Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Marist College
Athlone, County Westmeath
Roll number: 63190M

Date of inspection: 4 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>Inspection activities undertaken</th>
<th>Observation of teaching and learning during class periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of relevant documents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interaction with students</td>
<td>Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in Irish in this school was good.
- The progress of the students in learning Irish was good in the majority of cases and was of a high standard in some instances.
- The written work of the majority of the students was of a good standard.
- The provision of time for Irish and the distribution of class periods in the course of the week are both very good.
- The quality of the plan for this subject was good in that it included information on the majority of the areas of provision and support that are available for Irish in the school.
- Not all of the language skills are included in the assessment of the students’ learning in the junior cycle.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A more suitable range of methodologies and differentiation strategies should be used as well as a wider range of questions which would support cognitive development of a high order in the students.
- The expected outcomes of learning should be shared with the students at the beginning of each class and they should be given an opportunity to review their learning at its end.
- Subject planning should be based to a greater extent on the learning needs of the students in the school, on language functions and on the expected outcomes of learning.
INTRODUCTION
The Marist College is a voluntary post-primary school for boys. It is situated in the town of Athlone and 487 students are enrolled in it. A Transition year programme is provided on a voluntary basis. 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.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning Irish was found to be good.
- The progress made by the students in learning Irish was good in most instances and was of a high standard in a number of cases.
- It is recommended that the amount of teacher-centred instruction be reduced for the sake of ensuring a higher level of active participation by the students in learning activities. A more suitable range of methodologies and differentiation strategies should be selected to support such participation, such as working in pairs and groups and, in addition, use should be made of a broader selection of questions that would support cognitive development of a high order in the students.
- The aims and expected learning outcomes of lessons were not shared in advance with the students. It is recommended that learning outcomes be shared with them in language that will let them know what they will be enabled to do as a result of their participation in lessons.
- Very good practice in summarising effectively the learning from a lesson was observed in one instance and this practice should be extended.
- There was a very positive and supportive atmosphere for learning in all classrooms. Effective use of illustrative material was made to reinforce learning.
- Samples of the students’ copybooks provided evidence of a good standard of written work and that this work was very well organised and presented in the majority of cases.
- Best practice in providing feedback on written work was observed in a minority of the copybooks that were examined. It is recommended that the teachers review the input that they have received on the principles that are associated with Assessment for Learning.
- Homework is assigned regularly in the vast majority of classes.
- In general, the degree of participation by the students at the higher level in the Junior Certificate over a period of years is very good. Very good progress has been made in regard to the number of students who succeed in gaining the highest grades and steps should be taken to ensure that this trend is maintained.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The provision of time for teaching and learning Irish and the distribution of class periods during each week are both very good.
- Very good arrangements are in place for the development of the students’ ability and for facilitating their access to the subject at the highest level.
- A range of suitable co-curriculum activities is provided in order to support the students’ learning.
• The Irish department implements the school’s assessment policy. Details should be included in it regarding the different types of task that are assigned to the students as homework.

• Not all of the language skills are included in the provision for assessment in the junior cycle. It is strongly recommended that the assessment policy be amended so that the students could be enabled to gain recognition for their progress in acquiring the main language skills, including their ability to speak the language.

• The teachers are agreed on a common plan for the first and second year students but they set their examination papers on an individual basis. It is recommended that common tests and marking schemes be developed, agreed and used.

• It is the senior management of the school that analyses the achievements of the students in certificate examinations and their results in the language are submitted to the Irish department for discussion. It is recommended that the teachers would prepare a brief account of their analysis of the results with the purpose of identifying strengths in their practice and of agreeing strategies for addressing any shortcomings that might be identified.

• The teachers have easy access to resources and facilities and a central storage area is also available. Continuous development of their access to and skills in the use of information and communications technology has taken place.

• It is recommended that the teachers keep an account in the plan for their subject of the professional development events and courses that they attend and of the manner in which these activities support their students’ learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The members of the Irish department hold regular meetings. Although it was reported that minutes of formal meetings are kept, they were not available in the school during the evaluation. Management, in co-operation with the teachers, should ensure that copies of the agendas and minutes of meetings are available in the school at all times.

• It is recommended that the teachers should place methodologies along with teaching and learning strategies, including methods of assessment and strategies for differentiation, on the agendas of meetings for the purpose of discussion and the enhancement of the range of practices.

• The teachers take turns in assuming the role of subject co-ordinator and it is recommended that they take on this role for periods of two or three years.

• The plan for Irish was found to be of good quality. In order to guide further development work which needs to be carried out, it is recommended that the teachers should agree a number of targets to be achieved within a specific period of time and that they should develop a plan of action, as part of the process, in which various responsibilities would be defined.

• The subject plans for the different year groups were set out on a term by term basis and they contained a step by step description of the development of the different language skills, but they were unduly influenced by the order of the units of work in the textbooks. It is recommended that the plans be based primarily on the learning needs of the students
in the school, on the outcomes that would be expected at various stages in the learning process and on the language functions that are set out in the syllabi.

- It was evident from the available written accounts that thought had been given to the work to be carried out with the various classes and to the selection of suitable resources.

- A very good record of the achievements of the students was being maintained.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal teacher and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.

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