

**Department of Education & Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Newtown School  
Waterford  
Roll number: 65010R**

**Date of inspection: 1 May 2015**



**A N ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF  
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION  
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	1 May 2015
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during 5 class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- Use of the target language was good overall, with some scope for improvement in a small number of lessons.
- A supportive learning atmosphere had been created in several classrooms to help student learning.
- A plan for the teaching and learning of the language was provided during the evaluation and it was clear that a lot of time and effort had been spent on it.
- Teachers did the majority of the talking during lessons and very few opportunities were given to students to speak Irish except when answering the teacher's questions.
- Certain efforts are made to present Irish as a living language to students by organising events during Seachtain na Gaeilge and by including Irish in European languages day.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Proper opportunities for communication should be created regularly during Irish lessons to provide students with an opportunity to speak the language.
  - It is recommended that the division of higher and ordinary-level classes be delayed until the beginning of second year rather than at the beginning of first year as is the case at present.
  - It is recommended that the profile of the language in the school be raised through increasing the number of enjoyable Irish activities being organised outside of formal lessons.
  - It is recommended that a new plan be developed for the Transition Year in which emphasis is placed on Irish as a contemporary living language and in which material on the Leaving Certificate syllabus is omitted.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Newtown School is a co-educational secondary school under the patronage of “The Quakers”. The school offers the following programmes to the 317 students currently attending the school: the Junior Certificate, a compulsory Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the established Leaving Certificate. Around a third of the students have an exemption from Irish, many of whom have come from other countries to receive their education in the school.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The use of Irish as a learning medium was good overall, although some scope for improvement was noted in a small number of lessons. It is recommended that translation from Irish to English in order to confirm the students’ understanding of the lesson content be avoided.
- On the whole, it was the teachers who did the majority of the talking during lessons, except whenever students were answering the teacher’s questions. Very few opportunities to communicate in the target language were provided to students in each of the Irish lessons. It is essential that students have an opportunity to functionally use what they learn during lessons through speaking the language.
- It is recommended that regular use be made of pair work, group work, role-play and language games in order to enable students and to encourage them to speak and properly communicate with each other. It is recommended that this approach be taken in respect of first and second year initially and that the practice be extended gradually throughout the whole school.
- It is recommended that a support visit be requested from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to provide continuing professional development to teachers in the implementation of the communicative approach.
- The learning goals were explained to students in a couple of lessons observed and this good practice is commended. The learning goals should be revisited at the end of the lesson to assess students’ learning and to encourage them to become more involved in their own learning.
- An Irish-English dictionary was used during one lesson, an approach to be commended. To build on this good practice, it is recommended that online dictionaries be shown to students in class and that they be used regularly to embed their use in class and at home.
- Certain aspects of Irish grammar were interwoven into several lessons, an approach that is to be commended. However, it would be worth requesting full sentences as answers to questions and students should be reminded to give the verb used in the question in their answers.
- One TY lesson that was observed involved preparation for the Leaving Certificate oral examination. While it is extremely important to develop the students’ experience of speaking Irish, this should be done through communication and not through focussing on examination techniques that could be developed in sixth year. It is recommended that there be an emphasis on the nurturing and development of oral communication in the plan for TY.

- A lot of time was spent writing material on the whiteboard for students. Such material should be prepared in advance and displayed on the whiteboard with the help of a projector. While there are good information and communications technology (ICT) facilities available in the classrooms, little use was made of them during lessons. It is recommended that a much wider range of teaching material and resources be used to stimulate the students' interest in learning Irish and to present Irish to them in a contemporary relevant context.
- A supportive learning environment had been created in some of the classrooms observed. This approach is recommended and it would be worth regularly focussing the students' attention on the material on the walls in order to support the development of literacy in Irish.

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

- The provision for Irish on the school timetable is satisfactory, with four periods per week for junior cycle year groups, three periods in the Transition Year and five periods in fifth and sixth year. It is recommended that an additional period per week be provided, if possible, to at least one junior cycle year group.
- Students are divided into ordinary and higher-level classes at the beginning of first year. It is much too early to divide them at this point and it is recommended that mixed classes be created until the beginning of second year.
- Certain staff members have attended all of the in-service courses provided by the Second Level Support Service for Irish in the last few years. This opportunity was not available to all teachers and, therefore, it is recommended that a support visit be requested from the PDST to provide them with an opportunity for continuing professional development in the communicative approach.
- Good efforts are made to organise a small number of Irish events in the school outside of formal lessons to facilitate the students' experience of the living language. Many suggestions were given to the management and staff during the evaluation visit in relation to ways of raising the profile of the language in the school and of stimulating the students' interest in learning the language.
- Although it is mentioned in the plan for Irish that all year groups sit an oral examination, this is not the case. It is recommended that the students' communication skills be assessed from first year onwards.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- One of the teachers is named as coordinator of planning for the teaching and learning of Irish. Although minutes are kept of the meetings, they contain very little information. It is recommended that records be kept of the decisions taken and of the actions to be carried out. Teaching and learning should be a fixed item on the agenda of future meetings to provide teachers with an opportunity to share ideas and best practice with each other.
- A plan for the teaching and learning of Irish was provided on the day of the evaluation. The plan was clearly laid out and it was clear that a lot of time and effort was spent on it. This work is commended. However, it is recommended that the work schemes be laid out

in an integrated way, with information about topics or themes to be covered, as well as methodologies, use of teaching resources, including ICT, and assessment methods.

- Only a small number of students sit higher level in state examinations. It is recommended that the management and teachers discuss ways to increase this number over a period of time, as well as significantly cutting back on the number of students who sit foundation level in Irish in state examinations.

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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 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**

### **Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The school welcomes this report and thanks the staff for their participation and engagement with the inspection process during the inspection and in following up with the recommendations suggested.

### **Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection**

Actions following the recommendations:

- As of September 2015 all 1<sup>st</sup> year Irish classes are taught as class groups of mixed ability and we have deferred the division to Higher and Ordinary levels until 2<sup>nd</sup> year as recommended.
- An in-school support visit from the PDST has been requested to develop the communicative approach to teaching the language.
- The subject department is investigating initiatives to enhance the profile of the language in the school.
- It is planned to provide all students with a least one formal oral examination during the year.
- There is a commitment from the school to support the retraining of the teachers in the department with the use of ICT to support learning in the classroom.