

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Marino College  
Marino, Fairview, Dublin 3  
Roll number: 70250S**

**Date of inspection: 25 January 2011**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT  
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | A N D S K I L L S**

***{This is a translation of the original report which was written in Irish}***

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

---

**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Marino College. 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 two days 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**

Marino College is an inclusive school providing especially for students and families experiencing educational and social disadvantage. This challenging context creates specific factors for the teaching and learning of Irish. As an indication of this, for example, the percentage of students in the school who have an exemption from studying Irish is currently in the high twenties. All of the students in junior cycle are taking the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) and in senior cycle, two thirds of all students study the *Gaeilge Chumarsáideach* programme of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

Taking this context into consideration there was strong evidence that good work is ongoing in the school in relation to Irish and that students are given the opportunity and encouragement to make progress in the subject, in keeping with the level of their ability. The positive finding of this evaluation is that Irish is well supported as a subject and as a subject department in the school, and that teachers of Irish are very much encouraged by the support and the respect, for the subject and for their work, which is provided by school management. It is commendable also, that students who have an exemption from Irish are welcomed to study the subject and that this invitation has been accepted in certain cases.

On the whole timetabled arrangements for the subject were good. For the most part an equal distribution of one class period per day was allocated in the majority of classes. Concurrent timetabling operated in junior cycle ensuring flexibility for students who wished to change subject level, as necessary. Timetabled allocations in senior cycle and for the LCA were very satisfactory. The amount of time provided in junior cycle, four periods per week in each of the

three years, is considered to be quite limited. A review of the time allocation for the subject in junior cycle is recommended, taking into account the other requirements of the timetable. This recommendation is made in order to provide an extra class period in one of the three years for a higher level class. However it is at the school's discretion to decide this matter and this is not a prescriptive recommendation to increase the current allocation of time.

Teachers were classroom based and an atmosphere supportive of learning the subject was created by teachers in the Irish classrooms. Good information and communications technology (ICT) resources were available in classrooms and teachers of Irish were trained and competent in the use of these resources. A store of newly acquired books in Irish was readily available in the school library to encourage reading independent of class textbooks.

School management is supportive of teacher professional development and courses organised by the second level support services (SLSS) for Irish, including the JCSP, have been well attended by members of the Irish department. Two teachers are in charge of the department and both have appropriate qualifications in Irish. One of these teachers was a native speaker and provided an excellent exemplar and valuable in-house resource in one of the Irish dialects. At the time of the evaluation visit a substitute teacher was working in the school. However, thus far, the school had not had the resources to facilitate attendance by this teacher at any professional development events. The school and the coordinator of the subject department are to be commended for the in-house support provided for that teacher during the short period she was on the staff. This was an example of the co-operation and collaboration available both within the subject department and from school management.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The planning work provided was of a high standard and it was evident that collaborative planning was being implemented in the Irish department. The co-ordinator was fully familiar with the schemes of work and it became clear later on in the lessons observed that these schemes serve as guidelines for teaching. Regular planning meetings are convened and minutes of these meetings are included in the subject plan. Self-evaluation was an integral part of the work of the Irish department. It was clear from the subject plan that the implementation of the schemes of work is reviewed and that plans are subsequently amended for the following year. Included in the most constructive parts of the plan for the school year 2010/11 was an open and frank account at the beginning of the plan on the current state of the subject in the school and even more importantly an ambitious action plan was set out to enhance the status of Irish in the school. This plan had whole-school application. All this is an indication of the good understanding and approach to planning that is shared by the teachers of Irish.

In Marino College the subject plan for Irish incorporated findings and recommendations taken from subject inspection reports on Irish published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills. The Irish department was engaged in implementing some of these recommendations and adapting them to the context in Marino College. Irish was being promoted outside the classroom through the use of displays and notices and a collection of books was readily available in the school library. The Irish department is to be commended for their diligence.

It was evident from planning work in the school that cognisance was being taken of student ability. Lesson content was being adapted to ensure student progress during lessons and thereby providing satisfaction and encouragement to students to continue their study of Irish. This approach meant that students are set a limited yet achievable challenge while at the same time all

the language skills are addressed. Teachers are to be commended for this measured approach which places the needs of learners at the centre of the work. In such a situation, the language proficiency of the teachers themselves could, over time, be adversely affected due to the limited challenge. It was clear from the quality of Irish of the principal teacher of Irish that no such decline has taken place and there was evidence of appropriate support being provided for the substitute teacher. Co-operation flourished in both planning and implementation.

Planning work included a focus on resources, variety in resources as well as an understanding of the use ICT to support variety. There was an awareness of the need for regular practice and revision of key words and idioms. Teachers demonstrated knowledge of teaching approaches to be used with students in the JCSP and statements in relation to their proficiency in Irish had been produced for all the students. All of this was very positive and was another indication of the level of understanding teachers have of placing the needs of learners central in the planning work.

Learning outcomes were set out in the plans for the different year groups. This description was good. It is recommended that this work be built upon progressively and that learning outcomes be more defined so that there is a very clear understanding of the amount and standard of language students in every year group would have acquired in the four language skills by the end of the school year. This approach would be very helpful in setting out a gradual progress and in avoiding uninteresting material in class work. While it is accepted that revisiting material would be necessary, progress should also be apparent from year to year. To assist this work it would be worthwhile for teachers to maintain exemplars of the best levels of progress as a common resource to be included in the subject plan.

A timeframe for achieving the year's work was set out in all schemes. The work involved in the *Gaeilge Chumarsáideach* modules being undertaken by the LCA classes was clearly set out. It was evident that teachers had a clear understanding of how to implement a common scheme of work. In this regard it was helpful that teachers had classes with each year group in the school and consequently they worked together collaboratively.

It is recommended that members of the Irish department share openly their personal experiences of using teaching methodologies. To this end, as part of their planning work teachers should consider organising visits to each other's classes from time to time during the year.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The quality of teaching was good in all of the six lessons observed. These lessons comprised an equal number of junior and senior cycle classes and teachers had completed appropriate planning for every lesson. Copies of lesson plans and handouts which had been prepared to support lessons were provided to the inspector. The planning material showed that the work to be achieved was quite well measured by and large. Teachers had a good understanding of the capability of the students in their classes. In one specific case, the teacher showed very good understanding of the ability and learning needs of every student in all her classes and it was evident that useful information regarding the learning needs of students was being made available at a whole-school level. The work planned for the lessons was achievable for the most part and reflected the level of proficiency of students.

Individual planning work had a specific objective and presentation and implementation were well structured. Learning targets were clearly set out and included practice of the four language skills.

There was good awareness of the importance of variety in learning and of giving students freedom to participate in active learning and for individual work as well as learning together. This approach is to be commended.

Teachers need to have sufficient self confidence in order to manage active learning especially in the case where student proficiency is limited. This was the situation with many of the learners; however they were given opportunity to learn together and good use was made of work sheets prepared in advance to initiate pair work.

The amount of work that had been planned for in advance was not completed in every case. This was the outcome when the expected progress was not made in other activities in the lesson. Teachers were understanding and flexible in relation to amending the lesson content as the necessity arose. For example, the way in which work which could not be completed was set aside without trying to finish it in haste is to be commended.

The work displayed on classroom walls created an atmosphere supportive of learning. Among the material displayed were notices, idioms, vocabulary and other useful reference work. Teachers' approach was similar and the target language was used throughout even though English or translation to English was used casually. It is recommended that this latter tendency be curtailed.

Lessons were effectively managed. Rolls were called at the beginning of lessons; homework was carefully corrected without spending too much time and a brief presentation made to share the aim of the lesson and learning objectives. All the language skills were included and an appropriate amount of time was given to the different activities. This meant that an amount of time was spent with oral questions, moving forward to focussing on the spelling and the sound of words and then writing down these words in order to establish them as part of the students' everyday vocabulary. In addition, listening comprehension, pair and group work were also ongoing.

It is recommended that every opportunity in the lesson be exploited to reflect students' life experiences. In the case of a lesson on sport for example it would be worthwhile to focus on events and on contemporary sports personalities with whom students could identify. For example, it would be good to include student choices rather than discussing sports in general. It is more likely than not that students in Dublin would know celebrities such as Robbie Keane, Katie Taylor, Bernard Brogan, or the Dublin ladies' football team and it would be worthwhile focussing on these individuals. Directly opposite the school there are playing fields, as well as a well known sports and leisure centre. It was clear from discussions with students that they identified with these references but it was also obvious that they are not used to discussing issues that are immediately adjacent to them.

In the lessons observed good use was made of ICT resources, in particular of the data projector, used to show illustrations and motivating material. It is recommended that English translations of Irish vocabulary are not placed side by side on the screen when there is an excellent picture being shown to illustrate the concept, as was the case.

The amount of learning achieved during lessons was quite limited. However progress was being made and this was obvious from the understanding students displayed during oral questioning. A very good atmosphere was apparent between teachers and students throughout and all class activities had positive outcomes. Teachers had an effective way of dealing in a courteous manner with the occasional challenging individual student. Students showed respect for their teachers and work continued with full co-operation from beginning to end of lessons. Teachers praised student efforts; they used positive approaches; and in the lessons where there were higher levels of

proficiency teacher efforts were duly rewarded by the good standard of the answers given by students.

A greater focus on differentiated teaching is recommended, even in classes of the same level. There is discernible difference in the language proficiency of learners in every class and the challenge should be adjusted accordingly. In the case of either oral or written questioning, differentiation can be easily introduced through requesting information in one instance and accepting a single word as an answer in another. For example, when a picture of a semidetached house is shown, in one case a question about the type of house could be asked and the meaning of that answer sought in another instance. In addition, in every instance, learners should be given experience of posing, as well as answering questions.

On the whole the standard of Irish of students in the six lessons observed was quite limited however teachers made very good efforts to affirm and to build on the amount of Irish that students had acquired. In every lesson students did their best to engage with the material they were set and progress was evident in all lessons. It was clear that a certain satisfaction could be gained by students from the progress they made and that their effort was worthwhile. This was evident from the answers students gave to individual questioning by teachers, in group work, and in the written answers in their copybooks. All in all the teaching and learning are to be commended.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Whole-school policies for homework and assessment have been developed and these policies are included in the subject plan for Irish. Assessment in the subject is well provided for and there was a focus on assessment issues in the plan as an integral part of teaching and learning. Class tests are administered regularly and teachers maintain very good account of student progress. It is routine practice to carry out assessment by means of oral questioning in all lessons. It was evident in the written assessment that teachers focus on differentiation. A sample of student copybooks and folders was examined. Both the care taken by students with their work and teacher recognition of this work is to be commended. Stickers were also used in the copybooks to praise special efforts. The work in the LCA student folders is highly commended.

Irish is not included in the tests carried out as part of the entrance process in the school. Data from entrance tests concerning the reading ages of incoming first year students in English were reviewed. These details show the scale of the challenge involved in teaching a second language. An examination of the results being achieved in Irish in the certificate examinations illustrates the progress that has been made without any extra support or learning support in Irish. It is recommended that the Irish department consider the introduction of tests in Irish as part of the entrance process to first year. It would be worthwhile recording a pointer to student proficiency in the language as an initial step and, as an exercise in collaboration, to share this information with the primary feeder schools.

As part of the most recent review of their work carried out by the Irish department it was decided to enter one class for the optional oral examination in Junior Certificate in order to gain experience of the forty per cent of marks awarded for oral proficiency. The school is highly commended for having implemented this move. In the lessons observed it was evident that worthwhile efforts are being made to promote the speaking of the language. It is recommended that the Irish department adhere to this policy and enter students for the optional oral examination as standard practice from now on.

Details of the levels undertaken by the majority of students in the certificate examinations show student general proficiency and competence in the subject. The Irish department is commended for their plans to set higher expectations in the subject for a greater number of their students. The school mission for Marino College is to develop the full potential of every individual student and to foster respect for learning in a positive environment where teachers and students show respect for each other. It was evident in the lessons observed, in the thoroughness of the planning work, and in the diligence of their teaching that teachers in the Irish department are meeting their share of that challenge in the school.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Irish, as a subject and as a department, is well supported in the school, and teachers of Irish are very encouraged by the level of support and respect for their work which they receive from school management.
- Good work is ongoing with regard to Irish in the school and students are provided with the opportunity and the encouragement to progress in the subject in keeping with their ability.
- There are good information and communications technology (ICT) resources available in classrooms and teachers of Irish are well trained and competent in the use of these resources.
- Self evaluation is fundamental to the work of the Irish department. The current subject plan shows that schemes of work are reviewed and plans subsequently amended for the following year.
- The subject department plan for Irish incorporated findings and recommendations from subject inspection reports of Irish published on the website of the Department of Education and Skills and some of those recommendations had been adapted for the context in Marino College and were being implemented.
- The quality of teaching was good in the six lessons observed and teachers had a good understanding of the ability of the students in their classes.
- The school is highly commended for having entered a class for the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate 2010 as an initial step.

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

- It is recommended that learning outcomes be further developed in the future so that there is a very clear understanding of the precise amount and standard of Irish expected to be achieved by the learner from year to year, and to identify gradual continuity in learning.
- It is recommended that members of the Irish department openly share their personal experiences of teaching methodologies among themselves. To this end it is recommended that teachers consider organising visits to each other's classes from time to time during the year.
- It is recommended that Irish words and their English translations are not placed side by side on the screen when there is an excellent picture being shown to illustrate the concept.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of Irish and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

*Published June 2011*