Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

The Central Technical Institute (Scoil na gCeard)
[Coláiste Chluain Meala and Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn]
Clonmel, County Tipperary
Roll number: 72420E

Date of inspection: 23 March 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in the second level units (Coláiste Chluain Meala and Gaelcholáiste Cheitinn) of the Central Technical Institute (Scoil na gCeard), Clonmel. 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 units. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed the teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with the 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, to the teacher-in-charge and to the subject teachers. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The Central Technical Institute is a co-educational school under the patronage of Tipperary Vocational Education Committee and comprises three different units – a second-level school (Coláiste Chluain Meala) where the medium of instruction is English, an Irish-medium unit (Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn) with a teacher-in-charge who is responsible to the principal of Coláiste Chluain Meala, and the section which provides Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses. The inspector visited four classes in the Irish-medium unit and four classes in Coláiste Chluain Meala. No aspect of the PLC provision was evaluated as part of this subject inspection. Since the educational context of Coláiste Chluain Meala is very different from that of Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn, those two units will be considered separately, under each of the headings in the inspection report apart from assessment.

Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn was founded in 2004 as a separate unit of Coláiste Chluain Meala to meet the demand from parents for Irish-medium second-level education for their children. The local gaeilgeoir is a feeder school for the gaelcholáiste, another gaeilgeoir in the region is providing pupils in recent years also, and a small number of pupils come from English-medium primary schools.

Coláiste Chluain Meala

Normally there are two first-year classes in Coláiste Chluain Meala; one is a mixed-ability class and the other follows the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP). This arrangement continues through second and third year. There is a single mixed-ability class for Irish in fifth and sixth year and another class takes the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) course. The vast majority of the students take foundation-level Irish papers in the state examinations, or ordinary-level papers in certain cases, and only very rarely would a student take higher-level Irish papers for the Junior Certificate. First and second-year classes have four class periods per week and third year classes have five periods, including one double period. Students taking the LCA have four class periods per week in the first year of that course. The provision for Irish on the school timetable is satisfactory.
A problem was identified during the evaluation which affects the class taking the JCSP, in so far as students who have exemptions from the study of Irish sit in on the JCSP Irish classes. Because a reasonably large group currently have exemptions, the situation creates problems, in relation to the double class period in particular. The school’s efforts to offer students experience of Irish as a living language and of learning Irish, to students who have exemptions, is commended. However, a designated course should be designed for them, which would serve their particular learning needs. It is recommended, therefore, that learning support be provided for those who have exemptions during three of the Irish class periods per week and that a special course be designed, based on language awareness as well as on Irish heritage and culture, which the whole class would enjoy and benefit from, during the remaining two Irish class periods.

Good efforts are made in Coláiste Chluain Meala to give the students an experience of Irish as a living language. *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is celebrated by organising a table quiz, and sometimes, a treasure hunt. It was reported that the students’ interest in Irish and in Irish culture has been improving in recent years. The efforts of the management and of the teachers to broaden and improve language awareness are commended. It would be advisable to gradually develop a programme of extra-curricular and cross-curricular events, to enhance the students’ interest in learning the language.

_Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn_

Every year group in Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn is a single mixed-ability class group. School management expect a two class first-year intake in 2011 and it is expected that the gaelcholáiste pupil numbers will gradually grow. The majority of the students come from an Irish-medium primary education background, so that they are fluent in Irish and have good writing skills on enrolment. The provision for Irish on the school timetable is very satisfactory, with five class periods per week for Irish for every year group in the Junior Cycle. Five class periods per week are also provided for Transition Year (TY), including one double period, and six class periods per week, with one double period, are provided for fifth and sixth-year classes. All students, with a very occasional exception, take higher-level Irish in the state examinations. The students achieve good results in the state exams.

Every effort is made to broaden and develop the students’ experience of Irish as a living modern language. Regular contact is maintained with another gaelcholáiste in the area and joint events are organised with the students of that college, for example, table quizzes. The students are brought on school outings to _Gaeltacht_ areas and also to _Coláiste na Rinne_. The school takes part in _Craobh Uí Chadhain_, Gael Linn’s debating competition for Irish-medium schools. Opportunities are also provided for TY students to gain work experience in the Irish-medium primary schools in the region. The school’s efforts to provide a wide ranging language-experience for the students are commended and it is recommended that management continue to develop and broaden those initiatives, because it is so important for the students to get experience of a broader Irish context than that of the gaelcholáiste only.

The teachers of Irish have availed of the opportunity of attending all the in-service courses provided by the Second Level Support Service for Irish in recent years and their enthusiasm in attending courses at night and after school hours is commended.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

_Coláiste Chluain Meala and Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn_

Generally the same teachers teach Irish in the two parts of the school and much of the planning is done jointly for Coláiste Chluain Meala and Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn. The teachers meet formally
once a term to discuss aspects of the teaching and learning of Irish. It is evident from the minutes of these meetings that examinations, exemptions from Irish, an induction day for first-year students, schemes of work and Seachtain na Gaeilge are the topics discussed. One of the teachers of Irish is nominated as co-ordinator of planning for Irish in Coláiste Chluain Meala: this responsibility is assumed by each of the teachers in turn, for a year at a time. This practice is commended because it affords every teacher the opportunity of taking a leadership role in planning and in generally promoting the language. The teacher-in-charge assumes this responsibility in the case of the gaelcholáiste. It is recommended that the possibility of rotating this responsibility among all the staff in turn be considered, as is done in the other part of the school. It was reported that the staff meet regularly on an informal basis also.

A start has been made on elements of planning in the school. There is a dedicated file for all Department circulars and for guidelines from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and another for plans and schemes of work. Schemes of work for the various year groups and levels in the two schools were made available on the day of the inspection. The work carried out to date on planning in general is commended.

**Coláiste Chluain Meala**

It is recommended, however, that the planning be done separately for the two parts of the school because the two contexts are very different and the two parts of the school are in separate locations. It is recommended that a plan for Coláiste Chluain Meala be drawn up which contains a description of the school context, of the organisation of the department of Irish, the arrangement of classes, timetabling and cross-curricular as well as co-curricular planning. Schemes of work should be made available for each class group, which would include the subject matter or topic to be covered, the methodologies to be used in class, resources and materials to be used in presenting the subject matter to the class, learning targets to be achieved by the students and the assessment methods to be used to assess what has been learnt. Planning for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) should form a central part of the plan for the teaching of Irish in the two parts of the school.

**Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn**

In the case of Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn, it is recommended that a plan for Irish be compiled as described above for Coláiste Chluain Meala. It is suggested, besides, that a whole-school plan for Irish be devised, which would focus on defining and developing the specific Irish-language ethos of the school. That plan should also focus on the development of grammatical accuracy and correct use of language across the whole curriculum, to enable the students to reach the highest standard in writing and speaking the language.

A plan has been developed for the teaching and learning of Irish in Transition Year (TY). That plan should be substantially developed and a comprehensive plan devised for students’ learning for the duration of Transition Year. It is recommended that the plan should contain a comprehensive account of what students will be doing from week to week and of how the various lessons and activities will enhance their knowledge and understanding of Irish. TY affords students an opportunity of doing some extra reading, but it is recommended that any literature that might be used as part of the Leaving Certificate programme should not be studied. Teachers should consider enriching and developing students’ language skills in various creative ways during TY and assessing their progress through project work, keeping a diary, an oral exam and presentations on aspects of their learning during the year.
TEACHING AND LEARNING

Coláiste Chluain Meala
Some good efforts were made to use Irish in the classes with the students and these efforts are commended. There was excessive use of English in the majority of the classes, however, in relation to giving directions to the students, asking about the progress of the work on hand, and ensuring that students understood the subject matter of the lesson. Although commendable efforts were made in certain cases to avoid it, translation from Irish to English was continually used in the majority of classes, even when it was evident that the students fully understood what had been said in Irish. The Irish class and the teacher of Irish are the main contact the majority of the students have with the target language. It is vital, therefore, that the target language be used in the class on an ongoing basis, as the language of management, teaching and communication. It is recommended that the teachers discuss other strategies, besides translation to ensure that the students understand lesson content. It was observed, for example, that a certain number of posters and other materials relating to the teaching and learning of Irish were on display on the classroom walls. It would be advisable to use a much wider range of materials as an aid to the teacher in explaining words and concepts, and as a support to students’ learning.

A good range of learning activities was used in the classes observed. Teachers used pair work, role play and a game in certain classes as stimuli to encourage the students to speak Irish. All of this work is commended. In general, however, students were not afforded enough opportunities to speak the target language and it is recommended that the teachers discuss strategies for helping students to use the amount of Irish they know. It would be important, for example, to provide pages with sample questions and answers as scaffolding for the students when they are doing dialogues, to help them frame sentences and give them practice in using the language. In a few cases observed, good efforts were made to develop all the language skills during the lesson. It is recommended that it should be the aim of every lesson to develop all the language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The teachers succeeded in encouraging the students to work hard in the majority of the classes. The students answered questions willingly and, in general, their behaviour was good.

Besides the white board, posters, worksheets and a game, few teaching aids were used in the lessons observed. It is recommended that the teachers research the most modern resources on the market for the teaching of Irish, especially for students who need extra support, and that they build up a library of resources. A stock of resources should be available to everybody, in a central location in the school, and a list of resources should be part of the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school. As resources allow, wider use should be made of ICT in the Irish-language classroom, to support students’ learning and to stimulate and develop their interest in the language.

Gaelchláiste Chéitinn
The use of Irish as the language of management, communication and teaching was excellent in the classes observed. The students always answered questions in Irish and it was evident that they had long experience of speaking the language and were comfortable in using it. Most of the teachers made substantial efforts to avoid translation as a teaching method to explain new words and phrases to the students. Every teacher in the school should be capable of explaining things in simple Irish and a policy to that effect should be part of the Gaelchláiste’s Irish-language policy. In general, the commitment of the management, the teachers and the students to the use of the target language is commended. There was an appropriate emphasis in certain classes, on the
enrichment of the students’ Irish: that approach is praiseworthy. More time could be spent on this in certain cases, however, and it is recommended that this aspect of learning the language be mentioned in the plan for Irish in the school.

A special atmosphere is created in the gaelchlóiste through the use of the teachers’ Christian names, the teacher-in-charge included. A comfortable work atmosphere prevailed, where both teachers and students were happy and going about their work in a diligent and committed way. Discipline was excellent.

Active learning was used in a good number of the classes, through continuous use of communication strategies such as pair work, group-work and dialogues conducted aloud for the class. That approach is highly commended and it created plenty of opportunities for communication among the students themselves, independent of their communication with the teacher. It is necessary to ensure that classroom activities give rise quite naturally to communication and they should be regularly reviewed to ensure that this is the case. Teachers should also pay close attention to accuracy of phonetics and watch out for grammar mistakes. It is necessary for the management and the whole teaching staff of the gaelchlóiste to be on the alert regarding this aspect of learning the language, so that students will achieve a high standard of oral and written competence, as might be expected from those who are educated through the medium of Irish.

Particular note was taken of a class who were preparing for the school’s fashion show. Every student was allocated to one of four work-stations and all had their own particular responsibilities and duties. It was a really good example of interactive learning and of students taking responsibility for their own learning. It is highly commended as an approach to be used in appropriate lessons.

It was felt that a wider range of teaching aids and resources could be used during lessons, to put the subject matter in a modern context for the students and to further develop their interest in the lesson content. It is recommended that the teachers use music, podcasts, videos, DVDs, excerpts from TV and radio programmes, photographs, books, newspapers and any other materials that might be useful in the classroom. Teachers should focus on the use of ICT in teaching Irish when the facilities are available in the school for its use.

**ASSESSMENT**

In both parts of the school, students’ progress is assessed through examinations at Christmas and Easter. Reports are sent home to parents with the results of those tests. A school diary is regularly used also. Teachers use continuous assessment between exams. A record of that assessment is kept and parents are informed of their children’s progress at the parent-teacher meetings organised for each yeargroup once a year.

Oral exams are organised for fifth and sixth-year students in Coláiste Chluain Meala and the teachers of those year groups swap classes for the oral exams. That is good practice because it gives the students the experience of a different person questioning them in an exam situation. Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn is preparing to conduct informal oral exams for their students using modern technology, as recommended by the Second Level Support Service for Irish and the enthusiasm of the teachers re implementing the advice of the support service is commended. It is recommended that, in both parts of the school, the students’ communication skills be assessed formally and informally in every year group. It is necessary for students and their parents to understand the imminent changes in the education system regarding oral Irish. It is recommended
that the results of the assessments be presented as a separate mark in the school reports sent to parents.

It was not clear during the inspection in Coláiste Chluain Meala that the Junior Certificate School Programme statements concerning Irish were being properly kept, and it is recommended that this be rectified. Those statements should be a support to the teacher and the student as records of the progress being made.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

- The provision for Irish on the timetable in the two parts of the school is more than satisfactory.
- Good efforts are made in Coláiste Chluain Meala to broaden the students’ experience of Irish as a living language.
- Significant efforts are made in Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn to broaden and develop the students’ experience of Irish as a living modern language beyond the confines of the gaelcholáiste by maintaining contact with other gaelcholáistí and by taking part in various competitions.
- A good start has been made on planning for Irish in the two parts of the school.
- Some efforts were made in Coláiste Chluain Meala in relation to using Irish as a target language during lessons.
- The use of Irish as the language of communication, management and teaching was excellent in Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn.
- Some class activities and methodologies were effectively used in some of the classes observed in the two parts of the school.
- A very good example of active learning was observed in one class in Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn.

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

- It is recommended that a separate programme and special arrangements be devised for the students who have exemptions from Irish but who sit in on the class taking the Junior Certificate School Programme in Coláiste Chluain Meala.
- It is recommended that planning for the teaching and learning of Irish in the two parts of the school be done as separate tasks because the educational situations are so different from each other.
- It is recommended that a whole-school plan be drawn up for Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn which would explain and set out the specific Irish-medium ethos of the school. There should also be a focus on devising a whole-school approach to accuracy in oral and written Irish across the full curriculum.
- It is recommended that the TY plan for Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn be significantly developed.
- It is recommended that the support material on the school walls in general be augmented to support student learning and to help those who learn through the medium of Irish to achieve a high standard of accuracy.
• It is recommended that a wider range of resources be used, including ICT resources, during Irish lessons in both parts of the school.
• It is recommended that extra opportunities for communication be provided during Irish classes in Coláiste Chluain Meala.
• It is recommended that the communication skills of the students be formally and informally assessed in every year group in the both Coláiste Chluain Meala agus Gaelchláiste Chéitinn.

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

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Thank you for your draft copy of the report for the subject inspection of Irish on 23rd March, 2011 in Coláiste Chluain Meala and Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn.

We very much appreciate the fact that the inspector recognised and acknowledged the very differing educational contexts in which Irish is taught in Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn and Coláiste Chluain Meala, the latter being designated DEIS school. (P 2 & P 4)

We appreciate the inspector’s recognition of the intrinsic Irish ethos in Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn and we intend to implement the recommendations to reflect this ethos as we develop the whole school plan for Irish in Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn. We are delighted that the teaching and learning at Gaelcholáiste Chéitinn was particularly praised.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

We see great merit in the recommendations that planning for the teaching and learning of Irish in the two parts of the school be done as separate task ”because the educational situations are so different from each other” (P 7) and this recommendation will further guide us as we work on planning. The recommendation re Transition Year is already in process as is that concerning ICT usage. Rooms are now equipped with ICT and a whole school in-service in ICT was provided on the 5th October 2011. It is planned that teachers will devise strategies to fully implement recommendations thereof for all classes.

Finally, we thank you for your helpfulness, openness, affirmation and friendliness during your visit to our school. Feedback was delivered in a positive manner, inspiring us to continue with our efforts and to look at new approaches in the delivery of our subject.