

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish**  
**REPORT**

**St Joseph's Secondary School**  
**Spanish Point, County Clare**  
**Roll number: 62010C**

**Date of inspection: 6 December 2012**



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	6 December 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with the principal and the teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during five class-periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to the principal, deputy principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Good teaching and learning methodologies were a characteristic of a small proportion of the lessons, and there was scope for significant development of the techniques employed in the other classes.
- All language skills are included in the summative and formative assessment of students throughout the school year.
- Good provision is made for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school.
- Long-term curriculum plans have been developed for all the year-groups; however the topics are outlined in the form of separate aspects of the courses.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It would be beneficial for the department to discuss teaching and learning methodologies, in order to develop good practices and share them among members of the team.
  - The expectations of the department regarding the use of the target language during lessons should be part of this discussion.
  - The number of assessment instruments, both assessment of and assessment for learning, employed by the department should be increased.
  - It is recommended that an action plan be developed, based on the Irish department's own priorities and on the recommendations in this report, to further develop the department.
  - It would greatly enhance the short-term planning if a certain number of differentiated learning targets were selected to suit the length of the lesson period.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Joseph's Secondary School is a co-educational school located in Spanish Point in West Clare. 231 students attend the school and a Transition Year programme is offered as part of the school curriculum, on an optional basis.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The teaching and learning approaches in use in a small number of the classes were of a good quality, but there was scope for significant development of the methodologies used in the other classes observed during the evaluation.
- There was effective teaching and learning in those lessons where there was a good balance between teacher input and student activities resulting from the beneficial use made of task-based work and the problem-solving approach.
- In classes where all the learning possibilities were not achieved, the main reason for this was that too many different elements had been planned for the lesson period, with no thematic links between them. It is recommended that, when a lesson is being planned, there should be precise links between the various steps of the lesson, so that each step consolidates the vocabulary and content of previous stages. It is also necessary to differentiate the learning targets for the various language activities, to cater for the range of abilities in the class.
- In general, preparatory work was undertaken for the teaching and learning of language skills, except reading. It is recommended that, when embarking on a new reading task, the teacher should ensure that the learner can access the meaning of the text, as well as focusing students' attention on pronunciation when necessary.
- The teachers used Irish for all classroom interactions and, in a small number of lessons, good explanatory skills were used which gave students a clear understanding of the target vocabulary. During two lessons, students' attention was regularly directed to significant points of grammar in the communicative context of the piece, and, in one lesson, the teaching indicated high expectations of promoting the enrichment of students' vocabulary.
- These approaches should be more widely used and become the normal practice in all the Irish classes.
- The students in certain class-groups did not have a command of the type of vocabulary required to express themselves; to indicate a misunderstanding and to voice their opinions. It would be beneficial to review this gap in the students' linguistic competence.
- Effective use was made of the board or of the data-projector during all lessons observed. When homework is being corrected during class, the correct versions of the homework should be recorded. This emphasis on providing accurate written versions would be very helpful in improving students' competence in written language, in the areas of both spelling and syntax.
- The environment created in all the rooms where the language is taught supported the learning of Irish.
- There was a mutually respectful learning atmosphere in all the lessons observed.

- It was evident from the random sample of homework diaries collected in each class that homework was being regularly recorded in the majority of the diaries, in line with best practice. It is recommended that a variety of language skills be included in the homework tasks.
- Good practices were in use in the mechanical corrections observed in the vast majority of the copybooks collected at random. It would be beneficial if the department were to use more assessment-for-learning strategies, strategies that would afford the students more responsibility for the correction process, including self-correction.
- The majority of homework diaries, copybooks and textbooks reviewed indicated that there was a tendency towards over-reliance on the translation method.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Good provision has been made for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school, regarding the number of class-periods, concurrent arrangements and the number of students in the different class-groups.
- First-year students are assessed at the end of their first year and the results of this assessment are used to organise students in class-groups according to level in certificate examinations. It is recommended that this practice be regularly reviewed; taking account of the advantages for learning that might be derived from organising the students in mixed-ability groups until the end of the Junior Certificate course.
- The department has developed good aids and resources. It is recommended that the department make it a priority to update such supportive material continually, using the resources recommended by the Council for Education in Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna as a reference point for this work.
- It is estimated that 10% of the total number of students in the school have been granted an exemption by the school from the study of Irish according to the provisions of Circular M10/94.
- All members of the department are graduates of Irish. It is commendable that all the teachers have experience of teaching in both cycles and at the different examination levels.
- It is commendable that the Irish-teaching staff take part in in-service courses offered by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), for teachers of Irish. It is recommended that the department further expands its use of the methodologies recommended at the PDST workshops.
- The students, supported by their teachers, take part in a good range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities throughout the school year. In-school projects are organised and the students also participate in competitions and events outside the school.
- Good systems have been developed for conducting formative and summative assessment of Irish. The four major language skills are taken into account in the regular school tests and in the summative assessment.
- Management have carried out an analysis of the results of the certificate examinations in Irish in recent years. It is recommended that the department itself undertake this analysis and use it as one of the sources to guide the development planning process for the language.

## PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The curriculum plans in use for the teaching and learning of Irish were a long-term framework. It is recommended that the curriculum plans be developed with the objective of teaching the four major language skills and various aspects of the courses in an integrated thematic way.
- It is also recommended that the teaching topics be presented as learning objectives for the students. The timeframes, methodologies, resources and assessment methods should also be specified in the curriculum plans.
- It would be worthwhile to review the Transition Year plan to provide a more innovative teaching and learning experience during that year. *A Portfolio of European Languages* is recommended for this project.
- It would be beneficial for the department to discuss the priorities they have identified and to develop an action plan based on those priorities and on the recommendations in this report.
- Good quality short-term planning characterised less than half the classes and good preparation had been carried out for all lessons.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, the deputy principal and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school 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.

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

**Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The B.O.M accepts the content of the report.

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

Follow up actions have taken place and will continue to take place. A workshop on teaching and learning has taken place and plans are in place to continue this improvement plan.