

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish**  
**REPORT**

**St Columba's Comprehensive School**  
**Glenties, County Donegal**  
**Roll Number: 81010J**

**Date of inspection: 4 October 2011**



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

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	4 & 5 October 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <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>	<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>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Strengths were evident in teaching in all lessons observed. Students were provided with a good exemplar of accurate use of the language arising from the quality of Irish modelled by the teachers.
- The quality of learning was satisfactory overall with instances of good quality but the capacity of students to express themselves was in the main somewhat limited.
- The 2011 Junior Certificate examination shows a significant rise in the proportion of students who took higher level compared to previous years.
- Good efforts were made to encourage students to actively participate in lessons especially with questioning although there was a tendency among the teachers to attempt too much of the work themselves.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Engaging in discussion of current and topical issues as a regular feature of lessons is recommended as a way of providing students with an opportunity to express themselves.
  - A review is recommended of the rather limited provision for Irish currently available in the junior cycle.
  - Students' capacity in speaking the language should be indicated in school reports. In reviewing assessment arrangements, the optional oral Irish examination in the Junior Certificate merits consideration.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Columba's Comprehensive School has an extensive catchment area that includes a number of students who attended Gaeltacht primary schools. There is good provision of educational programmes, including the optional Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in addition to the established Leaving Certificate and the Junior Certificate. Enrolment for the current year 2011/12 is 388 and almost ten per cent of that total of students hold an exemption from Irish.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- Strengths were evident in all the lessons observed; the approach to the work was positive and was carried out with energy. The teachers had a presence, were self-confident and provided students with a good exemplar of accurate use of the language owing to the quality of Irish modelled by the teachers.
- The learning outcomes were totally clear in some lessons but in others these were conveyed to the students by reference to the lesson content alone. It is recommended that precise learning outcomes be shared with the students at the start of the lesson and that these be distinguished from the material that will be covered in the class.
- The target language was used throughout in all lessons in keeping with good practice. Lesson management was good. The content and speed of lessons was appropriate to the learners' capacities and the lesson plan was implemented within the time available.
- Good efforts were made to encourage the students to actively participate in lessons especially through questioning. These efforts met with mixed success. Teachers are advised to avoid the tendency that was noted of doing too much of the work in lessons themselves. This would mean that teachers would have to wait longer in encouraging students to answer in preference to their providing the answer themselves too soon.
- The quality of learning was satisfactory overall with instances of good quality but the wealth of students' vocabulary and their capacity to express themselves was in the main somewhat limited. It is recommended that the challenge in the lesson be directed more towards the students. Some teachers were more demanding than others in this respect.
- Questioning in the lesson should be differentiated, particularly in the case of students with good potential. In all classes a range of ability was to be found among the learners and the questions should be differentiated so as to provide all categories of learners with an appropriate challenge.
- The Irish department can show success in setting higher expectations of students in the subject. This is apparent in the significant rise in the proportion of students who took the higher level in the Junior Certificate 2011 Irish examination in comparison with other years. These efforts are commended.
- The learner was presented with variety in lessons and active learning was provided at various points in the lessons. In some cases the group work continued for too long a period of time.
- Written homework is regularly assigned and corrected. It would be a good exercise to compile the best of the students' own work in order to have a valuable resource to be shared among the teachers and as an exemplar for the students on making leaps forward in the subject.

- Lesson management was good and a positive atmosphere prevailed in all cases. The students co-operated fully in learning.
- An area for development is engaging students to talk about current and topical issues as a regular feature of the lesson. This would provide students with the opportunity as well as the challenge to express themselves, particularly in relation to matters in which they are interested.

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

- Junior cycle timetabled provision for Irish is considered limited. A review is recommended, mindful of all the demands on the timetable, with the aim of providing an extra lesson per week for Irish in at least one of those three years, if possible.
- Timetable arrangements are good for student access to an appropriate level in the subject. This is evident from the good mixed-ability class formation in first year and Transition Year (TY) and concurrent timetabling in all other years that permits level access.
- The school is supportive of teacher professional development as the high attendance of the teachers at Second Level Support Service (SLSS) for Irish indicates.
- A member of the Irish department now has extensive duties as the newly-appointed principal. The viability of continuing with the present arrangement of teaching the sixth year higher level class should be reviewed.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The current subject department plans are short on direction as to the proficiency level to be attained by students in each year and are unclear in differentiating the proficiency level from year to year.
- The areas for development identified as the current focus of planning work are a positive step, namely improving student attainment, enhancing teachers' ICT skills and specifying learning outcomes in plans.
- The more focused review of attainment data that is now in place is a good development and rightly includes comparative analysis with national norms. Improvement targets should be agreed along with common approaches to achieving them.
- Developing oral proficiency and its assessment are insufficiently treated in the current subject plan account. Students' oral language competence should be included in school reports. In reviewing planning for assessment in the subject, the optional oral Irish examination in the Junior Certificate merits consideration.

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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 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.

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