An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

The Donahies Community School
[Pobalscoil na nDomhnaí]
Donaghmede, Dublin 13
Roll Number: 91318U

Date of inspection: 14 February 2014
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

- The level of teaching was good and beneficial and there were strengths in the quality of learning in most lessons.
- There was a good atmosphere in the lessons and the students were giving full cooperation.
- There was a certain attention given to differentiation, which gave students of different abilities a chance to give a short answer or to make a greater effort to express themselves.
- Irish has a good standing in the Donahies Community School, senior management strongly supports the subject and high expectations are set out for it.
- The provision made for the subject on the curriculum and on the timetable is of a high quality.
- The participation rates of students in the subject show, in the junior cycle in particular, that the highest number of students are encouraged to undertake higher level.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students should be given an opportunity to hear elements of the language spoken from other sources, as well as the teacher, as often as possible; information and communications technology (ICT) resources are very suitable for this.
- An effort should be made to practise normal conversation more often with the students as a regular feature of the lesson.
- The assessment aspect of the lesson plan should be developed as the description is too general as it is; particular attention should be paid to assessment of the spoken language and how that will be done in every year, continuously, and as part of in-house exams.
INTRODUCTION

Irish is central in all educational programmes that are provided in the Donahies Community School, including optional programmes, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year, and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), as well as the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate. There are 484 students registered for the 2013/14 school year and an additional 30 students are enrolled in Further Education courses, bringing total enrolment over 500 students. The school participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) scheme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The level of teaching was good and beneficial in the five lessons which were observed and there were strengths in the quality of teaching in most lessons.

• A positive attitude and approach prevailed in the teaching of the lessons, an approach which created self confidence among the students regarding the challenges facing them.

• Clear learning objectives were set out at the beginning of most of the lessons and this gave the students a clear objective to focus on. In the best examples, these objectives were laid out in very constructive ways that emphasised ‘I will be able to . . .’ In other instances only the subject of the lesson was provided.

• The methods of questioning used in teaching were satisfactory. There was a certain attention to differentiation, which gave students of different abilities a chance to give a short answer or to make a greater effort to express themselves. It would be worth developing this skill further. The most capable students should also be appropriately challenged.

• The teachers used the target language at all times; the standard of language was very good for the most part and the students understood a lot. Some of the language used in the teaching was inaccurate in places and taking a revision course in language accuracy from time to time would be beneficial.

• Great ability was shown in a junior class with a variety of learning activities. The students enjoyed the board game snakes and ladders, used to practise the irregular verbs. Numeracy was being developed in this game as well with the students counting through Irish.

• Students should be given an opportunity to hear elements of the language spoken from other sources, as well as the teacher, as often as possible. ICT resources are very suitable for this. There are great possibilities here also for the team teaching which is set out for Transition year.

• The desire the students in the LCA class showed to willingly participate in the lesson is great praise for the quality of the teaching. They enjoyed making progress with pieces of aural comprehension, reading comprehension and writing which were suited to their abilities.

• The students’ work in their copybooks was commendable and there is scope to give more recognition to that work and to give more encouraging guidance on the quality of that work.
• There was a high quality learning environment in the Irish classrooms which encouraged learning.

• There was a good atmosphere in all the lessons and the students were giving full cooperation. In one class the students expressed honestly that they were at a loss with the task they were given – to compose a story from a series of pictures they were given. This was a sign of the good relationship between teachers and students and this led to the realisation that the task was too ambitious and too challenging.

• An effort should be made to practise normal conversation more often with the students as a regular feature of the class. Students’ cooperation and good communication skills from the teacher are needed for this. Both of those elements were evident in the lessons.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

• Irish has a good standing in the school and it is strongly supported by senior management. As an indication of this, the school’s representatives opted to conduct all discussions during the subject inspection in the school, and in all related correspondence, through Irish.

• The provision of five class periods per week on the timetable in every year is of a high quality and the provision for LCA and Transition Year is productive. There is an even distribution of Irish lessons in every class during the week.

• High expectations are set out for Irish and the participation rates of students in the subject show, in the junior cycle in particular, that the highest number of students are encouraged to undertake higher level. Another expression of these expectations is the low number of students who are undertaking foundation level in both cycles.

• The provision of teaching resources is very satisfactory and there is a scholarship scheme for Gaeltacht places as an incentive to students.

• Teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD) is greatly supported and events of support services for Irish are well attended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• The short-term planning for lessons was good and resources were ready such as printed handouts that were used well to consolidate learning.

• Apart from an aural comprehension resource, the ICT resources which were used in the lessons were mostly for illustrative purposes.

• Good aspects can be seen in the subject department’s plan. There is a reflective account there which recognises significant weaknesses in the subject among first year students and it is commendable that remedies are identified for those deficits instead of assigning blame for them.

• The list of topics that are identified in the schemes of work should be developed and attention should be focussed on learning targets that are to be achieved, those targets should be different from year to year, and from level to level. The resources, learning activities and assessment methods that will support them should be mentioned alongside them.
• The assessment aspect in the subject plan should be developed as the description is too
general as it is. Particular attention should be paid to assessment of the spoken language
and how that is done in every year, on a continuous basis, and as part of in-house exams.

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