

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection Of Italian

REPORT
Mount Sackville Secondary School
Chapelizod, Dublin 20
Roll number: 60120W

Date of inspection: 12 March 2013



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

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	11, 12 March 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in all the lessons observed was very good, with some excellent practice.
- Whole-school provision and support for Italian is excellent.
- The commitment, professionalism and diligence of the Italian teachers is noted.
- The quality of coordination and subject planning is very good.
- The optional Junior Certificate oral examination is being offered in Italian.
- The teaching and learning of Italian is supported by very good co-curricular activities, notably an exchange with a school in Italy.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that the Italian department make more use of information and communication technology (ICT), for teaching and learning.
 - The principles and practice of Assessment for Learning (AfL) should be further developed and embedded in classroom practice.
 - In the context of the new junior cycle, it is recommended that the school continue to offer students the range of languages as at present.
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INTRODUCTION

Mount Sackville Secondary School is a fee-charging school for girls with an enrolment in the current school year of 602 students. The school was founded by the Sisters of St Joseph of Cluny in 1864 and is now under the trusteeship of the Le Chéile Schools Trust. The school offers Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and a compulsory Transition Year. The modern foreign languages on the curriculum are French, German and Italian. A subject inspection in Italian was last carried out in 2001.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching observed in all the lessons was of a very high standard. Lessons were well prepared, the level of challenge was appropriate and a good range of teaching resources was used.
- The teachers' use of the target language for the conduct of lessons and all communication with students was excellent. Little or no recourse was had to translation to explain meaning or to check comprehension.
- The teachers used a good variety of teaching methodologies and made learning interesting for the students. Many of the resources had been prepared by the teachers themselves and there was no undue reliance on textbooks or past examination papers.
- Classroom management was at all times very effective and the atmosphere was pleasant and conducive to learning. Rapport between teachers and students was very good. Group work and other tasks were well managed.
- Students were encouraged to be autonomous and to take responsibility for their own learning, and there were some very good examples of independent and investigative learning in the lessons observed.
- Very effective use was made in all lessons of collaborative learning and group work, and the students worked well together, always purposefully and on task.
- Accuracy in language—spoken and written—was actively promoted, and very good work had been done with all year groups in building solid foundations in vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Students' awareness of how language works was very good. Opportunities were taken to revise and consolidate work already covered.
- It was evident during the inspection that the students enjoyed learning Italian and were enthusiastic about it. The quality of their spoken Italian was good, as was their use of Italian to ask and answer questions.
- To further develop the very good oral language work being done, it is recommended that more time be given to oral activities before progressing to activities involving reading and writing. A short general conversation or question-and-answer session as a warm-up or ice breaker at the beginning of each lesson would also be helpful in developing students' confidence and fluency.
- It is recommended that, with junior classes especially, care be taken to reinforce by drill and repetition the correct pronunciation of particular Italian letter combinations, such as the initial 'gl', and the difference between hard and soft 'c' and 'g' sounds.
- A notable feature of the lessons observed was the quality of support and feedback to individual students. Written work was corrected regularly and students were given advice

for improvement. There was, perhaps, some scope for more written feedback on students' written assignments, on the lines of 'comment-only' marking, as practised in AfL.

- Another aspect of AfL which could be further developed is the focus on specific learning outcomes for each lesson: the sharing of the outcomes with students at the beginning of the lesson and the checking of their attainment during and at the end of the lesson. This could include student self-assessment and peer assessment.
- A very good example of the use of ICT was observed, where students recorded their own spoken production and emailed the sound files to the teacher. It is recommended that the teachers continue to explore the potential of the school's ICT facilities for teaching and learning Italian. For example, new language content could be introduced by using the data projector to show video clips or images. Online dictionaries, as well as paper dictionaries could be used by the students to check meanings.
- Students are prepared well for the certificate examinations, and they attain very good outcomes. Examination results are analysed and targets for improvement are set.
- This year, for the first time, the students are taking an oral examination as part of the Junior Certificate examination. The Italian department is to be commended for this initiative, which underlines to students the importance of oral work and allows them to receive credit for their competence in oral Italian.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a strong commitment to language learning in the school. French, German and Italian are offered. There is a first-year taster programme and students are encouraged to study two of these languages.
- At the time of the last subject inspection of Italian in 2001, one of the key recommendations was that the subject would be accorded the same status as French and German with a view to increasing student uptake. This has been done, and whole-school provision and support for Italian is now excellent: every student has access to the language, and the level of uptake is very healthy.
- The commitment, professionalism and diligence of the Italian teachers is commended.
- The teaching and learning of Italian is supported by very good extra-curricular activities, notably a student exchange with a school in Turin. The school also has an Italian language assistant under the Department's scheme.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject plan for Italian is of a very good quality. It outlines detailed schemes of work for each year group and includes a record of departmental meetings.
- The planning folder also includes a long-term plan for Italian and an action plan for the current school year. This reflective, strategic approach is commended.
- One of the aims in the long-term plan is to encourage a strong uptake of Italian, especially in the context of the junior cycle reform. It is strongly recommended that the school continue to offer the range of languages as at present.

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.