An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Grange Post-primary School
Grange, County Sligo
Roll number: 72330D

Date of inspection: 28 October 2011

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF THE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	28 October 2011
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documentation • Discussion with principal and with the subject teachers • Interaction with the students	 • Observation of teaching and learning during four class-periods • Review of students' work • Feedback to principal and to the subject teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Good teaching and learning techniques were used in the majority of the classes observed during the inspection.
- There is satisfactory provision for Irish on the timetable and the school has developed a wide range of information and communication technology (ICT) aids and resources, which are being continually updated.
- In the plan for Irish, very good work has been carried out on department procedures. Curriculum plans have been developed for all year-groups, with the topics outlined as discrete aspects of the courses.
- Good systems for summative assessment are employed in the school for every year group and language skills are included in these testing procedures.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It would be worthwhile for the department of Irish to plan for teaching the language in an integrated thematic way, using the learning targets and language functions as a framework for this planning.
- It is recommended that the three steps of the communicative approach and differentiated learning objectives, which were part of the planning for teaching and learning the language in most of the classes, be used in all classes.
- To implement the clear realistic objectives developed for homework in the plan for Irish, it would be helpful that practices and expectations regarding homework be agreed at department level.
- In order to further develop the department of Irish, it is recommended that the teachers use every opportunity for co-operative planning and review of classroom work and that they formulate a plan of action based on the department's own identified priorities and on the main recommendations of this report.

INTRODUCTION

Grange Post-primary School is a co-educational school operating under the auspices of County Sligo Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It is the only school providing second-level education in this town and has an enrolment of 152 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Good teaching and learning methodologies were used in the majority of the classes observed during the inspection.
- Teaching and learning were effective in those classes where there was a good balance between teacher input and student activities along with opportunities for learners of practising all their language skills. Very good use was made of group-work during which the students used oral skills, both productive and receptive. A comprehensive feedback session on the group-work was conducted and it was evident that some students had achieved learning targets in the lessons according to their range of ability.
- In cases where the learning possibilities were not all achieved in class, the reason for this was that too many different elements had been planned for the lesson period, with no thematic links between them. It is recommended that, when a lesson is being planned, preparatory work be done for every language skill and that the learning targets for the various language activities be differentiated to serve the range of abilities in the class.
- Practice for the oral examination was the final activity in one lesson and students carried out this task well because preparatory work had been done earlier in the term which ensured that the task was suited to their ability.
- The use of ICT by all the teachers took account of the range of learning styles in every class and these supportive resources enhanced student participation.
- Homework was assigned at the end of every lesson and, in most cases, the task followed naturally from the subject of the lesson. When this was not the case, various tasks from previous exam-papers were assigned as homework; these were not a natural follow-on to the lesson, nor were they linked to one another. The tasks were also too challenging particularly as preparatory work had not been carried for them so early in the school-year. To achieve the clear, realistic objectives developed for homework in the plan for Irish, it would be helpful if practices and expectations regarding homework were agreed at department level.
- Incremental work had been done in the majority of the copybooks collected at random. There also was a set of copybooks which did not show the same continuity in students' work; it is recommended that this situation be reviewed.
- The mechanical corrections done in all the copybooks followed good practice. It is important for teachers not to overlook basic errors.
- Corrections in the copybooks did not show evidence of the use of assessment-for-learning strategies in the department. It would be well worth reviewing this.
- Translation was frequently used in some copybooks. It is recommended that the use of a long passage in Irish and an English translation, side by side, be avoided as a methodology in the teaching of Irish.

- There was a mutually respectful learning atmosphere in all the lessons observed during the inspection. All of the teachers had good classroom-management ability. The quality of students' efforts and opinions was always encouragingly affirmed.
- Irish was the language of all classroom transactions. This is a praiseworthy approach.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is a satisfactory provision for Irish on the timetable, regarding the number and distribution of class-periods and the provision of simultaneous class-periods for certain year groups. The ideal is to provide single daily class-periods for the teaching and learning of languages for all year groups.
- Eighteen per cent of total student enrolment has been approved by the school for exemption from Irish under the provisions of Circular M10/94. A question concerning exemption from Irish is included in the school's application form for new students, as appropriate.
- All teachers teaching Irish in the school are graduates in Irish. It is praiseworthy that the Irish-teaching staff undertake continuous professional development (CPD) at various levels: personally, at forums provided by Sligo VEC, at whole-school level and at external courses provided by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) of Irish.
- A wide range of ICT aids and resources has been developed in the school and one teacher is researching the possibilities of further use of ICT resources to support the teaching and learning of Irish. School management gives great support to the development of resources for Irish and a library is being developed in the school. It is recommended that a collection of up-to-date resources and books be compiled, using the lists of resources available for post-primary students on the PDST for Irish website and the www.cogg.ie website as reference points.
- There is clear evidence of the commitment of Irish-teaching staff to the promotion of the status of the language in the school and also of the continuous improvement in student achievement in the language. Staff members deserve recognition for the wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular events they organise for the students, and for the Gaeltacht scholarships they run in association with Sligo VEC.
- All classrooms throughout the school are bilingually named. Irish is taught mainly in one particular classroom and a good learning environment has been created there. There is a good proportion of Irish in the permanent section of the students' homework diaries.
- Good systems for summative assessments are used in the school. All language skills are included in these tests for every year group. The staff is highly commended for using these practices.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The staff has carried out very good work in providing organisational details of the department's approaches and procedures in the plan for Irish.

- Curriculum plans have been developed for all the year-groups. Topics are presented as discrete aspects of the courses and although themes are specified in the plans for juniors, the planning has not been geared to teaching the language in an integrated thematic way.
- It would be worth reviewing the curriculum plans by presenting the teaching and learning themes in the form of learning targets and the language functions the students will have mastered.
- It would be well worth seizing every opportunity for planning co-operatively, and reviewing classroom work and formulating a plan of action based on the department's own identified priorities and on the main recommendations of this report, in order to further develop the department of Irish.
- All the teachers had made good preparation for their classes, in the form of worksheets, pre-prepared answers to tasks, a listening extract with a glossary, and PowerPoint slides. The short-term planning done for the majority of classes was of a high standard in that there was an incremental order to the stages of these classes based on a single theme.
- It is recommended that the planning for the teaching and learning of every language activity follow these three steps: the pre-communicative step, the communicative period and the post-communicative period before the end of the lesson.

At the conclusion of the evaluation, the draft findings and recommendations of this assessment were discussed with the 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 report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

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