

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Elphin Community College
Elphin, County Roscommon
Roll Number: 722800**

Date of inspection: 23 October 2015



**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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	23 October 2015
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 three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to the principal

MAIN FINDINGS

- Significant strengths characterised the teaching and learning methods employed in the majority of the lessons, but there was scope for significant development in the techniques used in the other lesson evaluated.
- There is very good provision for the teaching and learning of Irish at whole-school level.
- The Irish department has developed good systems for the assessment of and for learning.
- The quality of all curricular plans ranged from good to very good.
- There was significant variation in the quality of the short-term planning and preparation undertaken for the lessons observed; in most cases the quality was very good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It would be very worthwhile for the Irish department to make more extensive use of the communicative approach and the integrated thematic approach in the teaching and learning of the language in the school.
- The teaching and learning of the language would benefit if all Irish teachers used the comprehensive assessment tools devised by the department and integrated all language skills as part of this work for every year group.
- It is recommended that an action plan for the development of the language be agreed and that attainable steps formulated in order to make progress in the areas prioritised for improvement.
- It would greatly enhance short-term planning if a number of differentiated learning objectives were chosen and if these were developed in a structured way during the course of the lesson.

INTRODUCTION

Elphin Community College is a co-educational school under the auspices of Galway and Roscommon Education and Training Board. This is the only school providing second-level education in this town and there are 132 students enrolled in the school. The Transition Year (TY) programme is part of the school curriculum on a compulsory basis.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Very good teaching and learning methodologies characterised the majority of lessons, but there was scope for significant development of methods in the remaining lesson observed.
- Best practice was observed in lessons that were based on the communicative approach and on the integrated thematic approach, and it is recommended that these approaches be the guiding principles for planning all Irish lessons.
- In some lessons, not all of the learning opportunities were achieved: the main reason for this was that there were too many different aspects planned for the class-period with no thematic links between them. It is recommended that, when planning a lesson, there should be more definite links between the steps of a lesson, so that each step reinforces a previous one in the areas of vocabulary and subject-matter. It is necessary also to differentiate the learning targets for the various language activities to better serve the range of abilities in the class.
- Vocabulary that emerged during class was clearly recorded on the board in most lessons and good use was also made of presentations with slides. It is recommended that teachers reflect on the importance of providing a clear written record for students to reinforce material presented verbally.
- There was variety in the teaching and learning activities in the majority of the lessons. The same aspects of the language were practiced again and again in different ways in these lessons, assisting to consolidate learning.
- The worksheets and other learning aids that were being used in the majority of classes were of a high quality and it is recommended that such good practice be implemented in other lessons to support teaching and learning.
- Good procedures were being employed in the majority of lessons to enable students to understand vocabulary. The teachers used Irish for all class interactions and it was evident in most of the lessons that students had consistent experience of this very good practice.
- The quality of the learning environment in most classrooms was exemplary. However, in one classroom, there was significant scope to enhance the amount and range of language on display.
- A good analysis of the certificate examination results in Irish is being undertaken by the teachers in relation to national norms. As a result of this analysis, targets for improvement have been devised to increase students' participation rate at higher level in the certificate examinations. The increase in student attainment in Irish is also a stated objective of the school and of the department. It is recommended that attainable steps be formulated in order to achieve these two priorities.

- Homework tasks were assigned as part of general practice in all classes. This practice was further evidenced in the random sample of homework journals reviewed. However, the homework tasks focussed primarily on writing and learning. It is recommended that this approach be reviewed and that the four language skills be included when selecting homework tasks, in line with the Irish department's own homework policy.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good provision for the teaching and learning of Irish at a whole-school level.
- All of the teachers teaching Irish are graduates of Irish and the majority of them have experience of teaching both cycles and at the different examination levels.
- It is commended that the Irish teachers have participated in continuing professional development at different levels, including in-service courses in Irish from the Professional Development Service for Teachers' (PDST). It was found that recommendations made at such courses have been implemented and methods adapted to the context of the school.
- It was noted that thirteen per cent of the total number of students are exempt from Irish and that the exemptions are provided in accordance with Circular M10/94.
- Students participate in a good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular events and it is an objective of the department to give the students an experience of Irish as a living language. It is commendable that many school projects are organised, in conjunction with the French department, and different competitions and events are attended outside of the school.
- The facilities and resources that have been developed for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school are of a good standard, including electronic resources; these were employed beneficially in most of the lessons observed.
- Regular corrections were made in most of the copybooks and a code system was used to give feedback to students on aspects of grammar and syntax. There was also evidence in these copybooks that developmental feedback of a very good quality was provided to the students. These practices are commendable.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of curricular plans ranged between good and very good.
- Best practice was observed in those plans where the syllabuses were being taught in an integrated thematic manner, where emphasis was placed on learning objectives, learning activities and the supporting assessment methods were detailed.
- The Irish department intends to use an intergrated thematic approach in its future planning for all year groups; this will be very beneficial.
- The Irish department has agreed comprehensive literacy strategies as part of the whole-school self-evaluation process.

- A specific plan has been developed for TY and the content of this plan is commendable. It is recommended that a learning portfolio be used as one of the assessment strategies during TY.
 - It is recommended that the Irish department agree an action plan to further develop teaching and learning of the language. Definite goals along with timeframes should be set out in order to achieve agreed aims.
 - There was significant variation in the quality of short-term planning and preparation undertaken for the lessons observed; in most cases the quality was very good.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal 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

Part A Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcome the positive findings of this report. It is an accurate and fair reflection of the teaching of Irish in Elphin Community College.

We welcome the acknowledgement by the Inspectorate of the significant strengths which characterised the teaching and learning methods employed in the majority of lessons, the quality of curricular plans and the good systems of assessment.

The Board will continue to support the development of the quality of teaching and learning in this subject and insure that the recommendations of the Inspectorate are implemented.

Part B Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

- All teachers will use the communicative and thematic approach in the teaching and learning of Irish and other subjects where appropriate. It has been agreed that this should be included in all subject department planning meetings.
- It has been agreed that all teachers in all subject departments will use the assessment tools devised by their subject departments.
- An action plan will be put in place for the development of the language at the next Irish department planning meeting.
- Teachers have taken on board the advice given by the Inspectorate at individual feedback meetings and are adjusting their lesson plans to accommodate differentiated learning objectives in all lessons.
- All four language skills are now used in homework exercises.
- A learning portfolio will be introduced for Transition Year in the next module.