Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Arklow Community College
Arklow
Co. Wicklow

Roll number: 70740M

Date of inspection: 29 November 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The school management and the teachers of Irish make good efforts to broaden the students’ experience of Irish as a living language beyond the classroom.
- At the start of the majority of the classes, the learning targets for the lesson were shared with the students: this approach is commended.
- The use of Irish as the language of management, communication and instruction was very good in the vast majority of classes observed, although this good practice needs to be improved upon in a small number of cases.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) was observed in a few of the lessons observed, but the use of this resource needs to be further developed and more widely used.
- A range of activities was a feature of all the lessons, but some teaching methodologies must be further developed, to ensure that students derive the greatest possible benefit from the teaching and learning.
- It was felt that not enough opportunities were provided in the Irish classes for the students to speak the target language.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strategies should be devised and agreed to encourage the use of the target language among the students, to ensure that they will be able to speak the language at a level suited to their ability, as an outcome of their learning.
- It is recommended that ICT be more widely used and that a wider range of resources be used during Irish lessons.
- It is recommended that the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish be further developed in such a way that topics, teaching methodologies, resources, learning targets, differentiated approaches, and assessment methods are outlined in an integrated way.
- It is recommended that teachers be more vigilant in relation to errors of grammar or pronunciation among the students and that these be corrected on a regular basis.
INTRODUCTION
Arklow Community College is a co-educational school under the patronage of Wicklow Vocational Education Committee. The current enrolment is 311 students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Some Post-Leaving Certificate courses are also available in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The use of Irish as the language of management, instruction and communication was very good in the vast majority of the classes observed. With regard to this, it is recommended that all teachers of Irish use the same approach and that this good practice is indicated in the school plan for Irish.

• Pair-work was used in many of the classes observed. This approach is commended in so far as it facilitates the use of the target language in class; it is necessary, however, to continuously assess the effectiveness of pair-work and the various other classroom activities, to ensure that the use of these methodologies results in the students’ use of the target language. It was felt that the pair-work observed did not provide sufficient opportunities for communication among the students during classes in general.

• To help students to communicate in Irish during pair activities, it is necessary to provide them with material for questions and answers. This material can be added to or reduced as necessary and according to student ability levels. Those who have only a limited command of the language will need more help in formulating simple sentences in Irish. Errors of grammar and pronunciation must be corrected on a regular basis, without detracting from students’ self-confidence.

• The teachers have their own individual rooms and there was an abundance of material, relevant to the teaching and learning of the language, on display in these classrooms. It is recommended that teachers continue with this approach and that they create an effective learning environment to support student learning.

• In a few lessons observed, ICT was used to support student learning. The use of ICT should be extended to other classes to provide further support for students and to make the subject-matter of the lessons more interesting, more contemporary and more relevant for the students.

• It is strongly recommended that a wider range of resources be used to support student learning. It is suggested, for example, that teachers use podcasts, pictures, photographs, music, Irish-language media, film-clips, the print media and any other suitable materials that would help to facilitate and develop student interest in learning the language.

• During the majority of the Irish lesson observed, too much time was spent in putting material on the whiteboard for transcription by the students. This written work frequently took up a considerable amount of class time, leaving very little time for teaching and learning. It is recommended that teachers prepare printed matter which is legible and easily understood, for students, in the form of notes, information sheets and worksheets which the students can retain.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• The timetabling for Irish is satisfactory, with four class-periods per week provided for junior cycle classes and five per week for senior cycle. It is recommended that, if possible, an extra period per week be provided for at least one of the junior cycle year-groups.

• Good efforts are made to broaden the students’ experience of Irish as a living language beyond the classroom, by organising various events. These include a weekend visit to the Gaeltacht, celebration of Seachtain na Gaeilge and starting an ‘Irish corner’ in one of the classrooms, where the students can go once a week to speak Irish on an informal basis. Some advice was offered to the teachers and the management, during the evaluation, on ways of developing the extra-curricular programme further.

• The co-ordinator for Irish submits a request for teaching resources to the principal. It is recommended that the teachers compile an inventory of the resources and teaching materials available in the school for the teaching of Irish. A library of resources should be gradually built up, so that a good supply of interesting, attractive materials will be available to support the teaching of Irish.

• The intention is to assess the oral skills of students in all year-groups from this year forward. The results of these assessments should be communicated to the parents and it is recommended that they be informed of imminent changes in the state examinations, regarding oral Irish.

• The results of the state examinations are analysed. It is recommended that an analysis of the results in Irish be available as part of the subject plan, to indicate how the students are doing year by year. It is intended that considerable efforts will be made to reduce the number of students taking foundation level Irish, within a certain time-limit, and that is a commendable aspiration.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• A co-ordinator for Irish is nominated every year and this role is rotated among the teachers of Irish.

• The teachers meet formally once a term and the minutes examined indicated that, at those meetings, a wide range of subject-matter is discussed including choice of textbooks, examination results, the Irish corner, assessment policy and Irish-language occasions.

• A plan has been formulated for the teaching and learning of Irish. It is recommended that this plan be developed, to give details of topics, teaching methodologies, resources, learning targets, differentiated approaches and assessment methods.

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.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

Whereas the Subject Plan for Irish does contain all the necessary headings, efforts will be made in its redrafting to see that they are outlined in a more integrated way.

The opportunities for a more extensive use of ICT as a teaching methodology in the school will be greatly enhanced in the short-term as Co Wicklow VEC’s strategy to improve ICT facilities is rolled out.

Encouragement and opportunity is given to all staff to engage in appropriate CPD.