Subject Inspection of: Irish
REPORT
Portmarnock Community School
Portmarnock, County Dublin
Roll number: 91324P

Date of inspection: 2nd October 2014
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• Teaching and learning were of a good standard in general and significant strengths were found in some of the lessons; a minority had scope for development.

• Lessons were well prepared, the learning targets were clear and good handouts helped to achieve those goals.

• Opportunities for active learning were routinely provided in all of the lessons.

• Irish is well established in the school and the timetabled allocation for the subject is good.

• High expectations are set by the school for participation and attainment at the highest level in the subject.

• Short-term planning was good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• An aspect for development is including more differentiation in the challenges given to the students and in the answers that are accepted.

• There should be a focus on developing oral proficiency with all categories of learners, weak learners included, and writing should not be given priority over speaking with such learners.

• It would be worthwhile to develop the target of ten per cent of the marks in the in-house examinations so that a greater allocation of marks can be awarded for speaking.

• It is recommended to focus more attention in general on the merits of using information and communication technology (ICT) resources, as in the best-practice approach seen in a particular lesson.
INTRODUCTION

Irish is a core subject in the education programmes in Portmarnock Community School, namely the Junior Certificate, the Leaving Certificate and the Transition Year. The Transition Year is an optional course that the majority choose to do. 879 students are registered for the 2014/15 school year. Seventy-eight students have an exemption from Irish, almost nine per cent of the overall enrolment. Most of the exemptions were awarded in primary school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The teaching and learning was of a high standard in almost all of the five lessons observed and significant strengths were found in some of them. There was scope for improvement in a minority.

• The teachers showed a high level of proficiency in the subject and good examples of the correct use of the language were provided to the students in the lessons. A positive, co-operative atmosphere prevailed both in classes where students were comfortable with the language and in classes that were much weaker.

• The target language was used routinely and it was the target language, for the most part, that the students themselves used also. In the case of junior students for whom the spoken language was a challenge, it would be worthwhile to practise information-seeking questions the students commonly ask, to be used routinely, in order to avoid questions in English.

• Lessons were well prepared, the learning targets were clear and previously prepared handouts were disseminated which helped to achieve those targets. It is recommended to check more thoroughly that students understand the learning targets so that they will be able to express those targets in their own words. In certain cases, it was assumed that the students understood what was to be achieved.

• The students had opportunities for active learning as standard procedure in all of the lessons. The provision of that work benefitted learning in almost every case as it was well directed on the learning targets.

• Very limited use was made in general of ICT resources as a means of exposing students to Irish being spoken naturally by another source apart from the teacher. In one particular lesson, very effective use was made of a short visual item in which the language was being spoken naturally. This greatly supported the challenge presented to the students and it led them to create a text for themselves. The effective integration of all of the language skills practised with this short item was excellent.

• In almost all cases, the students answered accurately and they undertook the tasks assigned to them confidently. Affirmation and encouragement was given by the teachers throughout for their efforts.

• An aspect for development is including more differentiation in the challenges given to the students and in the answers that are accepted. This is especially true when a descriptive account is being given. Efforts should always be made to firstly provide an account but to develop it by extending the vocabulary.

• Senior higher-level students showed very good ability in handling the spoken language and they were at ease when speaking with the inspector.
• Appropriate attention was given in all of the lessons to language awareness and to accuracy in the written language. However, it is advised to set the study of grammar in context in preference to devoting a full lesson on formal grammar.

• There should be a focus on developing oral language proficiency with all categories of learners, weak learners included, and writing should not be allowed to dominate the other language skills for such learners.

• Appropriate recognition for students’ oral Irish proficiency in school-based assessments is an area for development that can be addressed by implementing a common approach.

• Appropriate work was to be seen in most of the copybooks examined and an opinion of the quality of the work, and recognition of it, was recorded. Common errors in composition work are best addressed by providing examples of the correct versions, instead of correcting the common errors too often.

• A stimulating learning environment for the subject was provided in some of the classrooms and it would be worth extending those efforts.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

• Irish is well established in the school and the timetabled allocation for the subject is good.

• There has been a high attendance by the teachers at the professional development events provided by the support service for Irish for a number of years now.

• Teaching the subject is evenly distributed among five teachers who wish to teach the subject.

• The school sets high expectations for participation and attainment at the highest level in the subject. As evidence of that, most of the students in the junior cycle are taking higher-level Irish and there is no foundation level.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

• Short-term planning for lessons was good and previously-prepared resources such as printed handouts were used well to consolidate learning.

• The subject plan would benefit from providing greater clarity to learning statements and to making a clearer distinction between the learning targets identified from one year to another where the same topics are listed.

• It would be worth developing the subject plan further in order to align the schemes of work to timeframes. The resources, the learning activities, and the assessment methods that will support them should be mentioned.

• The pilot Transition Year project, based on the European Language Portfolio and language passport, is a positive development.

• The use of Irish on the school’s podcasting site is commended. In view of the limited use of ICT resources during the evaluation, greater attention is urged to the benefits of using ICT well, as seen in the excellent use made of it in one particular class.
• It would be worthwhile to develop the approach set out in the subject plan regarding the target of ten per cent of the marks in the in-house examinations so that a greater allocation of marks can be awarded for the oral language.

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