

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna  
Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Meán Scoil Mhuire  
Longford, Co. Longford**

**Roll number: 63760E**

**Date of inspection: 2 March 2012**



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

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

---

**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	1 & 2 March 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Meeting with the subject co-ordinator</li><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interaction with the students</li><li>• Review of samples of students' work and of samples of their school diaries</li><li>• Feedback to individual teachers</li><li>• Feedback to the principal and the subject teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- In over half of the classes observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good or very good and, in the remaining classes, it was weak or fair.
- In the majority of the classes, the teachers had high expectations of student learning and a review of data arising from the certificate examinations showed very good levels of student participation at higher level and of student achievement across the levels.
- The department of Irish uses very good assessment practices which recognise the main language skills.
- Irish enjoys a high status in the school and many opportunities are provided to broaden the students' experience of the language and culture outside of formal classes.
- Some of the classes are shared between teachers, but there was no evidence of this in the planning documentation.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It is recommended that the plans be based on the syllabuses and that the teachers lay out a framework of the learning outcomes that would be expected at various stages of the learning, for each year group.
  - It is recommended that the implementation of the plans be regularly monitored and reviewed and that an account of these activities be noted in the documents as appropriate.
  - It is recommended that only one teacher be responsible for the teaching of Irish to any class.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

Meán Scoil Mhuire is a voluntary secondary school for girls. It is situated in Longford town and has 595 students on the roll. The school provides a Transition Year programme on an optional basis.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in over half of the classes observed and, in the remaining classes, it was weak or fair.
- In the majority of cases, the teachers had high expectations of student learning, but at an appropriate level.
- In most of the classes, teaching methods and strategies used were effective because they supported learning development at various levels of ability and served different learning styles.
- In a minority of cases, the methods and strategies used were not successful because the work was not precisely structured, nor was there a sufficiently exact focus on the learning to be achieved.
- At the outset of most lessons, the students were informed about the content to be covered in that lesson. This practice should be further developed so that, as was done in one case, the students would be made aware of what they would be able to do, or of what they would have learned, as a result of their work in that lesson and those objectives should be revisited before the end of the lesson.
- Attention is paid on a continuous basis to students' language awareness by developing the accuracy of their grammar and phonetics.
- Irish only was used as a medium of instruction in most classes and, in many cases, as the medium of communication when the students were working together. In a minority of cases, however, the overuse of translation resulted in English being the main language to be heard from the students.
- In most classes, very good use was made of information and communication technology to provide a scaffolding to support student learning.
- Student behaviour in all the classes observed was very good and they were appropriately praised for their efforts.
- Questioning was regularly used in the classes, to check student learning. It is recommended that, in some cases, this aspect of the teaching be developed by broadening the range of questions, taking account of challenge and style.
- Very good assessment practices are used, which cover the four main language skills.
- It is evident that over a period of years students' level of participation in higher level courses and their achievements in the certificate examinations are very good.
- Students' school diaries do not indicate that homework is regularly set. The teachers and management realise that this aspect of the work must be addressed as part of the current review of the homework policy.

- Students' written work is regularly checked and monitored, but corrections which would give guidance on ways of improving their efforts should be made more regularly on students' written work.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Irish enjoys a very high status as part of the school curriculum and the school's policy on Irish is implemented, as evidenced by its use in the school environment.
- The management and staff collaborate in making a very good provision of co-curricular and extra-curricular events available during the school year.
- The amount of time allocated to Irish, especially in fifth and sixth years, is very good.
- Apart from second year, where half the amount of time available for Irish is timetabled on one day, the distribution of class periods over the week is satisfactory. It is recommended that the management ensure that the lessons are appropriately distributed over the week for every class group.
- The majority of the teachers are fully qualified to teach Irish and their ability in Irish for the purpose of teaching is satisfactory. It is recommended that the management ensure that every teacher who is given responsibility for teaching Irish classes is fully qualified.
- Some of the classes are allocated in such a way that students have one or two class periods with one teacher and the remaining class periods with another teacher. This is not good practice and it is strongly recommended that the management avoid such an arrangement.
- Neither the department of Irish nor the school has an assessment policy. It is recommended that the need for an assessment policy be taken into account in the review of the homework policy.
- A very good provision of aids and resources is available to support the teaching and learning of Irish.
- The management is strongly advised to review the number of announcements broadcast from the office during class time.
- Eight per cent of the students enrolled in the school have exemptions from the study of Irish. It was reported that a small number of students transfer to the school with unofficial exemptions given to them by their primary schools, which does not comply with the Department's regulations.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The work of the department of Irish is effectively co-ordinated. It is recommended that teachers take the role of co-ordinator in turn for a period of three years each.

- A comprehensive agenda, including discussion on matters dealt with at continuing professional development courses, is laid out for department meetings.
- To guide the development of the subject plan, it is recommended that, in line with the co-ordination term recommended, the teachers of Irish should agree development objectives and set out a plan of action, with target dates, for every objective. This plan of action should be used as a guide in self-evaluating the work of the department.
- The quality of the subject plan is good. Although plans for various year groups were laid out on a term-by-term basis, some of them were too closely linked to chapters and pages in textbooks. It is recommended that the plans be based on the syllabuses and that, keeping language functions to the fore, a framework of the learning outcomes expected at various stages of the learning, be set out for every year group.
- Although some classes were shared between teachers, there was no record of such an arrangement in the subject plan.
- The implementation of the plans should be regularly monitored and reviewed in conjunction with the assessment of learning, and the results of this work should be noted in the documents as appropriate.
- The planning and preparation for the majority of the classes was very good, including the provision of resources prepared by the teachers themselves or well-chosen by them.
- A very good record on learning progress was being kept in most cases.
- Plans are in train to reinstate Irish in the school-transfer examinations. As part of the preparatory work on developing this examination, it is recommended that teachers consult *Curacclam na Bunscoile: Gaeilge* (The Primary School Curriculum: Irish) and the teachers of the senior classes in feeder primary schools.
- The department has made a good start on developing numeracy and literacy strategies and integrating them into the plans for the learning of Irish.

---

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.