

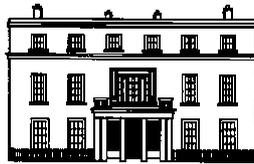
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**St Catherine's Vocational School
Killybegs, County Donegal
Roll number: 71241W**

Date of inspection: 12 September 2014



**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	11, 12 September 2014
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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning in the lessons observed included excellent practice, effective practice, and in the case of a few, fair practice with scope for development.
- In the lesson where progress in learning was best evident, recognition was shown in the first instance for the amount of the language that the students were able to express on the topic that was being explored and this level was developed through the teacher's advice and prompting.
- In some instances there was too great a tendency to provide the students with expressions and words without first exploring or recognising some of what the students already knew.
- Students were provided throughout with active learning opportunities and in a particular instance group work was managed in a way that served as an exemplar of excellent practice.
- The quality of the subject plan and of the accompanying schemes of work is good and very clear guidance is provided for a collaborative approach to teaching the subject.
- The Irish department is commended for placing the spoken language as a core element of the subject plan, and in the house examinations' assessment.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Initial recognition and praise of students' preliminary learning is recommended, regardless of the students' level of proficiency in the language.
 - The exemplary good practice shown in the management of group work in a particular instance is recommended for wider use.
 - The Irish department is urged to consider the occasional observation of each other's classroom practice and to include such professional practice as part of the deliberations at subject department meetings.
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INTRODUCTION

St Catherine's Vocational School is a coeducational post-primary school under the patronage of Donegal Education and Training Board. Irish is core in the educational programmes provided, the Junior Certificate, the optional Transition Year, and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). 303 students are enrolled in the current year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching and learning were of good quality in most of the lessons visited. Attention was paid to the development of the four language skills. In the best instances, this was done effectively and thematically, in the few instances that show scope for development those activities though evident were less well connected.
- Teaching and learning in the lessons observed included excellent practice, effective practice, and in the case of a few, fair practice with scope for development.
- Regular and lively interactions between teacher and students, and amongst the students themselves, were characteristic of the most productive lessons. In a particular instance, while the roll was called in a senior lesson, students were expected to deliver a critical or descriptive one-sentence account of a short story being studied by the class when their name was called. The students responded extremely well to this high-paced challenging task.
- The layout of the classroom in certain instances was designed very well for spontaneous interaction, as evident from the assignment of students in groups of four and five from the outset. In other cases the classroom layout followed a more traditional format.
- In the lesson where progress in learning was best evident, recognition was shown in the first instance for the amount of the language that the students were able to express on the topic that was being explored and this level was developed through the teacher's advice and prompting.
- Praise of students' initial learning is an inherent element in developing self-confidence in learning. In certain cases the lesson outcomes were considered too demanding for the students' language proficiency and the approach should be amended accordingly.
- It is recommended that recognition and praise for students' preliminary learning be adopted as an initial approach in the lesson, regardless of the students' level of proficiency in the language. This is a beneficial approach for all categories of learners and is not confined to able students alone. In some instances there was too great a tendency to provide the students with expressions and words without first exploring or recognising some of what the students already knew.
- It was notable that students were provided throughout with active learning opportunities. In a particular instance group work was managed in a way that served as an exemplar of excellent practice. Particular tasks were assigned to each member of the group in all cases and specific advice was given on how the group's agreed text could be differentiated. The more widespread use of this good practice is recommended.
- A senior class showed great proficiency in the language in their ability to bring together appropriate phrases, rich vocabulary, and a capacity to correctly use the language under time pressures. It was clear that high expectations were being set for them and that they were both willing and able to engage well with these challenges.

- Learning was reinforced effectively in a particular instance where a very creative link was evident between classwork and homework. In this example students were required to record three minutes of oral speech on their mobile phones on the topic discussed in the lesson and an essay on the same theme was mentioned as an early follow-on task.
- The Irish department is urged to consider the occasional observation of each other's classroom practice and to include such professional practice as part of the deliberations at subject department meetings.
- In general, students' copybooks contained appropriate work and also showed recognition and praise for students' efforts. In certain cases, overly detailed explanations were evident in comments on mistakes in grammar. It is recommended that excessive written advice on individual students' mistakes be avoided in favour of dealing with such matters collectively at whole-class level in time.
- It would be very useful to collect exemplar work of the students, including the best efforts at written composition and of the spoken word, as authentic material for use in lessons. In time this would become a valuable shared resource among all the teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Management is fully supportive of the promotion of the subject, both within the subject department and in whole-school activities.
- Teachers have a very high attendance at subject-based continuing professional development events.
- Timetabled provision for the subject is good in the senior cycle but somewhat constrained in the junior cycle.
- A review of the possibilities of raising provision for the subject in the junior cycle is urged, provided this is feasible.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of the subject plan and of the accompanying schemes of work is good and very clear guidance is provided for a collaborative approach to teaching the subject.
- The subject plan for Irish includes the promotion of literacy and numeracy as core elements of the classroom experience.
- The best indicator of individual teacher planning was the appreciation shown of the students' existing level of knowledge of the language, of bringing this to light in the lesson, and building on it. Practice in this regard was different, excellent on the one hand, and showing scope for development on the other.
- The Irish department is commended for placing the spoken language central to the teaching of the subject. It is good that the students have had the opportunity to take the optional oral Irish examination in the Junior Certificate since 2013.

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

given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

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