Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Coláiste Mhuire
St Mary’s Road, Galway
Roll number: 62980N

Date of inspection: 6 April 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>5 &amp; 6 April 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class-periods</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>• Examination of students’ work</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>• Feedback to the principal and to the teachers</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with the principal and the teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• Exemplary teaching and learning techniques as well as good methodologies were used in the vast majority of the lessons.
• Good methods have been developed for formative and summative assessment.
• The provision for Irish on the timetable is very satisfactory.
• After Christmas of first year, students are streamed for Irish according to the levels in the State examinations.
• The Irish department had carried out very good work on certain aspects of planning for the teaching and learning of the language.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• A review of the streaming of students so early in their post-primary education is recommended.
• It would be helpful to use the integrated, thematic approach in all curriculum plans and to formulate a plan of action to guide the strategic development of the department.
INTRODUCTION

• Coláiste Mhuire is a secondary school for boys, with an enrolment of 428 students for the current year. The boys come from 24 feeder primary schools in the Galway city area and from parishes outside the city. An optional Transition Year (TY) programme is offered when a demand exists for it.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• Exemplary techniques and good teaching and learning approaches were used in the majority of the lessons.
• Among the most effective methodologies were: a good balance between whole-class work and students’ active learning, thematic integration of the four main language-skills and comprehensive preparatory work was carried out before students engaged in the completion of language skill-based tasks.
• The vast majority of the teachers created good communicative opportunities for the students to practice their speaking skills, both receptive and productive, during classes.
• In the majority of lessons, the teachers had high learning expectations regarding enrichment of student vocabulary, the accurate use of language, as well as phonetics and articulation.
• All of the teachers made great efforts to encourage the majority of the students to participate in the lessons and the students were always affirmed for their attempts.
• Effective strategies were employed in almost every lesson regarding the use of the target language. New Irish language structures and vocabulary being introduced to the students were well simplified with the help of gesticulation, facial expressions and other visual aids. Good, clear, orderly recording was done and ICT was beneficially used in a way that had a positive influence on students’ learning.
• Impressive grouping and reinforcement of vocabulary was done in the majority of classes. These learning strategies are very beneficial to students’ long-term memorisation of vocabulary and the pronunciation of words.
• Useful Irish words and phrases were on display in almost every classroom. It would be well worth extending this approach. In one classroom, the topics for the various year groups were displayed on charts, with the progress of the different groups clearly visible as a strategy to promote the independence of the learners.
• Good methods were employed in the department of Irish to conduct formative assessment of students’ learning. It was reported that assessment-for-learning techniques (AfL) are used. It was evident from the random sample of student work in the copybooks that there is scope for further development in these areas, especially in the written feedback provided to the learners.
• It was evident from the random selection of student homework diaries inspected that homework was being regularly set, but that there was too much emphasis on written tasks and on memorisation. It is recommended that this practice be reviewed.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The provision for Irish on the timetable is very satisfactory as regards the number and distribution of class periods and the arrangements made for students to change from one level to a more appropriate level.

• First-year students are arranged in mixed-ability groups until Christmas. They are then streamed according to the levels in the State examinations. It is recommended that the streaming of students so early in their secondary education be reviewed.

• A good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular events is organised for the students, a provision which is of great help in implementing one of the objectives of the department of Irish: ‘to create links with the living functional language’.

• Twelve per cent of the total enrolment of students have been exempted by the school from the study of Irish, within the provisions of Circular M10/94. The inspector was given to understand that half of these exemptions had been given to students with identified learning difficulties and the remainder to students who had not been educated within the State. Management expressed a concern in relation to the doubling in the number of students presenting to the school with exemptions in the last five years.

• The school has good facilities, including information and communications technology (ICT) facilities. The department of Irish has developed teaching and learning resources which are shared among the members of staff. As the department supplements its support aids for Irish, the lists of resources on the SLSS (Second Level Support Service) website for Irish, and the website www.cogg.ie will be useful as reference points.

• There is very little Irish to be seen in the school environment. It is recommended that the school review this situation in order to raise the status of the language among all the partners in the school community.

• The school has developed good systems for summative assessment. Common tests are used and the four major language skills are tested in the house exams taken by every student twice during each school year.

• Management analyses and tracks the results obtained by the students in the certificate examinations. It is recommended that the Irish department itself would compare this analysis to the mean national results on an annual basis.

• The vast majority of the teachers of Irish have the language in their degrees and a good percentage of the staff have attended courses provided by the SLSS for Irish. It is recommended that the information disseminated at these courses be shared with all members of staff. It is also recommended that every teacher who has a degree in Irish be afforded the opportunity of teaching the language in both cycles and at various levels.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The department of Irish operates on a formal basis and a co-ordinator has been appointed. No record is kept of major decisions made at the meetings of the department held each term, nor
is the co-ordinator’s role rotated among the staff after an agreed term of office. It would be helpful to review this situation.

- It would also be worthwhile to identify the department’s development priorities, as a guide to the strategic progress of the department.

- There is an admirable emphasis on emotional intelligence in the department’s objectives, to enable the students to be relaxed as speakers of Irish. It is recommended that these teaching and learning objectives be used as performance indicators in the planning process. It would be helpful to record the organisational details of the department and to develop homework guidelines which take account of the four language skills and to ensure that this work is done within the comprehensive whole-school policy for homework.

- The curriculum plans for the various year groups, with the exception of the TY plan, were of a very good standard. The best work was seen in the plans for junior students where the four major language skills and different aspects of the courses were being presented in an integrated way, according to topic. It is recommended that this approach be used in the plans for senior students also, including the TY plan. It would be helpful also to describe the teaching and learning resources and the assessment methods to be used, as part of every plan.

- A high standard of planning and preparation had been carried out for the vast majority of the lessons observed during the inspection.

At the conclusion of the evaluation, the draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and with 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.

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