

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

**Subject Inspection of Irish**  
**REPORT**

**Dominican College,**  
**Wicklow Town, Co. Wicklow**  
**Roll Number: 61860V**

**Date of inspection: 17 November 2009**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F**  
**O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N**  
**A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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

---

## **SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Dominican College, Wicklow. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Irish and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and 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 subject teachers. 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.

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

The school has mixed-ability class groups in first year. The students are then divided in second year between one ordinary-level class group and two higher-level class groups based on the results of examinations at the end of first year. This arrangement continues in third year also. Mixed-ability class groups are formed once again in Transition Year (TY), an arrangement which is in keeping with the philosophy of TY. There are two higher-level class groups and two ordinary-level class groups in fifth and sixth year. It was reported that the number of higher-level classes in sixth year falls occasionally to one class group depending on the students' level of ability in that particular cohort. Every effort is made to encourage the students to remain at the higher level in Irish for the State examinations. Good timetabled provision is made with regard to the amount of time allocated to the teaching and learning of Irish for each of the year groups.

It was noted, however, that the number of students taking higher-level for the Leaving Certificate has been falling in the last couple of years. It is clear from the results of those students taking ordinary-level papers in the Leaving Certificate that more students would have the ability to attempt the higher level in that examination. School management and the Irish teachers are encouraged to discuss this matter to see if strategies can be implemented to increase the number of students taking higher-level papers in Irish for Leaving Certificate examinations.

There are four teachers engaged in teaching Irish in the school. They are all graduates in Irish with years of experience in teaching the subject. Levels and year groups are rotated among the teachers in order to give each teacher the opportunity to get extensive experience of teaching the different age-groups and levels. This approach is commended as best practice.

Twenty-four students in the school have exemptions from the study of Irish, from a total of five hundred and one students. Students who received their primary education abroad until the age of eleven account for two exemptions. Students from abroad account for eight exemptions and students with learning difficulties account for fourteen exemptions.

Significant efforts are made to celebrate “Seachtain na Gaeilge” in the school by organising Irish-language and cultural activities and events at lunchtime during the week and during the Irish lessons themselves. One of the Irish teachers co-ordinates the programme for the week and TY students help with the organisation of the various activities, for example, a céilí mór, music sessions, a poster competition, an essay competition and a quiz. The teachers’ efforts in this respect are highly commended. However, it is recommended that a co-curricular and extra-curricular programme of activities be devised which would give the students experience of Irish as a living language and which would continue throughout the year.

It was reported that a certain number of students go to the Gaeltacht each year but exact numbers in relation this were not available during the inspection. School management and the teachers of Irish are encouraged to remind students and their parents of the advantages of spending a period of time on an Irish course in the summer. It would be well worthwhile also to inform them about courses available locally as well other courses further a field. A partial Gaeltacht scholarship is awarded as a prize for the essay competition during “Seachtain na Gaeilge” and this effort to encourage students to take an interest in Gaeltacht courses is commended.

The Irish teachers have an annual budget and it was reported that the Irish teachers’ requests are discussed from year to year and that applications are then forwarded to school management for whatever resources are needed. The resources are kept in the teachers’ own classrooms and on a shelf in the staffroom. It is recommended that all the resources in the school for the teaching and learning of Irish be recorded and listed and that such a list form part of the plan for Irish.

All the Irish teachers have their own classrooms. The vast majority of the rooms were decorated in a very stimulating manner indeed with posters, students’ work and other material relevant to the teaching and learning of the language. It is recommended that this best practice be implemented in all the Irish classrooms.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The Irish teachers meet as a group once per term. Minutes are kept of those meetings and are provided to management. The most frequent references in the minutes were to the allocation of students to classes, examinations, TY and schemes of work. A co-ordinator of planning for the teaching and learning of the subject is nominated among the Irish teachers and this role is rotated among the teachers each year. This is good practice, as it gives each teacher the opportunity to take a leadership role in relation to subject planning and coordination.

A plan was provided for the teaching and learning of Irish during the inspection. The plan includes details of the administration of the Irish department, relevant policies and a description of the allocation of students to classes. As part of the plan, schemes of work are set out for the various levels and year groups. For the most part, the schemes of work consist of lists of topics based on chapters of the textbooks and are laid out according to the school terms. The work carried out by the Irish teachers on planning for the subject to date is commended. It is recommended, however, that the plan be further developed now and that more details be included that would reflect the standard of teaching and learning observed during the inspection.

The plan should contain information in relation to the methodologies to be used and the materials and resources to be deployed. Learning targets and topics should be thematically identified as opposed to being linked to chapters in the textbooks. In addition planning for the use of information and communications technology (ICT) should be a central part of the plan. It was reported that two Irish teachers intend to attend the Support Service for Irish ICT course in 2010 and the teachers’ commitment in this respect is highly commended.

A plan for teaching and learning Irish in TY was provided as part of the overall plan for Irish. It is clear that considerable efforts are being made to provide an interesting programme for the students in that year through the use of films and by participation in the organisation of Seachtain na Gaeilge. The teachers are encouraged to continue exploring other language activities as part of the year's programme which would give the students different insights into learning the language. Guests could be invited to the school to give workshops or lectures. Other suggestions were also discussed during the inspection visit. TY students' project work was examined during the inspection. Although some of the work was very good, the students need to be reminded that what they write should be fairly accurate and it is recommended that they should be provided with advice and guidance in relation to this.

Extremely comprehensive planning was completed for all the lessons observed. The efforts spent on preparing slides, class activities and films for use in lessons, resources which greatly increased the effectiveness of learning in the lessons and the interest of the students in the lessons, are commended. Comprehensive written lesson plans were provided for some of the lessons observed.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The use of Irish as the language of management, communication and teaching in the classes observed was, on the whole, excellent. Translation from Irish to English was used in one case observed, however, to give class instructions in the two languages when this was unnecessary. On the whole, teachers made considerable efforts to avoid using translation from Irish to English and a range of strategies was used to ensure students' understanding of the lesson content. The teachers' commitment to the use of the target language is acknowledged and praised.

The students made good attempts to answer the teachers' questions in Irish. The students took an active part in all the lessons and it was clear that they were enjoying and benefitting from their lessons. Teachers circulated around the classrooms talking with students, correcting their work and ensuring that each person understood the work in hand. It was clear that the students and teachers had mutual respect for each other and the good atmosphere which pertained in all classes was noted. There was a range of activities in all lessons which ensured a good pace. The students were given good opportunities to practise the four language skills – listening, reading, speaking and writing.

The Irish teachers are highly commended for their continual efforts during the lessons to present lesson content to the students in attractive, interesting and stimulating ways. There was appropriate use of the textbook as a resource and not as the principal instrument of teaching. Use was made of a range of teaching methodologies and of a wide range of materials and resources to place the content of the lessons in a contemporary and interesting context for the students. In two lessons observed, a film was shown in class. In one case, the film was on the Leaving Certificate course and the film was discussed, scene by scene, to ensure that the students understood all the themes and issues raised. In the other case, a short film was shown to a TY class group on a contemporary and controversial theme. The students were clearly very interested in the film and enjoyed the class. It is recommended, in cases where such films are shown, that a list of differentiated questions be prepared for distribution to work groups and that the groups then are asked to report back to the class on the answers and issues which arose in the discussion. Sometimes, it is easier to stimulate discussion on a controversial subject in small groups.

In certain lessons, use was made of interesting slides which were prepared to teach different poems. The slides were shown with the aid of data projector. The use of ICT helped greatly in presenting the material to the students in an interesting way. Pictures were used in another

case to present a poem to the students. This device worked well to ensure that the poem was presented to the students in a way which was understandable to them. The teachers are greatly commended for their efforts in preparing or accessing support material for the lessons. It is recommended that this be done for all classes and that continued use be made of resources such as music, ICT, pictures, the Irish-language communications media, podcasts and posters.

The manner in which opportunities to use the target language were created for the students in all the Irish lessons observed is commended. Pair work and group work were used to provide students with alternative opportunities to speaking Irish as opposed to just answering the teacher's questions. When group work is taking place, however, teachers should continually assess the size of the groups and review the effectiveness of the work on a continuous basis. Sometimes, if work groups are too large, not every student is given the same chance to talk or participate.

The number of approaches recommended by the Second Level Support Services for Irish which had been implemented in the Irish lessons was noted. Their use had a significant effect and they greatly enhanced the value of the lessons. It is worthwhile, however, when students are putting the lines of poems, which have been cut up, in order, that the teacher should read the poem aloud a couple of times to gain the best effect from that activity. The white board was used effectively to illustrate additional points, to show key words and phrases and to present students' answers to questions.

Aspects of grammar were taught in an integrated way in the course of many lessons. This approach is commended and the way in which, in one case observed, the students were reminded to use the correct tense of the verb while talking or answering the teacher's questions, is commended. Teachers should ensure that full sentences are sought as answers to questions as opposed to accepting single words. It is important that the students receive as much experience as possible of compiling simple sentences in oral Irish.

## **ASSESSMENT**

In-school examinations are organised twice a year, at Christmas and in the summer. Reports are sent home to parents after those examinations. The school diary, parent-teacher meetings and the student's progress card are used to keep parents informed of their children's progress. At the moment the progress card and homework policy are being reviewed. School management is commended for its commitment to keeping parents informed in the most effective way.

There was a considerable amount of work to be seen in the copybooks examined and it was obvious that homework is assigned and corrected regularly. The homework assigned in the lessons observed was based on the class work and, before the end of lessons, teachers ensured that the students had a good understanding of what was to be achieved in the homework. The homework examined in the copybooks was carefully corrected and a grade or mark and a description of the standard of work given, as well as providing guidance to the student. This is good practice. It was reported that the students' oral skills are assessed as part of the Christmas examinations and this approach is highly commended. Each student should undergo an oral examination from first year onwards in order to remind the students of the importance of this aspect of language learning from the outset. The results of the oral assessment should be shown as a separate item in the report sent home to parents.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The teachers' efforts in organising a programme of Irish activities during "Seachtain na Gaeilge" are commended.
- The work carried out to date on devising a plan for teaching and learning of the language is commended.
- There was very good preliminary planning for all lessons observed and the lessons were well-paced as a result.
- A wide range of materials and resources was used during the Irish lessons, an approach which is highly commended.
- Many examples of best practice in teaching were observed during lessons.
- Good efforts were made to give the students plenty of opportunities to use the target language during the Irish lessons, through the use of pair work and group work.
- The way in which the recommended approaches of the Second Level Support Service for Irish were used in the lessons to encourage and persuade students to take an interest in learning the language is commended.
- The formal assessment of students' oral skills as part of the Christmas in-house examinations is best practice.

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

- It is recommended that the celebration of Seachtain na Gaeilge be further developed and that a programme of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities be devised throughout the school year.
- It is recommended that the resources for teaching Irish in the school be recorded and that this list form part of the plan for Irish.
- It is recommended that the plan for teaching and learning Irish be developed and that it contain details of methodologies, resources, learning objectives and the use of ICT.
- It is recommended that the Irish plan for TY be augmented and developed to ensure that students are given enough opportunities to experience Irish as a living language.
- It is recommended that strategies be discussed to raise the number of students taking higher-level Irish papers for the Leaving Certificate.

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

*Published March 2011*