

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Ratoath College
Ratoath, County Meath
Roll Number: 76088T**

Date of inspection: 17 May 2013



**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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	16, 17 May 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods• Review of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was high for the most part and in certain cases that quality was excellent.
- The most significant aspect of the best lessons was the success of the teaching approach in encouraging the students to participate actively in the lesson.
- High quality work was to be seen in the copybooks observed and the encouraging notes written in by the teachers contained good direction.
- There is excellent provision for Irish on the school timetable in junior cycle and senior cycle.
- The number of students undertaking Irish at the higher level is very significant and there is an ambitious plan to increase the attainment rate in the subject at the highest grades.
- The quality of planning in the subject is good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the case of the students with the greatest ability in the language it is recommended to make a deeper investigation of new words and phrases in order to link them and to increase curiosity about words and literacy.
 - It is well worth while collecting common errors made by the learners and paying attention to them together in order to highlight and share language accuracy.
 - The teachers are advised to continue adding to their own ability in the subject in order to support increasing the amount of the higher grades attained in the certificate examinations – an aim which is an appropriate objective of the Irish department.
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INTRODUCTION

Ratoath College is a co-educational school managed by County Meath Vocational Education Committee. There are 925 students enrolled for the 2012/13 school year. Irish is a core subject of all the school's programmes: Junior Certificate, established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and Transition Year, which is an optional programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was high in the vast majority of lessons and in certain cases that quality was excellent, especially where there was active learning.
- In particular commendable cases efforts were made at first to highlight, to summarise and to praise the students' own knowledge as a first step in learning.
- The most significant aspect of the best lessons was the success of the teaching approach in encouraging the students to participate actively in the lesson and to provide clear evidence of the students' potential in the spoken language and of their interest in the content of the lesson. In the weakest case, the most significant aspect was the lack of input by the learners in the lesson, and the lack of chances to do so.
- The target language was used from start to finish and it appeared that the students were used to this approach, as they were well able to understand oral directions and questions. There was a lack of speech accuracy in the teaching in a small number of cases.
- There was a positive atmosphere in the lessons and discipline was excellent in almost every case. In the best lessons there was a friendly interaction noticeable between the students and the teacher. This good interaction was due to personal skills and questioning skills.
- In the one situation where students became unsettled this was due to unclear learning outcomes and group work without enough guidance to implement the task.
- ICT resources were used effectively in each of the lessons.
- Good questioning skills were used in teaching and in the best instances there was differentiation to be seen in the questions asked of different students – both higher order and lower order questions, and the amount of time given to answer them.
- Attention was paid to language awareness in the lessons and in the copybooks. In order to test the learners' vocabulary in written examinations it is better to write sentences in Irish and to leave spaces in them to fill in, instead of translating the English sentence to Irish.
- There was work of high quality to be seen in the copybooks examined and good advice to be seen in the encouraging notes written by the teachers.
- Oral tests were observed with students in a class in the junior cycle. The approach was good. The questions progressed in a natural way which encouraged talk and thought on one's own initiative instead of learning by rote.
- In the case of the most able students it is recommended to make a deeper investigation of new words in order to link them and to increase curiosity about words and literacy. Reading should be strongly included as a challenging and attractive strategy to enrich the learner's vocabulary.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is excellent provision for Irish on the school timetable. There is a level allocation for the subject throughout the week and, accordingly, the students have daily contact with the subject in nearly every case.
- Irish is to be seen throughout the school in signage and to be heard in the administrative terminology used daily such as '*caomhnóirí*', '*moltóirí*', and '*dialann na scoláirí*'.
- There are good assessment procedures in the subject, particularly the attention to developing the students' spoken ability. All students are being entered for the optional oral examination in the Junior Certificate.
- The school has ambitions for the subject regarding attainment in the certificate examinations. The number of students studying Irish at the higher level is very significant indeed. This is a good sign of the positive approach of the school towards the subject.
- The teachers are advised to add to their own ability in the language so that the potential and exemplar exists to attain the highest standard in the subject. This is important as there is now a focus on increasing the number of A and A1 grades at higher level – an appropriate objective which the Irish department now has.
- The school management is fully supportive of presenting the subject to the students with teaching methods and learning activities which lay a particular emphasis on spoken language acquisition. Every support is given to the staff to take advantage of opportunities in continuing professional development.
- Co-curricular and extracurricular activities for Irish are highly commendable.
- There is a good understanding of the potential and use of ICT to promote Irish in the media used by students. An indication of this was the sports and fun programme recorded in the school and broadcast on TG4 shortly before the subject inspection and the school website for Irish being developed by the Transition Year students.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning in the subject is good. Reasonable efforts have been made in the planning work to link learning objectives to the Irish syllabus topics. It is recommended that learning outcomes in the new specification for English in the junior cycle be consulted as a stimulus in this area.
- The Irish department has a positive and ambitious vision for the quality of teaching and learning in the subject. Team teaching and peer assessment is being progressed in the department as strategies for this.
- It is good to have the duty of coordinator taken in hand by all the teachers in turn. The coordinator is advised to agree an improvement theme in the subject, as well as a strategy for its achievement, with the other members of the department and to collaboratively review it during their term of office.
- It is recommended that planning take place to include students more in the review of attainment in the different language skills in order to cultivate independent learners. It is worth including the language passport as a step in this direction.
- It is recommended that a range of language and vocabulary be compiled, on a collaborative basis, among the department which would be appropriate for the learners in

each year of their course of study. This is a continuous project which could be amended and developed over time.

- In promoting literacy on a whole-school basis, it is worth adding to the attractive reading material in Irish which is available and implementing creative initiatives to promote independent reading in Irish.

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; a response was not received from the board.