

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

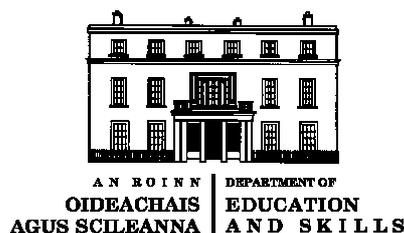
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Mountrath Community School  
Mountrath,  
County Laois**

**Roll number: 91550B**

**Date of inspection: 21 October 2011**



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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	20 & 21 October 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li> <li>• Examination of students' work</li> <li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of relevant documents</li> <li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li> <li>• Interaction with students</li> </ul>	

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Very good teaching and learning techniques were employed in the majority of the lessons observed during the evaluation visit.
- The provision made for teaching and learning Irish in the school is very favourable.
- Effective homework and summative assessment systems were in use.
- The Irish department has made good progress in the process of planning for the language. Curricular plans of a high standard have been developed for the majority of year groups.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It is recommended that the four language skills form part of the assessment experience of all students and that assessment for learning approaches be agreed at subject department level.
  - The development of a formal mentoring scheme would be worthwhile in order to facilitate the sharing of resources and teaching and learning methodologies.
  - It would be beneficial to have an integrated, thematic approach as a framework for the development of all curricular plans.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report was written following a subject inspection of Irish as part of a whole school evaluation (WSE) in Mountrath Community School in County Laois. This is a coeducational post-primary school with a current enrolment of 694 students. The Transition Year (TY) is offered as an optional curricular programme in the school.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Teaching and learning techniques of a very good standard were used in the majority of the lessons observed during the evaluation visit.
- The most effective methodologies included integration of all the language skills, good questioning approaches and an appropriate balance between whole-class work and student oriented task-based activity.
- In classes where task driven work formed part of the lesson the majority of teachers carried out very good pre-skill work which enabled students to accomplish the tasks. It is recommended that this approach be adopted by every teacher and that it also forms part of the normal practice of preparation for reading.
- All teachers responded well to the learning needs as students completed their various tasks.
- When undertaking pair work with students collaboration would be enhanced if two students shared one worksheet rather than providing every individual student with a copy.
- Listening extracts were in use in some classes with the voice of the teacher used in two instances. It is recommended that students from the school be recorded for this type of work.
- In some classes good use was made of the board and other visual sources to record new vocabulary, to emphasise grammar points and to record answers from class tasks or homework. This good practice reinforces the spelling competency and accuracy of students and is highly commended. It would be beneficial to student learning if these practices were employed by all members of staff.
- Irish was the language used for all class interactions. This approach is to be commended. The vocabulary of the classroom was displayed in some classrooms and it is recommended that similar material be displayed on the walls in all rooms where Irish is taught on a regular basis.
- In general, students demonstrated a good standard of Irish as well as a good understanding of the subject and when given the opportunity they readily participated in the target language.
- The majority of teachers provided skilful simplification of vocabulary which avoided overuse of the translation method in addition to focussing student attention on points of grammar in the communicative context of the extract rather than as individual, single items. In one class a constructive grouping of new vocabulary was achieved. Further development of student vocabulary through the explicit teaching of learning strategies is recommended in order to achieve the optimum vocabulary learning opportunities for every student.
- All lessons were characterised by a learning atmosphere of mutual respect obtained. The majority of teachers demonstrated very good classroom management skills which greatly

- enhanced the level of student participation in learning. Students were encouraged and affirmed at all times for their efforts and the opinions that they expressed.
- Correction of homework was a feature of each lesson and best practice was evident in classes where the correct versions of the homework were written on the board. It was evident from the random sample of homework diaries collected in each lesson that homework is assigned on a regular basis. It is recommended that homework tasks include a variety of language skills.
  - A random sample of student copybooks was reviewed. The majority showed a good deal of work with evident developmental work. However, in the case of two series of copybooks only a limited amount of work had been completed since the beginning of the school year.
  - Regular monitoring of student work was being carried out and helpful techniques were to be noted in the routine corrections; corrections were not excessive and gave learners an insight into the basis of the errors. More widespread use of these effective correction techniques is recommended and discussion should take place on a departmental basis on the agreed assessment for learning measures to be used by every member of the department.
  - Student awareness of marking schemes was fostered in some classes as students corrected their own work.

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

- Very favourable provision is made for Irish in the school from the point of view of the number of periods allocated per week; the average number of students in class groups; timetabling arrangements and the additional support provided to students in first and second year who have poor levels of proficiency in Irish.
- Ongoing review of class groupings is carried out in relation to participation at the different levels in the State examinations in order to improve student achievement. This approach is commended.
- Four percent of the total student population are afforded an exemption from studying Irish in keeping with the provisions of CL M10/94.
- Teachers of Irish are graduates in the subject. Management encourages and supports staff members to attend continuing professional development (CPD) courses both whole-school training days and inservice courses for teachers of Irish provided by the *Seirbhís um Fhorbairt Ghairmiúil do Mhúinteoirí* (SFGM).
- A formal mentoring scheme should be developed to support newly appointed and substitute teachers in the Irish department.
- Teachers of Irish are to be congratulated on the range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities arranged, and especially the whole-school approach to *Seachtain na Gaeilge*. Senior management are well disposed towards Irish and it is commendable that the school is preparing to display notices in Irish throughout the school.
- The school has developed very good support facilities for teaching and learning Irish. The Irish department has developed good resources and it is recommended that these be added

to by reference to the list of resources for post primary schools available at [www.cogg.ie](http://www.cogg.ie). It would be useful to store these resources in a central place in addition to gradually developing an electronic folder.

- The Irish department have agreed practices in relation to homework and these are contained in the comprehensive whole-school homework policy.
- All students take summative examinations twice during the school year. These are common examinations which include all the language skills with agreed marking schemes for senior year groups. It is recommended that an oral examination be included as part of the assessment experience of all students from first year onwards. It would be beneficial also to indicate learners' oral proficiency in the school reports issued to homes.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Formal structures are in place to support planning for teaching and learning Irish. It was evident from minutes of meetings that discussion takes place on a range of topics, including the strategic development of the language. An action plan with definite time frames would greatly enhance this progressive work.
- Good progress has been made in the subject plan for Irish and department practices are well described in the organisational detail of the plan.
- Good curricular plans have been developed for every year group with the exception of TY. It is recommended that this framework be used to devise schemes of work for all year groups based on an integrated, thematic approach in keeping with department objectives and basic principles of the Irish syllabuses. Themes should be presented in the form of learning targets for students and agreements concerning teaching and learning methodologies, resources and assessment should also be specified.
- The European Languages Portfolio, mentioned in the appendix of the subject plan for Irish, would be very appropriate for learners during TY.
- Short-term planning was of a high standard as was the preparation for most of the lessons observed. In a small number of lessons sufficient pace was not attained and not all of the learning possibilities were achieved during the classes.

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