REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>13 and 14 April 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Inspection activities undertaken | • Interaction with students
• Review of samples of students’ written work and of their school diaries
• Feedback to individual teachers
• Feedback to principal and to the teachers
• Review of relevant documentation
• Meeting with subject co-ordinator
• Observation of learning and teaching during eight class periods
• Interaction with students
• Review of samples of students’ written work and of their school diaries
• Feedback to individual teachers
• Feedback to principal and to the teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

• Both the management and teaching staff in this school have made satisfactory progress in implementing the recommendations made in a previous report in 2004.

• The quality of learning and teaching in the majority of classes was very good.

• Assessment practices are very good.

• A very suitable range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities which are of a very high standard is provided to support the students’ learning.

• The Irish department engages in exemplary practice in identifying and agreeing targets for development for every school year.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The subject plans should be based more closely on the language functions and on the learning outcomes that are expected at different stages.

• A special module of the subject should be prepared for implementation at the beginning of the school year with the first year students as part of the transition process from primary school.

• Methodologies along with teaching and learning strategies should be discussed at department meetings and opportunities for peer observation should be availed of as means of sharing good practice and experience.
INTRODUCTION
Athlone Community College is a co-educational post-primary school, which is situated in the town of Athlone. There are 673 second level students on the roll. The school provides a Transition Year programme as an option. Irish was inspected in the school previously in 2004.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The teaching and learning of Irish in the majority of classes was of very good quality. In half of the classes, the students displayed a very good level of understanding as well as a very good ability to express themselves through the medium of the language. In these cases it was evident that the teachers held high, but appropriate, expectations of the students' learning.

- The levels of participation by the students at the highest levels in the certificate examinations over a period of years are very good. Although the levels of attainment are very good in general, scope exists in the case of the Junior Certificate for increasing the number of candidates who undertake the examination at the higher level and of those achieving the higher grades.

- The subject was presented to the students in almost all classes in a pleasant and stimulating way and the available facilities along with suitable resources were used to support learning.

- The aim of the lesson was made known to the students at the beginning of almost all classes. Best practice was observed in the class in which the expected learning outcomes were shared with the students. It is recommended that this practice be extended and developed so that they would have an opportunity to reflect on their own learning at end of lessons.

- A suitable range of methodologies and of teaching and learning strategies was used in the majority of the classes. A minority of classes were too teacher-centred. There were difficulties in certain instances with the structure and management of tasks assigned to pairs and groups.

- Suitable emphasis was placed on the students’ language accuracy in most of the classes. More grammatical terminology should be shared and used with the students, over and above the terms “verb” and “tense”.

- It is recommended that more attention be paid to differentiating learning in class and in the homework assigned.

- In regard to a minority of classes, the teacher should ensure that the language which is presented to the students orally and in writing is accurate.

- The management of all classes was very good and, in the majority of them, there was a pleasant and mutually respectful relationship between the teachers and the students.

- There were samples of the students’ work and other material printed in Irish, which was supportive of learning, on display in the majority of classrooms.

- The assessment practices are very good. Common tests are set and all of the language skills are taken into account when doing so. The school report form has been amended so that marks for spoken Irish can be included.
There were marked variations in the students’ school diaries from class to class in regard to recording homework. This practice should be reviewed.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Time provision for Irish in the various programmes is very good and, in the case of most class groups, the distribution of class periods is also very good. It is recommended, as was done in 2004, that no class group has more than one Irish class period per day.
- A very suitable range of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, which are of a very high standard, is provided, to support the students’ learning. These include opportunities for participation in debating competitions at local and national level.
- It is recommended that the assessment policy be amended to include homework and its associated procedures. As was recommended in 2004, the policy should specify an approach to providing feedback on this work which, as was the case in certain instances, would be constructive and would support the progress in learning.
- There is a very good supply of equipment and resources available that include information and communications technology.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Developmental planning is a central feature of the work of the Irish department and firm efforts are made by its members to put learning from their own professional development into effect in this work.
- The functioning and co-ordination of the department is very effective. The Irish department engages in exemplary practice in identifying and agreeing targets for development for every school year.
- The teachers assume the role of co-ordinator in rotation and it is recommended that they do so for periods of two or three years.
- The subject plan is of good quality. There is a very good level of collaborative planning in operation with fitting emphasis on the thematic integration of the development of the language skills.
- In the development of the subject plans over the next number of years, it is recommended that they be based more closely on the language functions and that the learning outcomes that would be expected at various stages of the learning are defined. The defined outcomes should then be used as a guide to the planning and preparation of classes and as criteria for assessment.
- In order to link the learning and its development more effectively with the experience and ability of the students in first year, it is recommended that a module of the subject be prepared and taught and that they be examined on its content at end of a six to eight week period during the first term. The subject plan for these classes for the rest of the school year should be based on the results and their analysis.
- It is recommended that beneficial use be made of the experience and good practice that exists in the department in regard to the management and arrangement of tasks that are based on working in pairs and groups.
• It is recommended that methodologies and teaching and learning strategies be discussed at department meetings and that opportunities for peer observation be used as a way of sharing good practice and experience. In addition, it is recommended that a brief account of the practices that are used in the classes be provided in the section of the plan that deals with methodologies.

• The planning and preparation for individual classes was very good in the majority of cases. In a small number of instances the amount of time available should have been taken into consideration and a greater level of preparedness displayed to make changes where necessary in order that lessons could be brought to a suitable conclusion.

• In regard to some classes, it is recommended that the language which the students require in order to undertake tasks in pairs or groups should be taken into account at the planning stage.

• In almost all instances the teachers had prepared suitable resources themselves or had selected them from other sources.

• The teachers maintain very good and regular records of the students’ achievements. As is the practice in many instances, it is recommended that the marks that are awarded for oral Irish be clearly indicated in the diary of every teacher.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal teacher and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

Published June 2012