

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Italian

REPORT

**Presentation College
Terenure, Dublin 6W
Roll number: 76092K**

Date of inspection: 1 December 2009



REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN ITALIAN

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Presentation College, Terenure. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Italian and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and the teacher, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and the teacher's written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy principal and the subject teacher. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Presentation College offers three modern European languages: French, German and Italian. For the whole of their first year, students study all three languages, and then choose which of the three they will continue with in second and third year. While the idea of allowing all students to experience each of the languages is good in principle, the present arrangement has certain disadvantages, and school management is currently looking at other ways of helping students to make an informed choice of language for Junior Certificate.

Subject provision and whole school support for Italian in Presentation College is very good. The language was introduced to the school ten years ago by the present teacher of Italian, who has built up the subject over the years with commendable commitment and enthusiasm, and with the support of school management. The teacher is fully qualified, has an excellent command of the language, is a member of the Association of Teachers of Italian, and has engaged in in-service courses for teachers of Italian in Ireland and Italy.

The level of uptake of the subject is healthy: almost half of the students in the school are studying Italian in the current school year. An annual *Giorno Italiano* is organised to raise awareness of Italian language and culture in the school.

Timetabling for Italian is generally satisfactory, with four periods per week in second and third year, three periods in Transition Year, and five periods in fifth and sixth year. Because of the way languages are currently offered in first year, students have only two periods of Italian per week, which is less than satisfactory.

There is a very good range of resources available for teaching Italian in Presentation College. The teacher has her own classroom, where she has succeeded in creating an attractive learning environment with an Italian atmosphere. She has collected appropriate Italian books, magazines, maps, posters, CDs and DVDs, and good use is made of audio and video resources in the teaching of Italian. At the time of the inspection, the school was undergoing major rewiring, including the installation of network points in each classroom, wiring for ceiling mounted data projectors and the installation a number of interactive whiteboards. This will certainly enhance the possibilities for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for the teaching of Italian and other languages. It is recommended that, in developing the school's ICT resources, consideration be given to providing for student access to computer-assisted language learning programmes.

The school had an Italian language assistant, under the Department of Education and Skill's scheme, in the school year 2004-05. A language assistant provides authentic opportunities for the students to communicate in the language and can contribute greatly to the students' understanding of the country's culture. It is therefore recommended that school management consider applying again for an Italian language assistant.

The learning of Italian in Presentation College is enriched and supported by the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities which are organised for the students. These include: school trips to Italy, Italian pizza parties, meals in Italian restaurants, a school Italian Day, an Italian pen-pal and email project, visits to the Irish Film Institute to see Italian films, and participation in an Italian walking tour of Dublin, organised by Dublin Tourism. Most recently, the teacher has organised an exchange with a school in Turin. A group of students from Presentation College visited Turin, stayed with families and attended school there. This rich and varied programme is evidence of real commitment and imagination on the part of the Italian teacher, who is constantly finding new ways to interest her students in different aspects of Italian culture and to make it attractive and real to them.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

At the time of the inspection, a very detailed set of Subject Planning Guidelines had just been issued to the staff in Presentation College. This incentive to harmonised subject planning is to be commended. The standard of planning and preparation for the teaching of Italian in the school is very good. The subject plan is comprehensive, and begins with a Mission Statement, which outlines a vision for Italian in the school. The vision includes, commendably, elements such as passion for Italian, enjoyment in learning the language and celebration of the subject. There are also detailed schemes of work for each year group, which outline the work to be covered month by month, along with resources, course materials, general aims and learning outcomes, indications of teaching and learning methodologies, and forms of assessment.

A particular feature of the planning for Italian is its cross-curricular aspect: connections are made with English, Religious Education, History, Classical Studies and Home Economics.

When reviewing the subject plan, consideration could be given to articulating the connection between learning objectives and assessment, by using 'can-do' statements of the kind found in the European Language Portfolio. Use of such statements for teachers' planning, for learner autonomy, for student self-assessment and for teacher assessment would be an appropriate subject for discussion by the language teachers in Presentation College and for continuing professional development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Three lessons were observed in the course of the inspection: one each with sixth-year, fifth-year and second-year class groups. The standard of teaching in all three was very good. In the sixth-year class, students were preparing for their Leaving Certificate oral examination. They stood in groups practising conversation skills, first with, and then without, notes. They rehearsed role play scenarios in groups and went on to write dialogues. The fifth-year class centred around a song, *Tornerà la neve*, which was used very creatively to teach the future tense. The lesson evidenced a nice balance of elements—grammar, vocabulary, listening comprehension, creativity and cultural awareness. The second-year class centred on the vocabulary of food and the activity of ordering food in an Italian restaurant. The students used sock puppets to practise their newly-learned vocabulary with different partners in the class.

Each of these three lessons was, in its own way, a model of good practice. They were very well planned, and the best use was made of time and resources. The teaching style was very lively, and the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing were integrated naturally. The students responded well, entering enthusiastically into all the varied activities prepared for them. While the whole approach was imaginative and spontaneous, there was also very solid teaching, and incidental revision, of grammar. Students referred independently to dictionaries and verb drill books to check for information they needed. The teacher modelled excellent spoken Italian and encouraged the students to imitate her pronunciation and intonation. Use of the target language as the language of communication and instruction was optimal. Students were clearly well used to working in pairs and groups to practise their spoken Italian. The strong emphasis on oral competence is highly commendable.

In the interests of sharing good practice, it is recommended that school management and the language teachers explore the possibilities of peer observation and, where appropriate, team teaching.

ASSESSMENT

Students' progress in the various language skills is assessed regularly. Mid-term results are recorded, and the records include notes on students' attitude and application. The school also analyses the State examination results. It is recommended that every effort be made to ensure that students who are capable of doing so take Higher Level in the State examinations.

An examination of samples of students' copies, folders, scrapbooks and booklets made by the students showed that the volume and quality of written work completed was very good. Written work had been corrected thoroughly, with helpful comments.

The recommendation under "Planning and Preparation" above, is relevant to the development of assessment policy and practice in the school.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Subject provision and whole school support for Italian in Presentation College is very good, and the uptake of Italian is healthy.
- The learning of Italian in Presentation College is enriched and supported by a very good range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.
- The standard of planning and preparation for the teaching of Italian in Presentation College is very good.
- The standard of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- When reviewing the subject plan, consideration could be given to articulating the connection between learning objectives and assessment, by using 'can-do' statements of the kind found in the European Language Portfolio.
- It is recommended that, in developing the school's ICT resources, consideration be given to providing for student access to computer-assisted language learning programmes.
- It is recommended that school management consider applying for an Italian language assistant.
- In the interests of sharing good practice, it is recommended that school management and the language teachers explore the possibilities of peer observation and, where appropriate, team teaching.
- It is recommended that every effort be made to ensure that students who are capable of doing so take Higher Level in the State examinations.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teacher of Italian and with the principal and deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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