

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**St Joseph's Secondary School
Fairview, Dublin 3
Roll number: 60390F**

Date of inspection: 6 December 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	5, 6 December 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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The newly formed team of Irish teachers showed very good potential; the quality of teaching in most lessons was within a range that comprised good and competent, with some areas that can be improved.
- The quality of learning was fair in most lessons; there was evidence of good efforts to engage with learning and the spoken language was the area that presented students with the most challenge.
- The teachers modelled the use of the spoken language well; opportunities for the students to speak the language were very focused on the specific lesson material however, beyond which the opportunities to practise the spoken word were quite limited.
- Management is concerned to consolidate and develop a core team of Irish teachers following a number of retirements.
- In the lessons observed there was diligent attention to short-term planning; some of the planning is heavily focused on the requirements of the examination papers however.
- The school is commended for the further efforts being undertaken to promote Irish with the students through the pilot scheme of additional Irish classes for a cohort of Transition Year (TY) students through a link with the Marino Institute of Education Irish Department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that a focus be placed on the encouragement of spoken Irish with the students and that spoken Irish be developed as an integrated element of lessons. The students should be trained to develop as questioners in addition to answering questions; practising the capacity to speak independently is a good approach to this.
- The inclusion of oral capacity in all house examinations is recommended as is the separate identification of oral capacity on all reports sent home to parents.
- A summary profile of the subject is recommended for inclusion in the Irish subject department plan, showing the proportion of students for uptake of the various levels as well as attainment data in the certificate examinations, and that the data be used to plot an improvement plan.

INTRODUCTION

St Joseph's is an all-boys voluntary secondary school that participates in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan for inclusion. Current enrolment is 300 students; a considerable number hold an exemption from Irish, standing at one in five. The programmes on offer are the Junior Certificate, the compulsory TY, and established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The newly formed team of Irish teachers showed very good potential; the quality of teaching in most lessons was within a range that comprised good and competent, with some areas that can be improved.
- The quality of learning was fair in most lessons; there was evidence of good efforts to engage with learning and the spoken language was the area that presented students with the most challenge.
- Efforts were made to share the learning outcomes with students and specific attention was paid to them in certain instances. This area was one for development; there was a need to distinguish more clearly between the lesson content and the expectations for learning, and to differentiate the learning objectives themselves. Where this is clear from the outset, staying on task is more easily achieved, and learning is enhanced.
- Students were frequently encouraged, weaker students in particular, through the early reinforcement in the lesson of previously learned material, good pronunciation and phonetics were affirmed. This positive approach helps to make learning attainable and is commended.
- Teachers modelled the use of the spoken language well throughout; opportunities for the students to speak the language quite often focused entirely on the specific lesson material however, and on answering questions. Training the students to also develop as questioners is recommended; practising independent speech is a good approach to this.
- Making links between the lesson content and the students' life experience would be worthwhile. A reading comprehension on the visit to Ireland of the president of the United States some fifty years previously, as arose in one instance, could, for example, be developed into an oral piece on the students' own recall of the visit of the U.S. president to Dublin two years previously.
- Team teaching was used in the senior cycle; good efforts were made to develop natural speech by constructing a written dialogue together. The teachers' efforts are commended and developing team teaching is recommended. More exposure for the students to active learning would be worthwhile, with the teachers assuming a less prominent role in the lesson throughout.
- First year students complete a dedicated vocabulary booklet as part of the whole-school literacy promotion; it is good that Irish is included in this project.
- A good atmosphere prevailed between teachers and students in all of the lessons. A very high attendance was noted in most classes. Only in TY was the attendance notably short of the high attendance elsewhere.
- Teachers maintained a record of various tests from the start of the year showing evidence of student improvement. The inclusion of oral capacity in all house examinations is

recommended as is the separate identification of oral capacity on all reports sent home to parents.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Good provision is made for Irish on the timetable and an even daily distribution of lessons is achieved in most years, this arrangement supports learning.
- Management appreciates the need to consolidate and develop a core team of Irish teachers following a number of retirements. Nonetheless the current arrangements which sees a significant proportion of teaching hours for Irish dependent on curriculum concessions, appeals, and borrowing hours from special educational needs allocation is neither viable nor appropriate.
- Building on management's efforts to date, it is recommended that priority be given in the short-term to the school's staffing allocation, in the interests of ensuring appropriate provision for teaching Irish in the school, without loss to special educational needs allocation.
- There is good collaboration among the teachers; two of the three have a high attendance at continuing professional development (CPD) subject-related in-service for Irish and one teacher has significant experience of teaching spoken Irish in summer Irish colleges. A professional dialogue on promoting and developing teaching methods is recommended.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of planning was adequate and some of the schemes of work contained good guidance on the capacity of the class and on areas for particular attention. This reflects well on the teachers' attention to students' learning needs.
- Short-term planning was well focused and in keeping with the work undertaken in the lessons observed.
- A summary profile of the current state of the subject is recommended for inclusion in the Irish subject department plan, showing the proportion of students for uptake of the various levels as well as attainment data in the certificate examinations, and that the data be used to plot an improvement plan.
- The identification of clear learning outcomes from year to year is an area for development as well as avoiding an over-reliance on the examination papers to guide the writing of the schemes of work.
- The school website account of Irish in the school should be updated. Publicity and encouragement should be given here to initiatives in Irish both within the classroom and beyond, such as the experiences of the TY cohort of students in attending additional lessons in Marino Institute of Education.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

We wholeheartedly welcome this report and see it as an affirmation of the excellent work carried out by a committed team.

We appreciate the recognition of the good atmosphere between teachers and students in all lessons, the efforts being undertaken to promote Irish through a pilot scheme linked with the Marino Institute of Education Irish Department, and the concern of management to consolidate and develop a core team of Irish teachers following a number of retirements.

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

We acknowledge the recommendations in the report and we look forward to addressing and implementing them.