

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Loreto Community School
Milford, County Donegal
Roll number: 91500J**

Date of inspection: 05 April 2011



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

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	04 and 05 April 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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Examination of certificate examination data on Irish in 2008, 2009, 2010 – levels and results• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- In general the quality of teaching and learning was good however students had different experiences of learning from the two different approaches in use in the classroom.
- Throughout the teaching, strengths, such as the quality of Irish; lesson management; variety of content; attention to time; integration of skills; the excellent discipline and learning atmosphere, were evident.
- Effective differentiation was apparent in the range of oral questioning in certain lessons however in other instances sufficient challenge was not set for more able students.
- Very good timetabled provision is made for Irish, with excellent teaching resources and support for teachers to attend in-service courses in the subject.
- Teachers of Irish engage in developmental planning and assessment of oral Irish is now an integral part of subject assessment throughout the school.
- Collaborative planning activities and record keeping in the subject are firmly established. Resources exist to devise and implement a programme for improvement.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that discussion of teaching methodologies be set as an objective for planning work; that teachers observe each other's practice and avail of opportunities to establish increased cooperation among themselves in the classroom.
- It is recommended that the aims of the syllabuses be more comprehensively communicated in terms of clear learning objectives, and that the level of language skills expected from students by the end of every year of study be identified.
- It is recommended that strategies be developed to encourage those students who discontinue higher level at the end of junior cycle to continue with higher level.

INTRODUCTION

Loreto Community School is one of two coeducational post-primary schools in the town of Milford. Irish is a core subject on the school curriculum and is offered in the Leaving Certificate Applied and in Transition Year, an optional programme. Seven hundred and nine students are enrolled for the school year 2010/11. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- More strengths than weaknesses were evident in the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed and very high quality Irish was used in teaching. These strengths were most apparent in the active learning and participation which was in operation in a small majority of lessons.
- Class management was good in all lessons, in terms of the variety of content, attention to time and the integration of language skills. Discipline, cooperation between students and teachers, and the learning atmosphere were all excellent.
- Two different approaches to teaching the subject were in evidence. It is the finding of this report that students are accustomed to having different experiences of learning the language from those two approaches.
- More attention was given to learner needs in one case. Clear learning objectives were set out in order to empower learners. On the other hand correct use of language was set for learners as a routine practice which they had to engage with as a first step in learning.
- Difference in the input learners had into lessons was evident. In the most effective lessons learners were encouraged to express themselves as the primary objective, and learning was active. In the other case an instructional approach prevailed and learning was passive.
- The good practice of using the target language was evident in all lessons however the overuse of translation as a means of assessing student comprehension was also in operation on occasion. An approach to the practice of using translation should be agreed at a departmental level.
- In very many of the lesson observed learning objectives were clearly communicated at the beginning and were revisited to ascertain progress. In other instances, learning objectives were implied from the content of the lesson, an approach which added to the difficulty of the learners.
- Good use was made of information and communications technology (ICT) in many lessons and students were encouraged to participate by the use of well-chosen images.
- Language skills were most successfully integrated when appropriate focus was placed on literacy and on student ability to develop reading.
- Best practice was evident where oral questioning was wide ranging. In other cases the range of questioning was considered too narrow and was not sufficiently challenging for those students who had particular proficiency and aptitude. Differentiation is essential.

- The standard of work in the copybooks, in terms of appropriate work, the neatness and orderliness of the work, was good for the most part and, in some instances, very good and teacher recognition was evident on the work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Curricular provision for Irish is very good. Concurrent timetabling from second year onwards ensures that the best possible arrangements are made for students from the point of view of access to the subject.
- Teaching and learning the subject benefit from the most supportive circumstances in terms of the number and the even distribution of timetabled class periods allocated to the subject.
- The approach of the Irish department in relation to homework and assessment is consistent with whole-school policies in these areas and good records are maintained.
- Assessment of oral Irish is an integral part of assessment work and the optional Irish oral examination in the Junior Certificate has been introduced this year for the first time.
- Very good support is provided in the form of resources for teaching the language and a supportive learning environment for the subject obtains in the Irish classrooms.
- Teachers of Irish are well qualified and have attended all the courses for Irish offered by the second level support service.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- It is good that coordination of the Irish department is shared among all members of the Irish department, on their turn. Meetings are held regularly and review of the subject plan is an integral part of the work.
 - Appropriate focus is placed on syllabus topics; timeframes; teaching methods and to the identification of teaching resources. It would be worthwhile to identify learning objectives and to state clearly the quality of the language skills to be acquired by learners. It would be useful to collect samples of student work in order to assess and review the progress of these objectives.
 - Discussion of teaching methodologies would be worthwhile and to include opportunities for enhanced cooperation among teachers in the classroom as an objective of the planning work.
 - An examination of the reasons for the significant decline in the number of students taking higher level Irish in the Leaving Certificate examination compared with the Junior Certificate would be worthwhile in order to devise a strategy to encourage a greater number of students to continue with the higher level.
 - Good records of planning meeting activities and student attainment in the certificate and house examinations are maintained at both subject department level and individually.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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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

Firstly, we would like to thank the inspector for his visit and for the professional manner in which the visit was carried out. The recommendations and direction provided in the inspector's report are accepted and it is certain that these will add to the development and strength of the Irish Department.

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

The subject plans have been updated so that the learning objectives are clearly linked to the aim of the syllabus. The oral Irish exam at Junior Certificate was introduced last year in the school and this will be continued in the future. It is planned to establish a culture and drama group in Irish and it is hoped that this will add to the students' confidence and ability in Irish and that the numbers taking higher level for the leaving certificate exam will increase. The teachers plan to visit each others classes to gain an insight into the various practices that are in place. Teaching resources and ideas will also be shared. It is hoped these strategies will result in continuation and uniformity amongst the different classes. It is also one of our aims that more challenging content, tasks and projects will be provided for gifted students so that there will be differentiated classes at each level.