

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Italian
REPORT**

**Ratoath College
Jamestown, Ratoath, County Meath
Roll number: 76088T**

Date of inspection: 3 October 2011



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ITALIAN

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	30 September, 3 October 2011
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 was good or very good in most of the lessons observed, with some examples of excellent practice
- Students are motivated to learn Italian, and their attitudes to the subject are very positive
- The quality of learning was good or very good overall, but there is some scope for development in students' mastery of oral language
- There is a strong Italian subject department, with well-qualified teachers who are very committed to their work
- There is excellent whole-school support for Italian, and the subject is a popular choice with students
- Information and communication technology (ICT) and other resources are used effectively and creatively in the teaching of Italian

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The subject plan should be expanded to include details regarding teaching methods, resources, assessment and departmental self-evaluation
 - A system should be agreed and implemented to profile individual students' progress in the four language skills
 - A definite strategy should be implemented to maximise the use of the target language and to eliminate any dependence on translation
-

INTRODUCTION

Ratoath College is a co-educational school under the aegis of County Meath Vocational Education Committee. Founded in 2005, its enrolment has grown rapidly to the current level of 844 and is still growing. The school serves a large local catchment area and, in addition to Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes, offers Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). Italian is well established in the school and is offered in all years and programmes.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In most of the lessons observed, the quality of teaching was good or very good, and there were some examples of excellent practice. Lessons were well prepared and the learning outcomes were shared with the students at the beginning of each lesson.
- Students are enthusiastic about Italian, they enjoy their learning and the learning outcomes are generally good or very good.
- Students' behaviour and engagement were of a very high standard. There was a good variety of learning activities in all of the lessons observed and the students' interest was maintained throughout.
- The quality of teaching resources used in all lessons was very good. ICT was used effectively and creatively. Where possible, teachers had created an attractive learning environment with an Italian atmosphere, using maps, posters and prominently-displayed key words.
- Some lessons began with a short warm-up discussion in Italian on day-to-day matters and topics of interest to students. This very good practice should be more widely adopted.
- In most lessons, there was some well-paced oral revision of previous learning by way of lead-in to the teaching of new material. Again, this good practice should be the norm.
- In all of the lessons observed, the teachers modelled excellent spoken Italian, and in most cases their use of the target language for classroom communication and teaching was exemplary.
- In a minority of lessons, there was a tendency to translate instructions and explanations into English. This practice defeats the purpose of using Italian as the language of instruction. A definite strategy should be implemented across the department to maximise the use of the target language and to eliminate any dependence on translation.
- There were some excellent examples of skilful questioning by teachers and natural, fluent answering. However, some students seemed to have difficulty understanding even the basic question words and responding appropriately. More regular use of oral drill and repetition in lessons would remedy this deficit.
- It is commendable that this year's third-year students will take the Junior Certificate optional oral examination in Italian. This will provide an added stimulus for students to become more confident and competent in their spoken Italian.
- In most of the lessons observed, there was a very good balance between whole-class teaching and group or pair work. Where pair work was less effective, it was because more time needed to be given to preparatory teaching of the language, clear instructions and modelling of the communicative task.

- Homework is given regularly and corrected carefully. Some good examples were seen of comment-only marking in students' copybooks. However, there is scope to extend the application of Assessment for Learning (AfL) strategies in the teaching and learning of Italian. For example, the attainment of learning outcomes should be checked in all lessons.
- In keeping with the principles of AfL, it is also recommended that an overview of the year's learning outcomes, as well as the criteria for successful learning, be shared with the students at the beginning of each school year.
- Commendably, common assessments are given at regular intervals—at the end of units of work, for example. Care should be taken to avoid setting translation tasks in written tests and to include regular assessment of listening and speaking from the beginning of first year.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Italian enjoys a very high profile in the school, and whole-school support for the subject is excellent.
- Student access to Italian is optimal. The subject is offered in all years and programmes, and the level of uptake is very good. Particularly commendable is the fact that students who have not taken Italian in junior cycle are given the opportunity to take it up in TY and to continue to Leaving Certificate if they have the aptitude.
- The school has a strong Italian department, consisting of three fully-qualified teachers, all of whom are very committed to the subject. This year, for the second year in succession, the school has the benefit of an Italian language assistant under the DES scheme. School management is supportive of the teachers' continuing professional development.
- A very good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities supports the teaching of Italian.
- There is a very good range of resources for the teaching of Italian, and teachers share electronic resources by means of a departmental hard drive.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning in Italian is well established. The department meets once a term and minutes of meetings are kept.
- There are written plans for each year group and each programme. The plans consist mainly of lists of learning outcomes, expressed, commendably, in the form of 'can-do' statements. However, the plans do not as yet contain details about teaching methods, resources or modes of assessment.
- The department minutes available suggest that the main focus of meetings has been on necessary administrative matters. It is recommended that the department now focus its attention on teaching methods, assessment of learning and recording of students' progress.
- In keeping with the school's emphasis on AfL, the Italian department should address the question of how and when each component of the programme is to be assessed. Samples of written and oral tests should be included in the subject plan.

- It is recommended that a system be developed to profile individual students' progress in the four language skills. Consideration might be given to using some variation of the European Language Portfolio across the school.
- The results of the certificate examinations are analysed by school management, and the Italian department is asked to comment on the results. This commendable practice could form part of the department's self-evaluation and target-setting for the future.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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.

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 Ratoath College are delighted with an excellent report, which outlines the high standard of teaching and learning that is currently taking place in the school.

The Board wishes to thank all members of the Italian Subject Team who have worked really hard over the past four years to build the Italian Department. The Board would like to congratulate them on their excellent work in promoting the learning of Italian in the school. This is evident in the huge numbers of pupils electing to study Italian, growing from 8 first year pupils in 2007 to 120 first year pupils in 2011. This point is alluded to in the report which mentions the fact that the pupils are motivated to learn Italian and have very positive attitudes to the subject. The report compliments the excellent whole-school support for the subject evident in the success of the subject.

The report also commends the teachers for their commitment to their work and their high quality teaching. It praises the variety of resources used effectively in the classroom all of which enhance the student learning. Ratoath College is very proud of its progressive and modern approach to teaching and learning and this approach was given due recognition in this report.

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 recommendation of the inspector in relation to implementing a system monitoring individual students' progress in the four language skills has been introduced and will be reviewed at the end of the year.
- The subject plan has already been expanded to include teaching methods, resources and assessment as was recommended it is also intended to include and develop departmental self-evaluation in accordance with the school's policy on this issue throughout this school year.
- The Italian department welcomes the recommendation in relation to developing a strategy to maximise the use of target language and to eliminate a dependence on translation and has already started working on this strategy.