

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School
[Scoil Chuimsitheach Ríoga agus Prior]
Raphoe, County Donegal
Roll Number: 81011L**

Date of inspection: 12 March 2013



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

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching was good in nearly every case and potential for improvement was identified in the one place where that same good quality was not observed.
- The quality of learning was adequate in general with aspects which could be improved.
- The target language was in use throughout the teaching and the students were able, for the most part, to participate in the ongoing discussion with their own speech in Irish.
- An area for development in all lessons was the lack of conversation with the students outside of questions dealing closely with the lesson content.
- The provision for the subject on the school timetable is of a high quality.
- The good efforts of the Irish department to increase the proportion of students undertaking higher level are succeeding.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It would be worthwhile for the teachers to consider sharing their teaching talents with each other and developing them further by visiting their colleagues' lessons occasionally on a professional basis, where possible.
- The students should be given every opportunity to speak the language outside of the narrow context of the lesson content alone. A good way to do this is to encourage the students to converse freely on a regular basis.
- It is very worthwhile selecting video and audio items for the lesson to provide learners with as much experience as possible of Irish being spoken by different speakers.
- An important aspect of group work is to set out procedures, such as nominating students in each group as chairpersons and spokespersons and, above all, conducting the discussion in the group through Irish, a practice which was uneven.

INTRODUCTION

Royal and Prior Comprehensive School is a co-educational school with both day students and boarders. The current enrolment is 515 students. The school participates in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools).

Almost all educational programmes are provided: Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Transition Year (TY) as an optional programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching was of high quality in nearly all of the six lessons, and would have been true in each case if a small alteration were made to teaching strategies.
- The quality of students' learning was at an adequate level in general. For the most part, there were high learning expectations in lessons. This ensured that most of the students were presented with appropriate learning challenges.
- Despite the significant changes in the Irish department this year there was great consistency of teaching quality among the four teachers and strengths were to the fore. It would be worthwhile for the teachers to consider sharing their teaching talents with each other and developing them further by visiting their colleagues' lessons occasionally on a professional basis.
- The expected learning outcomes were communicated at the start of lessons, and in one case they were closely examined later to assess progress made with them. This approach is commendable in order to make learning more focussed.
- The target language was in use and the students were able, for the most part, to answer the questions they were asked. An area for development was the lack of conversation with students apart from questions on the lesson content itself.
- The students should be given every opportunity to speak the language free from the narrow context of the lesson content alone. A good way to do this is to encourage the students to converse freely on a regular basis about subjects of interest to themselves.
- Suitable resources were selected and information and communications technology (ICT) resources provided good stimulating material for visual learners. It is well worth while selecting a video and audio item for the lesson to provide learners with as much experience as possible of Irish being spoken by different speakers.
- Good attention was paid to questioning in lessons in general and efforts should always be made to ask competent students higher-order questions.
- Independent learning opportunities were provided through group work which was adequate in half of the lessons. An important aspect of group work is to set out procedures, such as nominating students in each group as chairpersons and spokespersons and, above all, conducting the discussion in the group through Irish, a practice which was uneven.
- There was assessment of learning in particular group work with a competition involving translating sentences from English to Irish. Though the students liked this game, care should be taken with this approach. There was considerable work in the same class's copybooks which also relied on translation. Translation is a particular skill which

illustrates competence in language awareness but it can be an obstacle to the learner's language acquisition if over-practised.

- There was a good, positive atmosphere in all classes and the mutual respect of students and teachers was evident.
- Appropriate attention was paid in teaching to development of literacy skills and good use was made of investigating and using keywords in context for practice, discussion and applying language functions.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The provision for the subject on the school timetable is of a high quality. This good provision greatly supports teaching and learning in the subject.
- The proportion of students undertaking higher level in junior cycle is encouraging. There is a significant increase in the proportion of students undertaking higher level in the current second year, for example, compared to the percentage in third year. Irish is taught in mixed-ability classes in first year. This is a productive arrangement which encourages the largest amount of students to undertake the higher level.
- Fifteen per cent of the total number of students have an exemption from Irish but some of those study the subject. This is a good testimony to the teachers' drive to promote the subject.
- It was reported that twenty per cent of marks in the in-house examinations are awarded for proving ability in spoken language. This should be made clear in the reports provided on students' progress and attainments.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Short-term planning was good and classes were definitely structured. Time management was good in the classes observed and the lesson objectives were achieved without undue haste within the thirty five minutes available for each lesson.
- The subject plan is of a reasonable quality and should be built on. It is good to note that work schemes have been laid out which encompass learning outcomes, language awareness, teaching methods, resources and assessment matters. Learning objectives could be specified better and success criteria linked to assessment.
- There should be a greater focus on innovation in language learning in the Transition Year plan in order to add to the students' experience of engaging with the language.
- The Irish department's current focus is commendably aiming at developing assessment for learning. All first year students taking Drumcondra Irish tests is a new departure. It is positive that they are to be used not only as a reference point in attainment but also to inform the design of improvement strategies. It is recommended that the department collaboratively implement these strategies, record them in the subject plan, and agree success criteria for their review.
- It would be worth adding a short profile of the standing and attainment in the subject to the subject plan as a pointer, together with improvement targets and strategies for their attainment.

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 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 Board of Management of the Royal and Prior Comprehensive School welcomes the report by the Inspectorate. It was delighted that the report emphasised the high quality of teaching, the efforts of the Irish Department to increase the numbers taking higher level and the good, positive atmosphere that was evident in the classes observed.

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 Board accepts the observations made by the Inspectorate and will do all possible to implement the main findings including building on how the Drumcondra Irish Tests in First Year are used to inform improvement strategies and developing the subject plan.