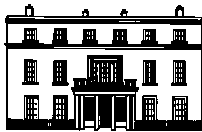


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Presentation College  
Terenure, Dublin 6  
Roll number: 76092K**

**Date of inspection: 11 March 2011**



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

**REPORT**  
**ON**  
**THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Presentation College, Terenure. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Irish and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, the deputy principal and the subject teachers. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

First-year classes are mixed ability in Presentation College. In November, second-year students are divided into one higher level and one ordinary-level class, based on examination results and on discussions with the students and their parents where necessary. If the students wish to change level after that, they must get written permission from their parents and the principal then consults with the teachers. This arrangement is also in place in third, fifth and sixth year. In Transition Year (TY) classes are mixed ability, an arrangement which is in line with the philosophy of that programme.

There are four periods a week for Irish for all year groups at junior cycle. This provision is not entirely satisfactory. It is recommended that school management examine the possibilities of adding an extra period per week for at least one year group at junior cycle. There are five periods a week for Irish for all year groups at senior cycle, including TY. This provision is very satisfactory.

Good efforts are made in the school to broaden and develop students' experience of Irish as a living language outside Irish class. To celebrate "Seachtain na Gaeilge" events are organised during that week such as a céilí, a table quiz and various competitions. The students participate in Gael Linn debates also. An Irish Club is regularly held in the school to give students the opportunity to gather together to speak the language in an informal setting. TY students are brought on a weekend trip to the Rath Cairn Gaeltacht. The teachers are commended for organising such an interesting and enjoyable language programme. It is evident that the Irish teachers are dedicated to broadening the students' experience of Irish as a language outside the classroom. To build on the good work being done, it is recommended that a series of Irish events and occasions for speaking the language be organised during the whole school year so as to broaden the students' experience of Irish as a modern living language. Many practical ideas and recommendations were suggested to the Irish teaching staff and to school management during the inspection regarding the type of events which could be organised.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The teachers meet together once a term to plan for the general teaching and learning of the language. The Irish teachers rotate the position as coordinator of the school's teaching and learning plan for Irish. This practice commended as it affords all teachers the opportunity to undertake a position of leadership as regards the planning development and language promotion in general. This task is rotated between the teachers every second year so as to ensure continuity.

The Irish documentation, including the plan for Irish is kept in three files. One file contains all the Irish syllabi, circulars, minutes from meetings and information relating to the teaching of Irish in general. The plan for Irish includes information about the composition of classes, a list of textbooks, distribution of students and ability levels, cross-curricular planning as well as information about methods of recording and reporting. The work completed to date on planning is commended. It is recommended however, that the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in general be further developed, including a more detailed description of the aims and objectives of the Irish department and more comprehensive information regarding cross-curricular planning as well as extra-curricular and co-curricular activities.

Teachers' schemes of work for each year group and level are also included in the plan. The work completed to date on the schemes is commended. It is recommended however, that those schemes of work be further developed to include more information about methodologies, use of aids and resources in class, learning objectives for the students at the various levels and modes of assessment to evaluate those objectives. It is recommended that the schemes of work be based on a common template and that they be used as working documents during the year so that changes and amendments may be made for the following year. It is recommended that reference be also made in the schemes of work to the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as a resource for supporting student learning.

A plan regarding the teaching and learning of Irish in TY was provided during the inspection. The plan was set out by term – a commendable approach. It was felt however, that the extra material set out to be covered during the year was mainly based on studying Irish as an ancient language. Notwithstanding the importance of ancient Irish traditions, it is recommended that the students be provided with information about and experience of Irish as a modern and living language which is still spoken in certain areas of the country today. A balance between the two aspects of learning the language is necessary.

Very good planning was evident in lessons observed. It was clear that much thought had gone into the learning aims and objectives for the students beforehand. The work to be covered in the lesson was displayed on the board at the outset in some cases observed. It is recommended that this practice be adopted in all classes and that the learning objectives be shared with the students, along with the work to be covered during the period. Many notes and worksheets of a high standard were prepared for distribution to the students during the classes.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The use of Irish as the language of management, teaching and communication was very good in the classes observed. Good efforts were made to avoid direct translation from Irish to English and the teachers employed various techniques to ensure that the students understood lesson content. The dedication of the teachers to using the target language is commended. The students

made worthy attempts to use Irish as the language of communication with the teacher and in some cases even among themselves during pair work and their efforts are highly commended.

Good strategies were used to encourage communication between students in the target language. The teachers used pair work, conversations, speed-dating and group work in some instances observed and these strategies are highly commended. In one case, the class commenced with informal conversation between the teacher and the students about certain issues in the lives of the students. Communicative practices were very evident among the students, in some cases, where students used the target language confidently. Sentences and phrases to facilitate communication in the class were displayed on the walls of one classroom observed. This practice is commended. The sentences were used during the lessons and in one case they were practiced at the beginning of the class so that the student would have no excuses to use English with the teacher unnecessarily. This is a very effective approach and the teacher's work in this regard is highly commended. The classrooms observed were very well decorated with plenty of material relating to the teaching and learning of Irish which proved useful to the students during the lessons.

Full sentences were required as answers to questions in some cases observed but that was not so in the case of every lesson. The use of such a practice is recommended for all Irish classes. It is very important that the students gain experience of composing full sentences so as to broaden and develop their knowledge of Irish syntax. Pronunciation and accuracy in Irish were corrected as necessary during some lessons and it is recommended that this practice be adopted in all classes. In some cases observed, the attempts made to develop and enrich the students' Irish, by giving them extra vocabulary and phrases, is commended.

The teachers circulated around the classrooms helping the students, correcting their work and ensuring that they were completing their work during classroom activities. The students made every effort to speak to the teacher in the target language. The students were continually affirmed for their work and their efforts. Humour was used in a number of cases observed which stimulated the interest of students in the subject and made teaching more effective. The students worked diligently in classes observed and discipline was excellent.

It was evident that suggestions made by the Second Level Support Service for Irish were being employed in one class observed where a poem on the course was taught through a listening exercise and other class activities. A game was used in one case which had the objective of getting students to speak to each other in the target language and that was successful. The students enthusiastically took part in the activity and the teacher circulated among them helping and encouraging them.

An overhead projector and a map were used during a couple of lessons observed. Apart from those teaching resources and the textbook however, practically no other resource or aid was used in the Irish classes. It is recommended that a broader range of aids and resources be used to make the learning of the language more relevant and interesting for the students. Use may be made of music, podcasts, ICT, films, radio and television programmes, posters, photographs and the printed media to put the learning of Irish in a contemporary context for the students. The use of these resources is a very effective approach when various aspects of the language are being taught, especially Irish prose and literature.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Formal school examinations are organised twice a year, in the spring and in the summer. Continuous assessment is also used and small class tests are regularly given to students on completion of a topic. Reports are sent home to parents with the results of the two main examinations. It was reported that a considerable emphasis has been placed on the use of the school journal during the last two years but especially in the current year. That approach is working well and teachers and parents are both informed about each student's progress.

The school has no formal policy regarding the assessment of the students' oral competence in Irish. It is recommended therefore that the teachers agree on a policy which would ensure that every student in the school would be formally assessed each year and that parents be informed about the results of that assessment in a separate entry in the school reports. It is also recommended that a letter be sent to parents reminding them of the significant changes taking place in the state examinations in Irish and that more emphasis be placed on oral ability in the language. An Irish day-course was due to start in the school during the summer and it is recommended that parents be informed about that course and also about other courses nearby as well as about residential Irish courses both in and outside the Gaeltacht. The students in the school can apply for Gaeltacht scholarships through the VEC scholarship system. A certain number of scholarships are awarded each year and they prove to be a very valuable resource for both the school and the students who receive them.

Considerable work was evident in the copybooks observed. There were also folders and copybooks containing comprehensive notes about various aspects of learning the language as well as literature notes. It was evident from work in the copybooks observed that homework is assigned and corrected regularly. It is recommended, however, that the students be given more information about their progress by providing marks or grades as well as references to the merits of the work and to the areas which need further work.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The work being done by teachers to broaden and develop students' experience of Irish as a living language outside Irish class is commended.
- Work completed to date on planning for Irish and on setting out schemes of work for each year group and level is commended.
- The use of Irish as the language of classroom management, teaching and general communication was very good in the classes observed.
- Good strategies were implemented in classes observed to encourage and facilitate communication in the target language among the students.
- Some good teaching practices were evident in the classes observed in particular the implementation of recommendations made by the Second Level Support Service for Irish.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- It is recommended that the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish be further developed in the school including a plan for the use of ICT during Irish classes.

- It is recommended that a broader range of resources and materials be used in the Irish classes to support student learning.
- It is recommended that a system be implemented to assess students' oral skills in the target language from first year.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of Irish, with the principal and the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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