

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Hamilton High School
Bandon, County Cork
Roll number: 620500**

Date of inspection: 12 November 2013



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12 & 13 November 2013
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 five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- In the majority of lessons observed the quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good. Otherwise, provision was fully appropriate.
- The use of Irish was to the fore in all lessons observed and it was evident that many students spoke Irish proficiently.
- Students' oral proficiency is among the language skills assessed.
- The small number of students who are exempt from the study of Irish, and the extensive programme of extra-curricular events which promotes the use of Irish outside the classroom, reflect the high profile the subject enjoys within the school.
- Concerns highlighted in a previous report regarding the poor condition of the school buildings, as well as the standard of cleanliness have yet to be adequately addressed.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A broader range of assessment strategies is recommended, especially strategies which encourage independent learning.
 - It is recommended that a common approach to assessing students' oral skills be established.
 - It is recommended that, as a matter of priority, the school manager ensures the ongoing upkeep and maintenance of the school buildings.
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INTRODUCTION

Hamilton High School is a voluntary secondary school for boys and operates under unitary management. 375 boys are enrolled for the school year 2013/2014. Irish is a core subject on the school's curriculum which offers the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate as well as Transition Year (TY) as a compulsory programme. Four percent of the entire student cohort are exempt from the study of Irish. Three teachers are involved in the teaching of Irish.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in the majority of lessons observed. While scope for improvement existed in the minority, provision was fully appropriate. It was generally evident that students were acquiring the language and of particular note was the oral proficiency of many students.
- The use of Irish was to the fore in all lessons. In the vast majority of lessons many opportunities were created for students to speak Irish. In these cases, students' oral proficiency indicated that it is common practice for them to speak Irish to each other and to the teacher. It was also good that students were required to use complete sentences when speaking; this good practice should be extended to all classes. In support of this approach, time should be spent during lessons practising the manipulation and accurate pronunciation of newly-taught phrases, especially in the case of junior-cycle groups and senior students with lower levels of ability.
- At the beginning of certain lessons, reference was made to the desired learning outcomes. This practice could be more worthwhile if the expected communicative objective was included in the learning outcomes.
- Students were assigned a range of tasks that were linked thematically. This good practice ensured that learning was consolidated effectively. Students participated enthusiastically in tasks and benefitted considerably from the collaborative discussion when they were given the scope to direct their learning activities. Another advantage of student-centred approaches was that teachers were afforded opportunities to attend to the varying needs of groups or individual students.
- The widespread use of pictures and photographs was helpful. The use of authentic material creates a link with students' lives and experiences and, in addition, encourages them to use their creative-thinking skills when they are asked to describe something or provide an account.
- Lesson content was appropriately challenging in many instances and the positive manner in which students undertook the challenges set for them was noted. Many students were given opportunities to consult dictionaries and to discuss the more complicated points of language. This good practice should be built upon and all students should be facilitated to focus, in ways appropriate to their ability levels, on: points of accuracy; meaning of words or phrases; examples of language richness; and on manipulating language structures. If students were shown the link between these learning areas and the success criteria that are most applicable when written work is corrected, they would have an enhanced understanding of how to improve the quality of their own work. It is encouraging that, in certain cases, students are asked to take their own notes when language points of this nature are discussed in class. This approach ensures that they will then have their own valuable reference source when they undertake composition tasks.

- In keeping with good practice, questioning was used frequently to assess the quality of learning. Nevertheless, teachers should further develop their questioning techniques to ensure that all students are: obliged to compose answers; are given sufficient time to recall information; and are afforded the opportunity to access the information, in the event that they are unable to provide the answer at the first attempt.
- In some classrooms, charts with examples of prior learning were displayed. These charts were useful when students needed to recall aspects of prior learning and when students were set group and individual tasks.
- Samples of students' written work were examined. Notes were well organised and it was evident that written homework is assigned on a regular basis. Various correction strategies were discussed with teachers, especially methods of encouraging independent learning by ensuring that students have a clear understanding of success criteria. Teachers should be mindful of the benefits of self-assessment and peer-assessment.
- It is good that the practice of assessing oral skills has been established in the school. As this mode of assessment is further developed, it is recommended that students' ability to express themselves orally be tested on a more regular basis. Whatever methods are chosen, practice should be common across all the classes in the same year groups.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabled provision is supportive of teaching and learning Irish.
- Teachers are given opportunity to teach the language at the different levels and across the various programmes.
- Students are assigned to class groups in a manner that ensures that they have opportunity to study Irish at the highest level appropriate to their ability.
- The TY programme offers an experience to both students and teachers that is somewhat different to that in previous year groups. It would be worthwhile to reflect on the benefits creating a modular system based on areas of most interest to students and their teachers.
- Teachers avail of opportunities to enhance their professional skills.
- A broad programme of extra-curricular activities supports and strengthens the profile of Irish within the school. Another indication of the strong standing the language enjoys in the school is the fact that only a small number of students do not study Irish formally.
- The poor condition of the school buildings, as well as the standard of cleanliness are of significant concern. As recommended in the Whole School Evaluation – Management, Leadership and Learning (2012), and again in this report, these concerns should be addressed without delay.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Minutes of departmental meetings show that some time is spent discussing classroom practice. This is to be commended. A more structured approach to this discussion would be useful through focussing specifically on the successful practices and challenges to be overcome. Again, when results of the state examinations are discussed, in addition to agreeing areas and strategies for improvement, it would be worthwhile to record reasons for celebration.

- The subject plan for Irish gives good insight into work completed, both inside and outside the classroom, to develop students' competence in Irish. In reviewing schemes of work, additional emphasis should be placed on the development of students' language and creative-thinking skills rather than the priority given at present to tasks based on the content of state examinations. The progress in language acquisition from year to year should be illustrated.
- Preparedness for lessons was good. Consideration had been given to the sequencing of lesson activities and resources had been prepared which would support the work. Planning is to be commended, especially in cases where the lesson objective was based on addressing identified student needs regarding their ability to express themselves effectively.

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. 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.