

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Good Counsel College  
New Ross, County Wexford  
Roll Number: 63610I**

**Date of inspection: 1 February 2012**



**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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	1 February 2012
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with the principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to the principal and to the teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The use of the Irish language in management, teaching and communication was excellent in the classes that were observed but translation was used in some instances unnecessarily.
- In some of the lessons observed effective communicative strategies were used to encourage students to speak in the target language but such strategies need to be extended to all classes.
- The efforts of the Irish teachers to develop and foster students' experiences of Irish as a living language are commendable.
- Information and communication technologies (ICT) were used in some instances but this use could be further extended.
- The number of students undertaking higher-level Irish in the state examinations is good.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- It is recommended that effective activities for the promotion of communication in the target language are provided in all classes so that students can practically apply what they have learnt in class.
  - It is recommended that a co-curricular and extra-curricular programme be developed to further motivate students in regard to learning the language.
  - It is recommended that students' communicative skills be assessed from first year onwards and that the results of these assessments would appear as a separate mark on the reports issued to parents.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Good Counsel College is a voluntary secondary school for boys with an enrolment of 777 students for the current school year. The school provides a range of programmes including the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The use of the Irish language in management, teaching and communication was excellent in most classes observed. In some instances translation was used when it was not required and it is recommended that the Irish department agree a policy in this regard. Other strategies should be applied to confirm students' understanding of the content of the lesson.
- In some classes a range of strategies was used to encourage students to speak in the target language. In one instance observed, a game was used to provide students with opportunities to communicate in the target language. This worked well although care needs to be taken regarding the pace of the game for students who may not be as proficient in the language. It was felt that some opportunities were not availed of in other lessons to encourage students to use the target language by using pair work or group work. It is recommended that effective activities be included in every lesson, providing students with opportunities to communicate, so that they can apply in a practical way what they have learned in class.
- ICT was used effectively in most lessons observed, and such use is highly commended as it enhanced students' understanding of the subject of the lesson. The use of ICT is helpful in providing students with a context for the content of the lesson and it assists their learning in general. It is recommended that the use of ICT be extended to all classes. It is also recommended that a more extensive range of teaching materials and resources be used in classes. The following resources should be used as appropriate: music, podcasts, Irish and English print media, films, television programmes, pictures, photographs and any other materials that would be appealing and interesting for students and that would help to provide them with a more contemporary context for the lessons.
- Some materials pertaining to language teaching and learning was displayed on the walls in some classrooms. It is recommended that the amount of material on display be increased to support students' learning and literacy development in Irish. Such material should be referred to regularly during lessons and students' attention should be drawn to verb and vocabulary charts as they attempt to create simple sentences. A specific area of the school has been set aside for Irish classrooms and it is hoped that in time students will feel comfortable using the language in this area. This should greatly enhance teachers' efforts regarding spoken Irish in classrooms, and such an approach is commendable.
- In a few instances observed, the aims and the learning objectives were displayed on the whiteboard at the beginning of the lesson and it is recommended that this practice be extended to all classes.
- It is recommended that errors in grammar and pronunciation be corrected regularly without impacting on students' self-confidence or on their language flow. Repetition could be used more extensively to ensure that students can pronounce and use new words and phrases in the appropriate context. In one instance it was observed that a list of words was taught without any context. It is recommended that students be taught how to pronounce words and how to use them in sentences when new vocabulary is being

acquired. Online dictionaries could be used in class to good effect and students should be shown initially how to use these so that they can use them at home also.

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

- Four periods of Irish a week are provided for all junior cycle classes, three periods are available in TY, and the provision in fifth and sixth year is five periods a week. It is recommended, if possible, that an additional period be provided for at least one of the year groups at junior cycle level.
- The work undertaken by the school to enhance the profile of Irish including celebrating Seachtain na Gaeilge and refurbishing an area of the school for Irish classrooms is commended. Efforts to encourage students to attend a residential summer college that is organised each year in the school and that is in great demand are also very commendable. A large number of students from the school attend the college and it was indicated that in general this has had a very positive impact on students' attitudes to learning Irish at school. Suggestions were made to staff about ways in which a co-curricular and extra-curricular programme could be organised throughout the year for Irish.
- Currently students' communicative skills are formally assessed in sixth year and some discussion is taking place in regard to implementing the optional Junior Certificate oral Irish test in the junior cycle. Regardless of the state examinations, it is recommended that students' communicative skills would be formally assessed from first year onwards and that the results of these assessments would appear as a separate mark on the report issued to parents.
- It was reported that teachers attend the training courses organised by the Second Level Support Services for Irish and this is commended.

### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- There was careful, comprehensive planning in place for most of the lessons observed.
- A plan for the teaching and learning of Irish has been developed by the Irish teachers. This includes very precise schemes of work and the work completed to date on this plan is commendable. When this plan is being further developed in the future it is recommended that the schemes of work be based on a common template which would have an integrated description of topics, teaching methods, teaching resources, communication strategies, learning objectives and assessment methods. It is recommended that the Transition Year Plan be set out if possible on a modular basis and that it would be clear what students would be doing from week to week during that year.
- The number of students undertaking higher-level Irish in the state examinations is good and it is recommended that the Irish department would continue their strategies to retain the highest possible number of students at higher level.

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

*Published November 2012.*

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management enthusiastically welcomes this Report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching of Irish in Good Counsel College. We believe it reinforces the highest standards we expect in all subject areas and commend the teachers involved for such an excellent report.

The Board observes that four of the five main findings commend teachers on their use of the Irish language and their encouragement of students to do the same. The Board is conscious that the teachers do this in an area on the country where there is little or no emphasis on the language in the community and is especially delighted that the college is involved in such a major initiative as Coláiste Laighean, the only major effort to promote the language in the New Ross area and beyond.

The Board is reassured that Information and Communications Technology is so useful to the teachers in the classroom. The Board has set aside a small budget for the promotion of this activity and is working with the teachers to see how best to use these funds.

The efforts of the College are reflected in the number of students taking the higher level in the State Examinations. Students' communicative skills are assessed in all classes, and in all years. Particular emphasis in this area is noticeable in their final year in preparation for State Oral Examination where an experienced external examiner is brought in to assess all students by an individual oral exam. The College welcomes the idea of separating out the result into the oral and written component and feels that such an approach on national level would be commendable.

Finally, the College thanks the Inspectorate for their support and encouragement and is confident this very positive visit will encourage teachers in this particularly demanding challenge.