

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of: Irish REPORT

**Margaret Aylward Community College
Whitehall, Dublin 9
Roll Number: 70321P**

Date of inspection: 10 March 2016



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection:	10 March 2016
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with the deputy principal and the teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Review of students' work• Feedback to the Irish teachers and to the deputy principal

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching was good or competent in the lessons that were observed and exemplary in one case.
- There was strong evidence in the lessons that the students were making progress in learning.
- The teachers are to be commended for being determined to enter all of the junior students, who undertake the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), for the Junior Certificate Irish examination in order to boost their self-confidence as Irish language learners and as learners in general.
- Students were seldom heard asking the teachers or their fellow students a question in Irish.
- The weekly provision on the timetable for Irish of four class periods in the three years of JCSP and in the two years of the established Leaving Certificate is too limited, it is a significant reduction in the provision from the time that a subject inspection was previously carried out on Irish.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that a goal be set early in first year to encourage the students to communicate in Irish among themselves regardless of their initial language competence.
- It is recommended to focus on reversing the trends towards foundation level at Leaving Certificate in particular by further enabling the students to speak Irish and to recognise this skill in assessment.
- It is recommended that the current low provision for Irish both in the junior and senior cycles be reviewed, and increased provision be considered in the context of launching a subject improvement plan.
- It is recommended that specific targets for teaching and learning should be discussed as an item at subject department planning meetings.

INTRODUCTION

Margaret Aylward Community College is a post-primary girls' school that operates under the trusteeship of City of Dublin Education and Training Board. All of the junior students do JCSP; the other programmes are the optional Transition Year, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the established Leaving Certificate. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department of Education and Skills action plan for educational inclusion. 202 students are enrolled for the 2015/16 school year.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching was good or competent in the lessons that were observed and excellent in one case; the teachers were diligent in the teaching.
- There was strong evidence in the lessons that the students were making progress in learning; a group of senior students were reasonably successful in responding to the discussion that the inspector initiated with them.
- The Irish teachers were proficient in speaking the language; use of the target language was central in some of the classes but more limited in the case of other classes.
- The teachers are to be commended for being determined to enter all of the junior students, who undertake JCSP, for the Junior Certificate Irish examination in order to boost their self-confidence as Irish language learners and as learners in general.
- The teachers were central to much of the class work. In a senior class, it was clear that the students enjoyed being able to answer well the questions that the teacher asked them quickly as practice for the oral examination. The same class enjoyed singing a song closely connected to the school's centenary commemoration of the 1916 Rising. The input that was given to the students illustrated the benefit of making students more active in learning.
- The students were seldom heard asking the teachers or their fellow students a question in Irish. It is recommended that a goal be set early in first year to encourage the students to communicate among themselves regardless of their initial language competence.
- The core language that is necessary to ask questions should be given to the students and practised regularly. It would be very worthwhile for the teachers to agree the appropriate language for that purpose, to include it in the subject plan and to develop it incrementally from year to year.
- The copy-books examined were in orderly arrangement; the students' written work was very comprehensive and very focused on the needs of the certificate examinations in Irish.
- The analysis of certificate examinations' data for Irish showed that the majority of the junior students undertake the ordinary level and that creditable results are achieved. The optional Junior Certificate oral Irish examination is not as yet provided as an option for the students; it is recommended nonetheless to focus on developing spoken ability in the classroom and assessing this in the in-house examinations.
- The key exercises and statements of learning were being filled in in the JCSP and LCA folders.

- There is an increase in the proportion of students who are undertaking foundation level in Irish and the majority of students undertake the established Leaving Certificate in the subject at foundation level. It is recommended to focus on reversing the trends towards foundation level, in the Leaving Certificate in particular, by further enabling the students to speak Irish and to recognise this skill in assessment.
- A positive, cooperative atmosphere was noticeable in the lessons.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Fully appropriate provision is made on the school timetable for Irish in the Leaving Certificate Applied; the allocation of three class periods per week for the Transition Year is very much in keeping with normal practice for that programme.
- The weekly provision on the timetable for Irish of four class periods in the three years of JCSP and in the two years of the established Leaving Certificate is too limited, it is a significant reduction in the provision since a subject inspection was previously carried out on Irish. A discrepancy was apparent between the provision of five class periods per week that was listed for sixth year in the school's 2015/16 Irish plan and the allocation on the 2015/16 timetable, where there were only four class periods.
- It is recommended that the current reduced provision for Irish both in the junior and senior cycles be reviewed, and that increased provision be considered in the context of launching a subject improvement plan.
- A significant proportion of students have an exemption from Irish, more than a quarter of the overall total; the school's records showed that the majority, a little over half, of these exemptions were granted at primary level.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A useful account is given in the department plan in relation to the standing of the subject in the school and the aims that relate to teaching and learning Irish. The Irish department holds a meeting once a term, discussion of teaching methodologies is not included on the agenda.
- It is recommended that the subject plan be developed so that there will be a clear account of the learning intentions related to every year of every course, especially in the senior cycle, the Transition Year and the established Leaving Certificate. The teachers are familiar with this practice from the JCSP and LCA programmes. That account should be laid out in the format 'The student will be able to ...'
- In a particular case, the material in the Irish department's subject plan was well adapted to particular classes. It is recommended that this be developed and that schemes of work be laid out for each class in each year with appropriate timeframes assigned, per term or per week. The schemes of work should specify the learning intentions, resources, methodologies and assessment methods to be used.
- There was a limited account in the plan of the Irish teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). It would be worth recording agreed goals in the plan under specific aspects of teaching and learning methodologies that the teachers are focusing on in any particular year and discussing these goals at subject department planning meetings.

- The individual planning for the classes that were observed was good and the teachers had good records of the progress of the students in the subject.

At the end of the evaluation, the draft findings and draft-recommendations of this evaluation were discussed with the deputy principal and with the subject teachers. 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 Board of Management welcomes the subject inspection of Irish and both the practical and constructive recommendations contained in the report. The Board of Management is pleased that the quality of teaching and learning observed is commendable. The Board of Management, school management, and teaching staff, are committed to the implementation of recommendations within the report.

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

- Work has already been undertaken by the Irish department and school management to address the recommendations of the report.
- Students will continue to be encouraged to speak in the target language in the class and with the teacher and fellow students.
- As part of the Irish department's ongoing assessment of students an oral Irish/'scrúdú béil' from first to sixth year will be incorporated into the Irish Subject Plan. The aim is to encourage students to communicate among themselves, and with the teacher, in the target language.
- The core language will be taught regularly from first year to sixth year so that students will become more competent in communicating in the target language from year to year.
- In light of the report the provision for Leaving Certificate Irish has been increased from four to five classes each week.
- Every effort will be made to reverse the trends in levels taken at Leaving Certificate.
- Junior Certificate School programme targets will be incorporated as part of teaching and learning.
- A review of the Irish Subject Plan will be undertaken and will focus on learning intentions, and targets to be achieved, for each year.
- Continuous Professional Development will be encouraged and goals set on teaching methodologies.