

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Coláiste an Chreagáin
Mountbellew
Co Galway
Roll number: 71290M**

Date of inspection: 15 October 2010



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

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

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	15 October 2010
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion with the principal• Informal discussion with the teachers• Review of documents and records.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examination of some of the students' work• Feedback to the principal• Observation of teaching and learning in the classrooms• Interaction with the students

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main findings of the evaluation:

- Very good methods of teaching and learning were employed by all teachers.
- Irish has a central status and both school management and the Irish teachers are committed to the development of the language.
- The department of Irish has compiled a significant amount of resources as well as learning and teaching aids, including information and communication technology (ICT) aids.
- There are good systems in use for assessment and for correction of students' work.

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

- It is recommended that when short-term planning is being carried out, the teachers differentiate the learning objectives for the range of abilities in every class.
- Strategies should be devised to raise the level of students' achievements in both junior and senior cycles.
- It is recommended that an integrated approach, thematically organised, be used when curriculum plans are being designed for the individual year groups.
- It is recommended that the Irish department devise a plan of action to guide the strategic development of the department.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste an Chreagáin is a co-educational vocational school under the aegis of the County Galway Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It is one of two second-level schools in the town and it has an enrolment of 59 students. The evaluation was conducted over one day, during which the inspector observed teaching and learning in three classes: two in senior cycle and one first-year class.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A very good standard of short-term planning was used in all the classes observed during the evaluation. As a result of this thorough planning, there was an order and appropriate pace in the presentation of the subject matter of the lessons; the PowerPoint slides and worksheets enhanced student participation in the learning activities. All teachers shared the learning objectives with the students, orally or on the board, at the start of lessons and again as changes in the learning activity required within the lesson. Teachers are commended for their diligence in short-term planning and in lesson preparation. Two recommendations are made regarding short-term planning: to differentiate learning objectives, in order to provide scaffolding for students for whom language learning is difficult and to offer a challenge to more able students. Based on the differentiated objectives, it is recommended that recapitulation sessions be organised for the students at appropriate points during lessons, to afford the learners an opportunity of showing or clarifying what they have learned.

The teachers of Irish used effective teaching methods which achieved a balance between their own input and student activities. The mixture of whole-class work and work on individual tasks in one class observed added considerably to the variety of the lesson. While the students were involved in individual tasks the teachers moved around, giving guidance where necessary. Opportunities were created for the students to tackle the subject matter of the lessons effectively. The worksheets that had been prepared for the learners enhanced the students' intrinsic learning strategies and the worksheets had a positive effect on the standard of work attained during individual tasks. One teacher summarised on screen what the students had achieved, an approach which affirmed the students' work. These teaching and learning techniques are praiseworthy. In other classes, good use was made of questioning to encourage all the students to participate in the lesson. Good techniques were used in one class, which gave students the opportunity of questioning one another, thus practising both their productive and receptive skills. It is recommended that such techniques be more widely used as an alternative approach to teacher questioning of students.

The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) was a feature of all the lessons observed. This enhanced students' participation in the lessons and the ICT equipment had a positive influence on the teaching and learning. The teachers made very good use of the board to illustrate the structure of lessons, to record new vocabulary and correct answers, to explain points of grammar, and to register homework clearly. The board was also used to write words which arose during a lesson as a back-up to spelling the word orally. These are praiseworthy practices which emphasise the target language visually and which are of particular help to students whose preferred learning style is visual.

It was evident from a random sample of student diaries that homework was regularly assigned. In the diaries of certain year groups, it was clear that the variety of tasks set as homework encompassed all the language skills. The integrated approach to homework tasks is highly commended and it is recommended that this be specified in the plan for Irish, as a guide to the entire team. Recording of homework was in Irish only or bilingually. Teachers using the recording of homework as an opportunity for teaching and learning are congratulated. The sample of copybooks inspected during the evaluation indicated that a lot of work had been done on a range of topics which complied with the requirements of the syllabuses. The continuity observed in students' work in their copybooks indicated a good level of development. It was clear from the random sample that both mechanical and developmental corrections were being regularly done by the subject teachers. These praiseworthy practices are beneficial to students' learning. It is

recommended that the Irish department discuss strategies for developing students' involvement in the correction process, in particular the development of self-correction. There was no evidence in the copybooks inspected that the syllabuses were being taught in an integrated way, according to themes and language functions. It is recommended that this situation be reviewed.

All teachers had a very good command of Irish and plenty of opportunities were created at different levels for the students to use their Irish during classes, in line with their abilities. The very good language-simplification skills of the teachers greatly enhanced this interaction. In one class, students' attention was focused on points of grammar in the communicative context of the piece rather than as individual items and a star was placed beside any new word that came up in class. In this particular class, impressive links were forged between new material being learned by the students and prior learning carried out on other aspects of the syllabus. It is recommended that these teaching and learning techniques be more widely used.

There was a mutually respectful and enthusiastic learning atmosphere in all the classes observed during the evaluation. All the teachers showed very good class management ability. The teachers knew their students well, a factor which greatly enhanced the learning and teaching. Learning and behavioural expectations of the classes were high and the quality of efforts made and opinions offered by the students was always affirmed and encouraged.

There was a good learning environment in the main classroom used for the teaching and learning of Irish. Useful Irish idioms, posters, grammar charts, a record of the presentation of *fáinní*, and students' own work were on display, as well as a notice board offering information on a variety of competitions and other Irish-language events being held throughout the country. It is recommended that the impressive work already done be developed through the vocabulary needed by students in order to participate being displayed on a chart on the walls of the classroom. There were some notices in Irish on display around the school also. It is recommended that the diligence of the Irish teachers and the goodwill of school management be combined in order to make school notices in Irish a more permanent part of the students' experience of the language.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

At the start of the current school year, the school name was changed from Gairmscoil Naomh Iarfhiltha to Coláiste an Chreagáin in consultation with all the school partners. Irish is being promoted as a central part of school life and the motto of the school is 'learning and development'. The school management is congratulated on its commitment to the promotion of Irish.

The teaching and learning of Irish are well provided for on the timetable, in so far as daily contact with the target language is ensured for senior students, and junior students have four class periods each week for Irish. Higher level students in Leaving Certificate, Year 2 have an extra class. It is recommended that every effort be made to provide a daily class period for the teaching of Irish, particularly for third-year students.

There is a mixed-ability class group at every year level. The management makes every effort to maintain continuity by ensuring that each class group has the same teacher throughout each cycle.

It is commendable that the teachers have agreed an arrangement regarding teaching in the two cycles and at the various exam levels. Students are allowed to change levels when parents or guardians sign a letter approving this. This is praiseworthy practice.

Eight students of the total enrolment have been approved by the school for exemption from the study of Irish in accordance with the provisions of Circular M10/94. The inspector was told that all eight have been exempted on the basis of identified learning difficulties.

The teachers who are responsible for the teaching and learning of Irish all have Irish in their degrees. The management gives great encouragement and support to the staff to attend continuous professional development (CPD) courses, both as whole-school development days and through in-service courses run by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) for Irish. All teachers of Irish are members of *Comhar na Múinteoirí Gaeilge* and the management pays their membership fees. The professionalism of the teachers of Irish regarding CPD is also evident in the number of courses they have taken on their own initiative. Teachers test the suggestions offered at these courses in their own classes and then discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the recommended techniques, on the basis of the feedback from their own classrooms. This discussion of methodologies is highly commended. The school is also congratulated on providing ICT courses and the teachers of Irish are commended for developing their skills in using ICT.

Although there is no formal budget available for the language, the Irish department has compiled a remarkable array of resources and aids to learning and teaching. The Irish teachers are highly commended for this professional collaboration and for their initiative in providing learning resources and aids for their students.

Summative examinations are set for all the students twice each year. Trial examinations are normally taken, in the spring, by students preparing for the certificate examinations. A report of the results of the summative tests is sent home and the results of continuous assessment are also specified. The various language skills are taken into account in the summative and formative assessment, as appropriate. It is recommended that parents or guardians be kept informed of students' achievement across all the language skills.

The school has developed a comprehensive homework policy, with all students using a system of homework diaries. The class teacher examines the homework diaries once a week and they are signed regularly by parents or guardians.

The analysis and tracking conducted by management on the results achieved by students in the certificate examinations are commended. The Irish department compares this analysis to the mean national outcomes on a yearly basis and they also conduct a study of the number of students attempting higher level in the certificate exams in the two cycles. It is a priority of the department to encourage students to take higher level in the certificate examinations. It is recommended that the department devise strategies to raise the level of students' attainment in both junior and senior cycles.

An extensive number of co-curricular and extracurricular events is organised to promote the language among the students. *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is celebrated every year and the whole-school celebration is enhanced by organising different events from year to year. In co-operation with the County Galway VEC, Gaeltacht scholarships are awarded, to attend the Irish colleges run throughout the summer. The VEC organiser for Irish offers great support to events organised by the school to promote the language. Other activities also are ongoing throughout the year, among them Irish music and dancing, sports competitions, a trip to the Gaeltacht and attendance at Irish

plays, as well as encouraging the students to take part in literary competitions, quizzes and debating competitions. It is a priority of the school to forge links with Gaeltacht schools in the Co. Galway VEC scheme. The school is highly commended for providing a positive experience of the language for the whole-school community.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The management of the school has put formal structures in place in recent years which ensure that the teachers of Irish operate effectively as a department. Minutes are kept of the department's monthly meetings and there is an agreed arrangement about the rotation of the roles of co-ordinator and secretary. These practices are commended.

In the past all language teachers met as part of the school-planning development process. It was evident from the minutes of these meetings that there was great co-operation between the various language departments concerning the teaching of common aspects of the courses and identifying challenges to language teaching and learning in general in the context of this school. It is recommended that all the language teachers meet at the beginning and end of the school year to ensure that the students benefit from this cross-curricular co-operation. It is suggested that the department of Irish devise a plan of action within this multi-language approach to guide the strategic development of the department. The recommendations in this report and the department's own priorities should be an integral part of this plan. It is recommended that all the comprehensive aims and objectives which the department has already developed be presented in terms of expected learning outcomes for the students. This will provide a framework for planning for teaching, learning and assessment.

Good work has been done on certain areas of the Irish department's plan. All the data about the organisation of the department is in the plan, as well as copies of the whole-school policies which affect the teaching and learning of the language. Long-term plans have been developed for the presentation of the curriculum to individual year groups. It is recommended that these long-term plans be further developed co-operatively, so that the language functions and topics are being taught in an integrated way, in accordance with the key principles of the syllabuses. It would be desirable to specify the teaching and learning activities to be used, as well as the timeframes and resources and the assessment methods already outlined. Some of this work has already been initiated in the plans for Leaving Certificate, Year 1. There are other examples of this integrated planning in the *Guidelines to Support the Teaching of the Revised Literature Course* from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), which is available at www.slss/gaeilge.ie.

CONCLUSION

A summary of the draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation was presented to the principal and to the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. These were discussed with the inspector.

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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