

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Columba College
Killucan, County Westmeath

Roll number: 71430C

Date of inspection: 3 March 2016

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	2 and 3 March 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Preliminary evaluation meeting with the coordinator• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interaction with the students• Review of samples of the students' work and samples of their school diaries• Feedback to individual teachers• Feedback to the principal and to the Irish teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or better in the majority of the classes and fair in one case.
- Only a small number of the opportunities that were created for students to cooperate in learning were effective in the advancement of learning.
- Worthwhile efforts were made to improve the students' expectations and attitude in relation to Irish.
- Aspects of planning for the subject were of very good quality, such as how the self-evaluation process is used and the analysis of student attainment.
- Generally, good time provision was made for Irish on the timetable.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- As set out in the department's aims with regard to the development of independent learner skills and learner self-awareness, it is recommended that the focus on planning for learning is based more on the syllabi and learners' needs.
 - It is recommended that the spoken Irish ability of students in first and second year is included as an integral part of assessment.
 - In accordance with the school's policies, and as observed in some cases, it is recommended that giving homework regularly, as well as providing formative feedback when correcting, is made standard practice.
 - As well as group-based tasks and teacher questioning, it is recommended that a wider range of differentiation methods is used to benefit learning.
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INTRODUCTION

Columba College is a co-educational school. The school functions under the trusteeship of Longford and Westmeath Education and Training Board and participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme. 191 students are enrolled for the current school year. The Transition Year is not provided in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or better in the majority of the classes and fair in one case.
- In each case, the topic of the class was communicated to students. The best practice was observed in those cases in which the learning intentions were shared with students. In these cases, language was used that aided their understanding of what they would be able to do or what they would know and the learning intentions were used as a basis for assessment both during the class and at the end of the class. It is recommended that this is made standard practice in all classes.
- Opportunities were created in every class for students to cooperate in learning on tasks to be carried out in pairs or in larger groups. However, this work was only effective in a small number of cases. When the task was effective, every member of the group had a definite role, the students possessed the language needed to do the work through the medium of Irish, the time limit mentioned for the task was complied with and a task had to be carried out by the audience while gathering feedback.
- Although emphasis was generally placed on developing the students' speaking ability in Irish, including their ability to compose questions, some of the classes were too teacher-centred.
- Significant emphasis was placed on grammar in a number of cases and the teaching was approached in an explicit manner. It is recommended that care is taken to ensure that the chosen approach is appropriate to the class group.
- In a minority of classes, and in many examples of students' written work, it was noted that there was a habit of translating material in Irish to English. It is recommended that this type of practice is avoided for the purpose of acquisition of the target language.
- Although there were mixed abilities in all classes, differentiation as a feature occurred only in a small number and it was based mainly on the teacher's questions and the tasks. Differentiation of learning must be included in planning and preparation for learning and in the design of tasks, homework tasks included.
- With regard to a minority of classes, better use must be made of the time available in order to develop and promote learning. Clever use of the available resources would aid this in some cases.
- Very effective examples of using technology to benefit learning were observed in certain cases.
- The behaviour of students in all classes was very good and they received great praise, creating a positive and supportive atmosphere for learning.
- Analysis is carried out on the participation and achievement of students in certificate examinations. The staff and management recognise that the number of candidates and levels of achievement at the highest levels must be raised and the number of candidates at

foundation level must be lowered. Goals are set out accordingly and, as part of the planning to achieve these goals, it is recommended that attainment in internal house examinations is also monitored and analysed.

- In accordance with the aims of the Irish department and the syllabi, the students' speaking ability is assessed in senior classes and in third year. Although students undertake the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate, spoken Irish is not assessed in either first or second year. It is recommended that the good practice in place in other year-groups is applied in every year of the junior cycle.
- Homework was given in all classes. A review of a sample of students' diaries showed that this is not a regular practice, however. It is recommended that an assessment policy which corresponds with the school's policy is put in place for the department.
- A number of examples of constructive corrections were to be noted in the students' work. It is recommended that this good practice, which corresponds with the school's assessment policy, is expanded.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- It was clear that worthwhile efforts are being made by the Irish teaching staff, with the support of the management team, to promote Irish as a medium of communication and to nurture a positive attitude to the language among students.
- Good work is being done to motivate students to attend Gaeltacht courses and to provide scholarships for this purpose.
- Generally, the time provision for Irish was good. It was very good in the case of the senior cycle.
- It is praiseworthy that the Irish teachers participate in the teaching and learning group set up in the school to promote peer-observation practices aimed at teaching and learning methodologies.
- The furniture in the classrooms was arranged very suitably for collaborative learning and communication.
- The spoken Irish competence of each teacher was satisfactory for teaching purposes.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- There was evidence that the Irish teachers hold regular meetings. It is recommended that pedagogy is made a permanent item on the meeting agenda and that differentiation is focused on initially.
- Aspects of the subject plan and the plans for the different year-groups were of very good quality. This includes how the self-evaluation process is being used to identify development goals based on the results of analysis on student attainment in certificate examinations. The recognised aims regarding the development of independent learner skills and learner self-awareness are also praiseworthy. In order to optimise the planning process, it is recommended that the department's monitoring practices in relation to identified aims and implementation of plans during the year are developed.

- The subject plans for individual year-groups were based too closely on textbooks. It is recommended that this planning approach is reviewed so that it instead corresponds to the syllabi and student needs. Moreover, the phased development of learning from year to year should be noted in these plans.
- Good planning and preparation was carried out for the majority of classes.

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 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

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

Columba College, Killucan and Board of Management accept the findings of the Report on the quality of teaching and learning in Irish. We accept the main recommendations and have put in place an Action Plan for the subject in conjunction with the teachers in the Department to address the recommendations in the short and long term.

Since, the inspection, we have now integrated iPads for all first years and we are moving away from textbooks altogether with our subject plans for junior cycle. New resources are formulated by staff to interact with students at different stages of learning. Therefore, there is greater flexibility to target key areas of need within the student population.

Assessment for learning also plays an integral part in highlighting student needs and allows teachers evaluate student learning on an ongoing basis. This is conducted through oral questioning, the use of ICT and also through more conventional examination methods.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

“As set out in the department aims, with regard to the development of independent learner skills and learner self-awareness, it is recommended that the focus on planning for learning is based more on the syllabi and learner’s needs.”

The Irish Plan will now have been updated to reflect the needs of the learners in our school. Learning intentions and success criteria will be shared with the learners for all lessons within the subject. Collaborative planning for shared topics is encouraged within the department and greater planning for differentiation is also a priority. Key words and vocabulary will be central to lesson plans so that students become more familiar with these when doing examinations.

“It is recommended that the spoken Irish ability of students in first and second year is included as an integral part of assessment.”

An oral component for all Christmas and summer examinations for all students has been introduced at Columba College and student awards will also be presented at our Annual Awards Night for their proficiency in oral Irish by way of *Fáinne* awards. Formative feedback sheets will be given to students after oral assessments.

“In accordance with the school’s policies, and as observed in some cases, it is recommended that giving homework regularly, as well as providing formative feedback when correcting, is made standard practice.”

It is now Irish department policy that formative assessment is included in student's written work on an ongoing basis. This will be achieved by using strategies such as "two stars and a wish" for marking written assignments. One member of the department has attended Instructional Leadership workshops to develop innovative assessment strategies. This will be distributed across the department over the coming academic year. Irish homework is now given in every lesson. Detailed formative feedback is given to students on an ongoing basis allowing greater learning and awareness to take place between students and teachers.

"As well as group based and teacher questioning, it is recommended that a wider range of differentiation methods is used to benefit learning."

The Irish Plan has now been developed to include more assessment for learning strategies, with planning for differentiation as an integral part of the lessons. More differentiation and assessment techniques have been introduced by all staff as part of our move to the new junior cycle. As part of assessment for learning (AfL), students are encouraged to ask questions through Irish on an ongoing basis both in and outside the classroom. They also conduct some of their lesson work through the use of ICT which allows them instant feedback on work completed. Here students are paired together in groups allowing for greater mapping of learning needs and progress achieved. Peer tutoring also enables weaker students interact with other students to achieve higher attainment levels in class. Homework is differentiated to allow students attain set targets and this is conducted through a tiered approach whereby students work reflects their learning capacity. In class questions will be varied to reflect student diversity. Place mats and other learning games and resources are incorporated to vary teaching and learning approaches as teachers are conscious of the many differentiated styles of learning. Overall, students will be empowered to engage in the Irish curriculum at all levels and this will over time be reflected in all examinations undertaken within the school. More importantly students will gain greater appreciation of their native language.