

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Coláiste Éamann Rís  
Callan, Co. Kilkenny  
Roll Number: 61510R**

**Date of inspection: 21 January 2010**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | AND SCIENCE**

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

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report was written following a subject inspection report in Coláiste Éamann Rís, Callan, Co. Kilkenny, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of the evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning of Irish and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of the subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with the students and the teachers, examined students' work and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and to the teachers of the subject.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Mixed-ability classes are in place for Irish at the beginning of first year in Coláiste Éamann Rís. After six weeks, the students are divided into one higher-level and one ordinary-level class group. These classes are timetabled concurrently so that students can move between the two levels. This is good practice. In the current first year, the ordinary-level class is much smaller than the higher-level group and every effort is made to give extra help and support to the students in that class, so that they may remain at ordinary level or even move up to higher level. This is good practice, as it is meeting the needs of the current cohort of students. However, this practice should be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of students.

There are four periods for Irish per week available for all classes in junior cycle. School management should review the provision for junior cycle which is not fully satisfactory. It is recommended, if possible, that a fifth period be provided for at least one of the year groups in the junior cycle. There are two periods per week for Irish allocated for the students in Transition Year (TY), a provision that is not at all satisfactory. It is not possible to provide an interesting, stimulating programme in Irish for students in TY over two periods per week. Five periods are allocated to Irish in fifth and sixth year which is satisfactory.

Usually, five teachers are involved in the teaching of Irish in the school. The school had significant difficulties this year in acquiring trained substitutes when a number of teachers were on sick leave or career break. The principal reported that the matter should be resolved to some extent shortly, and should be fully resolved at the beginning of the next school year. The classes are exchanged between the teachers under the direction of school management, so that every teacher gets the opportunity to teach the various levels and age groups. This is good practice.

Twenty-three of the two hundred students in the school have an exemption from the study of Irish. Students who received their primary education overseas until age eleven account for six exemptions, students with learning difficulties account for fourteen exemptions and two newcomer students have exemptions. There is one student in senior cycle who is not doing Irish and who does not have an exemption. School management should ensure that circular M10/94 is applied strictly at all times.

There is only one extracurricular event for Irish on the school calendar. Sixth-year students are brought on a day trip to a Gaeltacht post-primary school in Dingle where a well known writer from the area comes to talk to them. The effort and work associated with school trips are recognised and the work of the teachers in organising this day trip is commended. In the past, this trip was held over a weekend and it is a pity that this tradition has lapsed. It is strongly recommended that an interesting programme of extra-curricular and co-curricular events be devised in the school. The input and help of TY students could be enlisted in organising and running such activities.

It was reported that there is not a strong tradition in the school of students attending summer courses in Irish. It is strongly recommended that school management raise this matter with parents at their annual meetings and that the advantages to such courses are explained to them. It is recommended that accurate information be provided for parents in relation to Irish courses that are available in Kilkenny and further afield in Gaeltacht areas and elsewhere.

Although there is an annual budget available to the Irish department in the school, it was reported that the full amount is not always spent. It is recommended that the teachers of Irish discuss the needs of the department in terms of facilities and additional resources. A request for resources should be agreed and presented to senior management from the Irish department. In addition, it is recommended that the materials and resources that are in the school at present for the teaching of Irish are recorded. This list should form part of the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school. It is recommended that teachers refer to the website of An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta, [www.cogg.ie](http://www.cogg.ie), and the website of the Second Level Support Service for Irish, [www.slss.ie](http://www.slss.ie), when they are reviewing resources for the classroom.

Inservice courses in Irish have been provided for the last two and a half years by the Second Level Support Service for Irish. To date one of the teachers of Irish from the staff has attended these courses but it was reported that four teachers are due to attend another course presently and this is commended. It is important that teachers avail of opportunities to attend courses and to add to their personal professional development on a continuous basis. Courses on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching of Irish are being run in the education centres throughout the country at present and it is strongly recommended that the Irish teachers attend one of these courses, if possible.

An attractive and interesting learning environment was created in a number of the Irish classrooms, where posters, charts and samples of the students' work were displayed on the walls. The same practice should apply in all classrooms, as it is important that a stimulating Irish learning atmosphere is provided during all Irish lessons.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The teachers of Irish meet as a group once a year at the beginning of the year. Very short notes of these meetings were provided in Irish but on an English template. The allocation of students to

classes and levels in first year, the trip to the Gaeltacht, changes in the Junior Certificate examination and inservice were the main issues under discussion at these meetings, according to the notes examined. It was reported that the teachers come together more often informally as the need arises.

There is no teacher nominated to accept responsibility for co-ordinating the planning of teaching and learning of Irish in the school. These responsibilities are reportedly shared among the teachers. It is recommended that the question of co-ordination of the subject be examined again in relation to the possibility of nominating one teacher every second year to take on this role. It is important that all the teachers have the opportunity to play a leadership role in relation to the planning of the subject and in relation to the promotion of the language in the school in general.

A plan for the teaching and learning of Irish was presented on the day of the inspection. The plan includes a description of the Irish department, the layout of the classes and the timetable for the subject, a short account of the resources for Irish and plans for the various classes and levels. The work of the teachers to date on planning is commended. It is recommended, however, that the plan for Irish be expanded and developed. The plan should be on an Irish template, typewritten and available in electronic format. The plan should contain more details on the deployment of a range of methodologies and on the use of resources for different classes and levels. It is acknowledged that there are few facilities available for the use of ICT in the school at present. It is recommended, however, that there be reference in the plan to the use of new technologies in the Irish classroom and that more comprehensive planning is done on the use of ICT when the necessary facilities become available in the school.

A fairly basic plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the TY was presented during the inspection, which contained a list of topics to be covered and some brief references to assessment and to the textbook for the year. It is strongly recommended that this plan be more fully developed and extended. TY affords teachers the opportunities to teach subjects in creative, innovative ways. It is recommended that the teachers devise an interesting, attractive and stimulating programme, which would give the students experience of Irish as a living language.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The use of Irish as the language of management, instruction and communication was very good in some lessons observed and the teachers' dedication to using the target language with the students in those lessons is commended. In the case of other lessons observed, some were taught almost entirely through English and, on other occasions, there was far too much emphasis on translation from Irish to English. It is recommended that the Irish department discuss this question as a matter of urgency. Irish should be maintained as the language of communication and instruction in all Irish classes.

The students made good efforts in a few lessons observed to answer the teachers' questions in Irish. Apart from a few cases, however, only a small number of opportunities to communicate in Irish were provided for the students. In one lesson observed, the students engaged in pair work and were afforded the opportunity to ask questions of one another in Irish. In two other cases, the lessons began with open questions to the students about themselves, their pastimes and other areas of interest. These approaches are commended and it was observed that the students derived benefit and enjoyment from them.

In the vast majority of lessons observed, however, the only opportunity provided to students to speak Irish was by way of answering the teacher's questions. Since the teachers sought the English translation of Irish lines and words in the main, it was generally English that was spoken in the Irish classes. There is an urgent need to change this practice. Regular opportunities should be provided for the students to practise Irish and make use of what they learn in the class. For classes who may have difficulties learning the language, it is recommended that daily use be made of strategies to facilitate communication in Irish, for example, through the use of pair work, group work, role play and games.

In a few cases that were observed, the students' pronunciation was corrected in an understanding manner which did not affect their self-esteem. Use was made of repetition in the class in order to ensure that the students were able to pronounce words and newly-learned phrases properly. The students' attention was directed also to the correct usage of verbal tenses and this approach is commended.

A range of activities was in place in some of the lessons observed. In those cases, three or four activities were completed by the students and each student continued working quietly and diligently. This approach is commended. The teachers circulated around the classrooms in some lessons, talking with students, assisting them and ensuring that the work was completed. In relation to certain lessons, however, teachers remained seated at the top of the classroom and did not circulate among the students to ensure that the work was done correctly and taken down properly. When this work was examined as part of the evaluation, it was observed that the work was not being completed correctly by the students, when no direction or advice was given to them during the class.

Effective use was made of the whiteboard in some cases observed and key-words, answers to questions and phrases and new vocabulary were displayed for students. In another lesson, key-words, which related to the lesson in hand, were put on a chart and this was employed as an aid and a stimulus for the students as they answered questions on lesson content. Apart from the whiteboard and some photocopied materials, few attractive and stimulating resources were used in the Irish lessons observed. There is a need to use a much wider range of materials and resources in the Irish classes, in order to place the lesson content in a contemporary and interesting context for students. Use should be made of photographs, pictures, music, television programmes, compact discs and any other resources that would help to make the teaching and learning of Irish interesting and relevant for the students.

## **ASSESSMENT**

House examinations are held at Christmas and in the summer. Mock examinations are administered to the students in the examinations classes. Reports are sent home to parents after the house examinations and it was reported that parents are kept informed also by means of meetings and the homework diary.

It was not clear during the inspection whether or not oral skills are assessed formally in the same way as writing and aural skills. It is recommended that a short oral examination is given to every student from first year onwards in order to impress upon them the importance of speaking the language from day one and to give them practice in answering questions in a formal situation. It is important that the results of this examination are given as a separate mark in the reports that are sent home to the parents.

A good amount of work was observed in the majority of the copybooks that were reviewed. It was obvious also that homework is corrected regularly. A variety of practices is employed, however, in relation to the correction of the work. It is recommended that the teachers discuss among themselves the question of homework correction and that an effective correction system is agreed which would give students the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. It was noticed in a few cases also that insufficient work was planned for the class period and that students were allowed to start on their homework before the end of class. If such a situation arises, it is recommended that this time be spent on oral work practice. The more opportunities the students have to speak the language the better.

A satisfactory number of students takes higher level in the Junior Certificate examinations but it is recommended that the aim should be to raise the achievements of students over time, if possible. It is recommended that the Irish teachers and the senior management discuss strategies to increase the number of students taking higher-level Irish in the Leaving Certificate over a period of time. An increased emphasis on speaking Irish and on strategies to make the learning of Irish more interesting and more relevant for students should help to achieve these aims.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main findings identified in the evaluation:

- The work of the teachers in relation to organising the day trip to Dingle, in order to support the the teaching and learning of Irish in the school, is commended.
- An attractive Irish learning environment was created in a number of classroom observed which supported the teaching and learning of the language.
- The work, which has been done to date by the teachers on planning, is commended.
- The use of Irish as a language of management, instruction and communication was very good in a number of classes that were observed.
- A range of activities was observed in some Irish classes and there was good pace to the classes as a result.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made :

- That school management reviews the time allocation for Irish in junior cycle and in the TY.
- That a co-ordinator be appointed among the Irish teachers to provide a leadership role in relation to planning for the teaching and learning of Irish.
- That the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish is extended and developed incorporating planning for the use of ICT, and a revised TY plan.
- That a strong policy regarding the use of the target language in the Irish classroom is put in place.
- That regular opportunities for the oral use of the target language are provided in the Irish classes so that the students may practise and use what they are learning.
- That a wider range of materials and resources are used during the Irish classes so that the learning of Irish is placed in an interesting, contemporary and relevant context for the students.
- That use is made of a wider range of methodologies in the Irish classes so that learning the language may be more interesting and enjoyable.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the Irish teachers and with the principal at the end of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations were presented and discussed.

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