An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Coláiste Chroí Mhuire
Spiddal, County Galway
Roll number: 63130R

Date of inspection: 4 October 2011

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	3 and 4 October 2011
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with Principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to Principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Favourable provision is made for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school.
- While the teaching and learning techniques were of a good standard in some of the classes, there is a need to extend this good practice across all the Irish classes.
- The curricular plans for the various year groups were of a good standard and laid out term by term.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It would be of advantage if strategies designed to enhance the students' written attainments in the areas of spelling and syntax were to form part of lessons on a regular basis.
- The promotion of Irish for the whole community of the school would be greatly advanced, if practical, measurable steps were devised with a view to attaining the aims set down in the whole-school Irish policy.
- It is recommended, at the level of the Irish department, that there should be a focus on implementing good teaching and learning methodologies in every Irish lesson.
- It would be well worthwhile putting the department on a more formal footing, so that the curricular plans might be developed, that the four main skills of language together with various elements of the courses might be taught in an integrated fashion according to topic, and that an action plan might be agreed upon and reviewed at the departmental level.

INTRODUCTION

This is an all-Irish school set in a Gaeltacht district. Irish is the medium through which teaching, communication and administration is carried out in the school. 247 student attend the school, drawn from varying socio-linguistic backgrounds. Transition Year (TY) forms part of the school curriculum and is an optional programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- While the teaching and learning techniques being used in some of the classes during the evaluation were of a good standard, there is now a need to extend this good practice so as to bring about a high standard of teaching and learning across all the Irish classes.
- A defining characteristic of this good practice was that opportunities for activity which were created for the students by means of group work and the use of questions.
- Effective use was made of questioning between teacher and students in one class, whereby the students deduced the main messages of three poems in their own words. Such approaches are more successful than presenting a paraphrased version of a poem based on the words of the textbook.
- In some classes, effective links were made with the students' previous learning, as is appropriate. It would greatly enhance student motivation if new themes be introduced by means of a brainstorming session.
- Preparatory work should be carried out for all language skills to increase students' leaning. In the case of reading, it is necessary that the students' attention would be drawn to the meanings of words as well as to their pronunciation.
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) formed part of the students' learning experience in less than half the classes. It is recommended that the use of ICT that enhances students' learning should be extended.
- Good use was made of the white board in half of the classes which added to the visual learning of students. This recording should be orderly, as an example to the students of how to order their own thoughts, as well as providing a written record of the work of lessons.
- It is recommended, while the home work is being corrected during the lessons, that the appropriate home work forms are recorded. This emphasis on correct and accurate written forms would greatly enhance the students' proficiency in relation to spelling and syntax.
- There was evidence that Irish was being used as the medium of teaching and learning in the course of all Irish classes during the evaluation.
- Reference was made to grammatical points during some lessons but, in general, high expectations in relation to grammatical accuracy among the students was not been fostered in the lessons. It is recommended that, in the communicative context of a passage, the students' attention should be regularly drawn to major points of grammar during lessons.
- The vast majority of teachers demonstrated good class management skills. It is necessary for a small number of teachers to devote more time to short-term planning, so as to differentiate the learning objectives so as to seek to keep all students on task during the lessons. The range of learning styles should also be taken into account in this planning.

- A variety of practices was observed in relation to the recording of home work in the sample of journals collected during the evaluation. It is necessary that the department agree practices in relation to home work, in keeping with the whole-school policy on home work.
- A random sample of students' work was collected in all the classes evaluated. Good mechanical corrections were to be seen in some of the samples of copy books, however such correction practices of students' work were not in evidence in every case. There was no evidence of written developmental corrections in the copy books; further information on assessment for learning may be found on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The provision for teaching and learning of Irish is favourable in that periods are timetabled on a daily basis.
- All class groups are organised in mixed ability groupings.
- Learning support is provided in Irish from first year through to leaving certificate, year two.
- The school has drawn up a policy for Irish and a designated teacher has been assigned a special duties post to promote Irish at all levels in the school. It is recommended, that an action plan would be devised incorporating practical, measurable steps leading to the attainment of the aims of the policy.
- Good work is being carried out in the school in terms of the schools' participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in the language.
- Classrooms are allocated to individual teachers. While there are some materials on display in the classrooms, there is scope to develop learning environment of classrooms.
- It would be worthwhile setting common examinations for all year groups and to incorporate all four skills of language as part of this assessment experience.
- There is no evidence in the plan that the students' results in the certificate examinations are analysed. It would more beneficial if this situation was reviewed.
- There are good teaching aids in the school, including ICT equipment. It is a priority for the department that teaching and learning aids are developed and distributed among the staff members. The resources listed on the website of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) of Irish would be of assistance in this context.
- All those teaching Irish in the school are graduates in Irish. The vast majority of the teachers have experience of teaching classes in both cycles and at the different examination levels and in all the programmes. It would be well worthwhile affording all teachers this opportunity.
- The Irish teachers began to attend inservice courses in Irish last year. A programme for continuous professional development (CPD) at a whole-school level was not provided last year. It is commendable that the integration of ICT into teaching and learning is planned for the CPD programme for the whole staff for next year.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The Irish department holds two formal meetings during the school year. A subject co-ordinator has not been appointed and records are not kept of the main decisions taken at departmental meetings. It would be well worthwhile reviewing this situation.
- It was reported that the department has developmental priorities for the current school year. It is recommended that an action plan would be agreed upon, based on these priorities and on the main recommendations of this report.
- The curriculum plans compiled on a termly basis for the various year groups were of a good standard. It is recommended that planning should be made for the teaching of the four main skills of language, together with various elements of the courses, in an integrated manner according to topics, and that the teaching and learning resources and more accurate time frames should be specified also.
- Students from varying linguistic backgrounds attend this school. It is recommended that a language bridging programme should be designed for the first term of first year, to enhance the competence and self-confidence of students in Irish for the context language immersion.
- Good work has been done on the Transition Year plan with a view to providing an alternative teaching and learning experience during that year, particularly in the links being fostered with local literature.
- Good planning and preparation had been made for the great majority of lessons observed during the evaluation.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the Principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of this 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.

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