An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

St Colmcille’s Community School
Knocklyon, Dublin 16

Roll number: 91510M

Date of inspection: 28 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>27 &amp; 28 October 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inspection activities undertaken</td>
<td>Observation of teaching and learning during 7 class-periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion with the principal and the subject teachers</td>
<td>Feedback to the principal and to the subject teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- The use of Irish as the language of management, instruction and interaction was excellent in the classes observed and the teachers’ commitment to the use of Irish as the normal language of communication among themselves is commended.

- Pair-work and group-work were regularly used during the lessons to create opportunities for communication for the students.

- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) was good in the classes observed and particularly noted was the use of methods of assessing students’ communicative skills.

- The students participated in classroom activities and in their own learning and their behaviour was excellent.

- Good work has been completed to date on planning for the teaching and learning of Irish, although it is recommended that the planning work be done in a more integrated way in future.

- The members of the department of Irish assess their own work regularly, the results of state exams are analysed and the reflective culture among the teachers of Irish is commended.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the use of ICT be gradually developed, to achieve excellence in this area.

- It is recommended that the teachers focus extra attention on student accuracy in writing Irish and in Irish phonetics, to achieve the highest standard possible according to the students’ ability.
INTRODUCTION
St. Colmcille’s is a Community School with an enrolment of 713 students. The school offers a wide range of educational programmes, including the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

TEACHING AND LEARNING
• The use of Irish as the language of management, instruction and interaction was excellent in the classes observed. The vast majority of the teachers made significant efforts to avoid the use of translation from Irish to English, but a few instances were observed where translation was continuously used when not necessary; it is recommended that this practice be avoided in future.

• The teachers’ commitment to using Irish among themselves is commended, as is the good example that they and the school management give regarding speaking the language outside of the classroom.

• Students worked diligently during the lessons and they played an active part in classroom activities. The majority of the students made admirable efforts to communicate in Irish with the teachers. Students framed their answers as complete sentences in Irish in certain cases, but where this practice was not followed, it would be worth requiring full sentences as answers, to give students experience of Irish syntax and of composing simple, accurate sentences.

• Good opportunities for communication were created in the classes observed, through the use of pair-work and group-work. Particularly noteworthy was the work done on recording, assessing and correcting students’ communicative skills, based on the recommendations of the Second Level Support Service for Irish. It was evident that the students were accustomed to this methodology and this approach is highly commended. In general, there was a good balance in the development of all the language skills, but, in a few cases, it was felt that a little more time might be devoted to developing communication and it is recommended that attention be paid to achieving this better balance.

• Good, effective use was made of ICT in many of the lessons observed and that enhanced the pleasure and benefit the students derived from their learning. Various kinds of music were played on the internet, short videotapes were shown, and PowerPoint was used during different lessons. It is recommended that teachers continue to use ICT resources, and that their use be gradually developed in order to achieve excellence in this area.

• Mistakes in grammar and phonetics were corrected in certain cases observed. In other cases, it was felt that closer attention could be paid to this aspect of learning the language. It is recommended that repetition be regularly used, to ensure that students can pronounce words and phrases correctly. This should enhance their self-confidence in speaking the language.

• The classrooms are decorated with materials relevant to the teaching and learning of the language, as well as samples of students’ own work. The amount of material on display could be increased in certain cases, to create a stimulating, supportive learning environment, which the teacher could utilise during a lesson to support the development of literacy in Irish.
The copybooks contained significant amounts of work. Homework was very carefully corrected and references to the standard of students’ work as well as guidelines for improvement were given in Irish.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

In general, the provision for Irish on the school timetable is good, with five class-periods per week for every year-group in both junior and senior cycles. Three class-periods per week are provided for Transition Year. It is recommended that an extra class-period be made available for this group, if possible.

Admirable efforts are made in the school to give Irish a high profile, by making a range of co-curricular and cross-curricular events available, including participation in Gaeilg debates and the GLEO competition, celebration of Seachtain na Gaeilge, visits to the theatre and attendance at an Irish language summer camp organised in the school during the summer. The new system of Irish Language Leaders, initiated recently in the school, is commended.

Excellent ICT resources are available to the teachers and there was plenty of evidence available to indicate that the teachers are committed to the development of ICT as a teaching resource.

The minutes of the meetings of the teachers of Irish indicate that the results of the state examinations are continually analysed. The number of students who take the higher-level papers in the state exams is very satisfactory. The students’ communicative skills are assessed right through the school and it is recommended that the results of that assessment be given as a distinct mark or grade in the school reports sent to parents.

All the teachers of Irish attended the in-service courses provided in recent years by the Support Service for Second Level Irish and good teaching practices and approaches to assessment were noted during the lessons observed.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

One teacher is nominated from among the teachers of Irish, to act as co-ordinator of planning for the teaching and learning of the language. This responsibility is rotated annually among the department staff and tasks and responsibilities are also assigned to staff-members, to share the burden of the work.

The minutes of the teachers’ meetings indicate that a wide range of issues and policies is discussed. It is clear that there is a reflective culture among the teachers of Irish and that they are continually trying to encourage the students to achieve the best possible learning outcomes.

A plan for the teaching and learning of Irish was made available during the evaluation. The work completed to date on that plan is highly commended. It contained comprehensive information on the operation and organisation of the department of Irish. It is recommended that the schemes of work be set out in a more integrated way, in due course, giving information on topics, teaching methodologies, resources to be used in class, learning objectives and assessment methods.

Careful, comprehensive preparation had been completed for all the lessons observed. Worksheets, notes and ICT material had been prepared, to support students’ learning.
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 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 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management of St. Colmcille’s Community School welcomes the positive findings of the inspection report issued by the D.E.S. following a Subject Inspection of Irish, 28th October 2011.

The Board is delighted by the Inspectorate’s recognition and acknowledgement of the reflective practices that are taking place within the Irish Department thereby recognising the hard work and dedication of the Irish teachers.

The Board particularly notes the following examples of the good practice identified in the report:

- The excellent use of Irish as a language of management, instruction and interaction in all lessons observed.
- The use of paired and group work in lessons.
- The good and effective use of ICT in lessons.
- The teachers’ commitment to using Irish among themselves.

The Board is particularly pleased that the Inspectorate highly commended the Department’s efforts to embed the methodologies recommended by the Second Level Support Service for Irish into classroom practice.

The Board wishes to acknowledge and commend the Irish Department for their continued hard work, dedication and commitment to the school and congratulate them on the inspection Report.

The Board wishes to take the opportunity to thank the Inspectorate for their professionalism and courteous manner throughout the inspection.
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 of Management of St. Colmcille’s are committed to the ongoing development of an e-learning environment and will continue to support the Irish Department in the ongoing development of ICT.

- The Irish Department will also address the recommendations in the report through their Departmental Action Planning process.