An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Mount Mercy College
Model Farm Road, Cork
Roll number: 62661U

Date of inspection: 23 January 2012
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was very good. Excellent practice was observed in one particular class.
- Irish was the primary language in use in all lessons observed.
- Students were provided with frequent opportunities to speak Irish and it is commendable that steps have been taken to assess their oral ability.
- Students participated in class activities on an ongoing basis.
- Irish enjoys a very high status in the school. Co- and extra-curricular activities support the promotion of Irish outside the classroom.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- More widespread use of information and communications technology (ICT) facilities and authentic interactive resources is recommended
- It is recommended that the oral ability of all students form part of their formal assessments.
- It is recommended that more comprehensive schemes of work be set out which would provide a clear account of the year’s work and which would support self-evaluation at both an individual and a department level.

INTRODUCTION

Mount Mercy College is a voluntary secondary school for girls operating under the auspices of CEIST. A total of 732 students are enrolled currently and eight teachers are involved in teaching Irish. The school provides the junior- and leaving-certificate programmes and Transition Year (TY) is offered as an optional programme.
TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Irish was the primary language in use in all lessons observed. Student understanding of each other’s conversation and of teacher input showed that Irish is the normal medium of communication during lessons. Student oral proficiency in Irish reflected their ability range.

- Students were active in learning throughout the lessons. Best practice was evident where the teacher ensured that all students had practice in all four language skills.

- In the majority of lessons there was a thematic link between lesson activities. This approach ensured that newly-acquired language was reinforced.

- All teachers placed appropriate emphasis on language accuracy both in grammar and in pronunciation. Another approach which demonstrated the high expectations teachers have of students’ ability was the emphasis placed by some teachers on students acquiring idiomatic expressions as well as on developing the quality of language used by students. It is recommended that teachers ensure that students, according to their ability, acquire new expressions on an ongoing basis.

- Particular commendation is due to those teachers who provided opportunities for their students to engage in interactive tasks. This practice was even more effective when the work groups had a particular target to achieve within a timeframe. The widespread use of this good practice is recommended, in addition to the use of other methods where students are given a more central role in the learning process.

- In one case, a commendable effort was made to use authentic materials. However, on the whole, the use made of such resources was limited. It is strongly recommended that more widespread use be made of authentic interactive resources, according as ICT facilities are further developed in the school.

- A diligent and collaborative atmosphere prevailed in all lessons observed.

- Students who work hard and who ensure that they present their work in a neat and tidy manner are to be commended. Similarly, teachers are to be commended for the enthusiasm they bring to lesson activities. However, in some cases it was noted that more work was being done by teachers than by students. It is recommended, therefore, that teaching, learning and assessment strategies be used which would oblige students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

- Effective use was made of questioning to assess the level of language acquisition. In general, it was evident that student language proficiency had been improved by the end of lessons.

- Student work is monitored on a regular basis and an effective system of reporting is in operation. It is strongly recommended that assessment practices be extended to include greater recognition of oral proficiency for junior-cycle students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- School timetabling arrangements support the teaching and learning of Irish.

- Students are assigned to classes in a way that offers them every opportunity to study Irish at the highest level appropriate to their ability.
A total of six percent of the student population has an exemption from studying Irish. These students are managed and facilitated so that they continue to learn while Irish classes are taking place.

Irish enjoys a high status in the school. It is gratifying to note that a positive attitude towards Irish is being fostered within the student population. This approach is very well supported by the broad programme of co- and cross-curricular activities which promotes the use of Irish outside the classroom.

Teachers are aware of the benefits to be gained from recognised continuing professional development (CPD) activities. Several teachers have spent periods in the Gaeltacht areas every year, an exercise which ensures that they have the appropriate language skills to undertake their teaching duties.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The subject plan for Irish provides a satisfactory overview of the work being done in relation to Irish in the school. It is recommended that agreement be reached on the practice of using English during Irish lessons and this agreement should then be included in the subject plan. In addition, it is recommended that department self-evaluation be interlinked with the subject planning process.

- There is need to clarify in the work schemes the topics to be covered at different times during the school year; the resources available to support the learning and teaching process; and the assessment practices in use at class level.

- Appropriate preparation was made by all teachers in order to achieve lesson targets. Good practice was evident when prior consideration was given to devising the most appropriate activities to allow students practise newly-acquired language. Best practice was evident when resources such as work cards and flashcards were designed to guide students as they worked.

- Every teacher maintains a comprehensive account of individual student attendance and achievement. One practice observed and noted as worthy of merit was where advisory comments, based on ongoing review of the learning standard of students, are maintained in a diary.

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 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.

*Published November 2012*