

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine
Kenmare, County Kerry
Roll number: 91503P

Date of inspection: 27 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

Dates of inspection	27 & 28 March 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall standard of teaching and learning was satisfactory. While examples of good practice were observed during all lessons, areas for development were also identified in every class.
- In all of the lessons observed Irish was the primary language of communication.
- The four language skills are accounted for in the assessment system.
- There is good provision of time, facilities and resources for Irish.
- Teachers are committed to developing student proficiency in Irish. Steps taken to achieve this, however, are limited because of weaknesses in the manner in which they, as a department, are managed.
- While subject-department meetings are frequent, there is very little collaborative planning as regards drafting a subject plan or setting out common schemes of work.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that students be given a more central role in the learning process through more extensive use of interactive tasks, thereby reducing the amount of teacher-directed learning.
- It is strongly recommended that teachers gain experience of teaching Irish in various programmes and at various levels.
- It is recommended that use be made of the subject development planning process to set out a subject plan based on the guidelines issued by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).
- It is recommended that there be common schemes of work for all year groups and that the development of a Transition Year (TY) scheme be given priority.

INTRODUCTION

Pobalscoil Inbhear Scéine, with an enrolment of 494, is a community school under the trusteeship of the Kerry Education Service and the Sisters of Saint Clare. In the school year 2011-2012 a total of five teachers were involved in teaching Irish. Four of these teachers were present on the days of the inspection visit. The school offers the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes; the Transition Year (TY) as an optional programme; and a very small number of students take the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of teaching and learning was satisfactory in so far as some examples of good practice were noted in all of the lessons observed. However, there was also scope for improvement in every lesson.
- Irish was the primary language in use in all lessons. Students displayed good understanding of what teachers said and, when given the opportunity, the majority of students made commendable efforts to use the Irish they had. They also displayed a good understanding of each other.
- The open conversation that took place at the beginning of one lesson was very worthwhile. This good practice could be further developed by giving students the opportunity to practise the new vocabulary and language structures which arise and by displaying them on the white board.
- In many classes students were set to work in pairs or in groups. However, these interactive tasks initiated very little conversation or discussion. It was mainly through individual questioning that teachers succeeded in getting students to speak Irish.
- Teacher-led instruction was the main methodology in use and, consequently, the learning process was predominantly under the control of the teacher.
- Teachers should provide their students with more experience of collaborative learning through incorporating into lesson activities simple tasks which require students to work together. When students are working collaboratively the teacher should monitor them as well as exploit opportunities to focus on individual student needs.
- In general, students were set a range of activities during lessons. Best practice was evident when there was a thematic link between these activities as this created opportunities for students to reuse the newly-taught vocabulary.
- A wide range of resources was employed in lessons and commendable efforts made to use information and communications technology (ICT).
- A courteous atmosphere existed in all classes. It was stated that some students are reluctant to express their ideas in the presence of their peers. It is best to try and overcome such shyness from the outset through the use of collaborative learning strategies or props and fancy dress.
- Good use was made of questioning in certain cases to assess students' language proficiency. In one case, effective use was made of questioning to assess students' understanding of lesson content. Teachers should bear in mind the importance of questioning as an assessment tool and should use it regularly to measure the level of language acquisition.

- Students' copybooks show that written tasks are frequently set. Copybooks were very neat and were being monitored. However, in many instances it was noted that while exercises appeared to have been corrected, student's attention had not been drawn to basic language mistakes.
- It is good that the four primary language skills are incorporated into the assessment system. It is also very worthwhile that the majority of students take the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate and this is reflected in the oral proficiency of these students.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabled provision supports teaching and learning in Irish.
- 11% of students are exempt from studying Irish in accordance with circular M10/94. Efforts are made to provide learning support for students with special educational needs when Irish classes are timetabled.
- A review of how certain year groups are assigned to class groups is recommended. Streaming should be avoided. It would be worthwhile to reflect on the possibilities arising from team teaching as a means of supporting teachers as they respond to the individual needs of all students in the mixed-ability class.
- It is strongly recommended that senior management and Irish teachers consult when class groups are being allocated to teachers. The basic principle should be that teachers gain experience of teaching Irish in all programmes and at all levels.
- Teachers are classroom based and have access to ICT facilities and storage space for their resources. Efforts have been made to create an attractive environment by means of displaying reference materials on the walls. It would also be a good idea to display examples of student's work.
- The school has a library and a fulltime librarian. Worthwhile reading initiatives are being developed and it would be helpful if these could be used to encourage students to read books in the Irish language.
- Many teachers acknowledge the potential of new methodologies being advocated for teaching Irish. They accept that new practices are necessary if they are to respond to changes in the learning context. All teachers are asked to consider developments in teaching, learning and assessment with an open mind.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The Irish department engages in the subject development planning process in so far as teachers meet regularly. Minutes of meetings show that discussions focus primarily on administrative matters.
- While there is general acceptance of the value of discussion and collaborative planning, teachers continue to work independently. Teachers are encouraged to engage in collaborative practices and to explore the possibilities of creating links with Irish teachers in other schools for the sharing of ideas.
- It is strongly recommended that common schemes of work be set out for the different year groups and that implementation of these schemes be reviewed from year to year. A

functional language programme is essential for TY and would ensure a different experience of learning Irish for students and of teaching Irish for teachers.

- It was evident that teachers had given a certain amount of consideration in their class preparation to aspects of the language to be practised. Good practice was evident when the use of newly-acquired language had a functional objective and when that same objective was shared with students at the outset.

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

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management acknowledges the report and its recommendations. The Board has set aside time to address the findings of the report. Over the next 12 months, the Board of Management will facilitate the Irish Department, in so far as is practicable, with time and resources to carry out the recommendations in this report.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board of Management asked Roinn na Gaeilge for its view on the main recommendations. Their response is as follows:

1. Roinn na Gaeilge takes Recommendation No1. on board. However, due to constraints of large classes curricular and syllabus demands and time limitations, this is not always possible. Where and when applicable, Roinn na Gaeilge will endeavour to address this.
2. The Board of Management is acutely aware that the Principal, as the curriculum planner, is best placed to decide on allocation of teachers to various levels and programmes. The Principal has engaged with the Irish Department on this recommendation. In the past, most teachers have taught various programmes and have had opportunities to teach at various levels. The Principal invited the teachers to meet with him if they wanted to change their normal routine. The work on this recommendation is ongoing.
3. Roinn na Gaeilge acknowledges Recommendation No. 3, but recognises that this was already being done on an informal basis. We will now work more collaboratively and on a formal basis during Continuous Professional Development time and Subject Department meetings.
4. Whereas there are schemes of work in place for all year groups, including Transition Year and leaving Certificate Applied, Roinn na Gaeilge acknowledges the fact that these schemes of work and their collaborative planning should be revisited and refreshed.