which they arrived as a group at the principal learning points of their previous lesson.
- A debriefing session was undertaken at the end of one lesson. This practice is commendable but such would be more successful if the students arrived at their own learning outcomes at the end of the lessons.
- The most effective methodologies included a good balance between whole-class work and students' task-based activity. There was variety in all classes, through the integration of the four main language skills.
- There was a good use of group work to practise listening and writing skills. The groups' needs were well-served and a good feedback session from the groups was undertaken.
- In one class innovative tasks were undertaken which relied on composition, on peer teaching, on role play, on oral peer assessment and on students' written self-assessment with support from the teacher. It is recommended that greater use be made of these approaches.
- Irish was used for all class interaction. Good practices were employed to draw the students' attention to grammatical points as well as very good techniques as regards to training the learners' ear to the correct pronunciation of the language.
- The students' attention was being directed to acquire a wider vocabulary throughout all the lessons. This target vocabulary must be adapted to the range of abilities in the senior classes in particular. There must be a challenge for learners with a high competency in Irish. It would also be worthwhile teaching vocabulary learning strategies explicitly in order to achieve the best vocabulary learning possibilities for each student.
- There was a mutually respectful learning atmosphere in all lessons observed during the inspection. The majority of teachers had good class management ability, which greatly enhanced the students' level of participation in the learning. Good stimulating affirmation was always offered to the quality of the efforts and opinions given by the students.
- A stimulating learning environment was created in the classrooms in which Irish was being taught as support for teaching and learning the language. It is recommended that other authentic materials be added to this display.

- It was clear from the random sample of work diaries collected in each lesson that homework was being assigned regularly. It is recommended that the homework tasks contain variety in the language skills.
- A random sample of the students' copybooks was reviewed, which contained plenty of developmental work. The students' work was regularly monitored and good techniques were in evidence in mechanical corrections, which were not excessive and which gave a good illustration to the learner of the basis of the errors as well as supporting examples.
- An assessment grid was in use in one class where the students were self-assessing their own learning outcomes. These good assessment for learning (AfL) techniques should be more widely employed.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The provision and support provided for teaching and learning of Irish is very satisfactory. It is commendable that a total immersion course is provided in the first term of first year. All class-groups are organised on a mixed ability basis.
- The school has developed a comprehensive Irish policy to promote Irish at a whole school level and among the entire school community.
- The facilities and resources developed in the school which support teaching and learning of Irish are of a very good standard. These support facilities, including electronic resources, are continuously updated. The school has a library with up-to-date books.
- All the teachers teaching Irish in the school are graduates in the subject. It is recommended that all teachers have experience of teaching in both cycles and at the various examination levels. The plan for Irish has good mentoring instructions for newly-appointed teachers or student teachers.
- It is commendable that the Irish staff participates in continuous professional development (CPD) at various levels: personally, at courses provided by the VEC, at whole school level and at external courses provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) for Irish.
- A whole school approach to literacy and numeracy is in place as part of the Junior Certificate School Programme (JSCP). It is recommended that this be developed with the school's senior year groups also.
- It is commendable that all the language skills are included in the summative examinations for all year groups. It would be beneficial to include the learners' spoken competency in the reports sent home based on these assessments.
- The school has a long tradition of participation in a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Projects are organised which positively enhance the amount of Irish used in the school's environment as well as cultivating links with schools in the school's catchment area and in Scotland. The language is to be seen in places throughout the school but there is scope to add to this.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The work completed on curriculum planning for teaching and learning Irish was of a very high standard.
- The best aspects of this planning were: differentiated teaching and learning objectives, up-to-date documentation for students with special educational needs (SEN) as well as strategies for their inclusion, emphasis on pre-taught skills, marking criteria for each skill, and an emphasis on peer learning.
- It is recommended that planning take place in order to teach the four main language skills and various aspects of the courses in a thematic, integrated manner.
- A co-ordinator has been appointed for Irish and it is recommended that this position be rotated at a time agreed at the level of the department itself.
- It is commendable that the plan for Irish is reviewed on an ongoing basis and that action planning is in place to develop the language at subject level and at a whole school level.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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; a response was not received from the board.