

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Glanmire Community College  
Glanmire, County Cork  
Roll number: 76064F**

**Date of inspection: 22 April 2009**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT  
OIDEACHAIS | OF 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 Glanmire Community College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching in Irish and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed learning and teaching. 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 and the teachers of Irish. The board of management of the school 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.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

When the school was established, twelve years ago, school management made a decision that Irish would be given a special status in the life of the school. The school community welcomed this decision from the outset. Since then, the teachers of Irish have enjoyed full support for their endeavours to promote the use of Irish in the school and in the surrounding area. Particular praise is due to the school's teachers of Irish for their on-going efforts to empower their students, particularly with regard to the speaking of Irish. The teachers of Irish are firmly of the opinion that the proficiency of senior management and other staff members in Irish is of great assistance to them. Undoubtedly, it was especially heartening that all aspects of the evaluation visit were conducted exclusively through Irish.

The timetable provides satisfactory support for the learning and teaching of Irish, in that the students have regular contact with the target language. Contact on a daily basis applies in the case of third year, fifth year and sixth year students, which is commendable. Classes are equitably allocated to teachers in such a way as to ensure that all teachers have experience of teaching Irish at the various levels. This approach is in keeping with good practice.

First year and transition year (TY) consist of mixed-ability classes and a banding system exists in other years. The mixed-ability arrangement is successful, particularly in first year, in that the differentiated needs of students are being met effectively while their proficiency in Irish is being advanced. In light of this, it would be worthwhile giving consideration to the benefits which would accrue from implementing a mixed-ability system in second year also. The attention of management and of the teachers of Irish is drawn to the fact that research and experience have demonstrated that it is in mixed-ability classes that students make the greatest overall progress, particularly students of average or of lower abilities. Such an approach would have the added benefit of creating an opportunity for individual teachers to cover a comprehensive language programme with the same students over a period of two years.

It was reported that teachers have ready access to teaching equipment. Each teacher has a personal tape recorder and access to DVD players, a laptop computer and other information and communication technology (ICT) aids such as *iPods*. Indeed, the teachers acknowledge the importance of integrating ICT into class activities and this is an aspect of classroom practice on which they place a continuing emphasis. There is a resource room available to all the teachers and it is here that many of the learning and teaching resources which have been accumulated by the Irish teachers are stored. It is good that such resources are made available in a central location.

At the time of the evaluation, the school library was being re-organised and therefore no permanent location existed for the storage of the school's book collection. Once the library has been renovated, the teachers should make every effort to give students as much exposure as possible to Irish reading material such as magazines, newspapers, short stories, plays and novels. For example, an Irish book club could be set up which would meet either in class or in the library from time to time. This would give students experience of reviewing literary works, a skill which would be of benefit to them when studying the Leaving Certificate literature programme.

Many of the teachers have made every effort to create a stimulating learning environment in the classrooms in which Irish is taught. The walls have charts showing word banks, common idioms and language points. Samples of the students' work are on display also, a practice could be advisable to further extended, as it is a great source of encouragement for students that their work is given public recognition.

One hundred and ten students have exemption from the study of Irish. This figure is equivalent to sixteen per cent of the total school enrolment. Eighty-eight of these students have learning difficulties and the others are students who received their early education abroad. Every effort is made to provide these students with support in literacy, numeracy or English when Irish lessons are in progress. Those students who are entitled to an exemption, but who choose instead to study Irish, are to be congratulated. Likewise, their teachers are to be complimented on the encouragement and support which they give to these students.

The teachers of Irish acknowledge the importance of continuing professional development and they welcome opportunities for developing their skills as teachers and as facilitators of learning. They attend the day and evening workshops being organised at present by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) for Irish. They consider the subject matter of the workshops to be of great assistance and many of the issues raised at the workshops have been explored in more detail by themselves. This is a praiseworthy attitude and the teachers are commended particularly on what they do in order to develop the communicative strategies which they themselves utilise. Teachers are reminded of the importance for the teacher of Irish to demonstrate fluency and accuracy in the language at all times, and they are urged to continue to devote ongoing attention to this particular professional skill.

There is a wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities that promotes the use of Irish outside of class. Included among the main activities are the participation of students in debating and poetry competitions, as well as various *Slógadh* competitions. The school has forged close links with *Glór na nGael*, an organisation which is very active in the area. The school has a *Cumann Gaelach* (Irish Club) and the junior students are members of the national body *Ógras*. Irish Days are frequently organised in the school, during which the whole school community is encouraged to use Irish. It was reported that *Seachtain na Gaeilge* is a major occasion on the school calendar during which, among other events, dance workshops, talent competitions and t-shirt competitions are organised. Students are taken to the Gaeltacht each year and many students

spend time in the Gaeltacht in the summer. The County Cork Vocational Education Committee makes funding available in support of some of these students. Guest speakers with expertise in Irish have visited the school to speak on various subjects to the students. The teachers are to be commended on their resourcefulness and dedication in providing a programme of activities which is stimulating and varied.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

All the teachers participate fully in the subject-development planning process. They acknowledge, in particular, the opportunities this process has created for open discussion of various aspects of the teaching and learning of Irish.

One of the teachers is appointed as co-ordinator of the department on a rotating basis. This is a good idea as it develops leadership and organisational skills in all the members of staff. The duties of co-ordinator are specified in a whole-school policy document. It was apparent also that other members of the Irish department are willing to accept responsibility for a variety of duties and all the teachers are commended on their dedication to the development of the subject.

Departmental meetings are frequently held and the minutes reviewed give an insight into the matters discussed by the teachers. It is highly encouraging that teachers debate classroom practice with one another. It was indicated that the discussions on active learning and on promoting the use of ICT had their origins in the workshops presented by the SLSS. The teachers are aware that their colleagues implement many strategies in order to integrate more interaction and technology into their lesson activities and they therefore welcome opportunities for sharing these ideas with one another.

Among the documentation reviewed in the Irish file were general aims, information on the organisation of Irish in the school, an account of resources and equipment which support the learning and teaching of Irish, information from training workshops, references to students with special educational needs and work schemes. The comprehensiveness of the work schemes was noteworthy. The reviewing and revision of these work schemes, as required, is an on-going element of the teachers' work. This is commendable practice. When schemes are being reviewed in future, it is recommended that the plan for each topic of the syllabus should include references to sample teaching, learning and assessment activities. It is further recommended that terminology associated with certificate examination papers should be avoided as much as possible, and that use should be made of terminology drawn from the various syllabuses — that the expression 'listening task' should be used in preference to 'listening comprehension', for example.

Extensive preparation had been made by all the teachers for the classes observed. Each of them made available a lesson plan in which the steps of the lesson had been laid out. It was apparent that the great majority of them had given careful consideration to the language to be acquired by the students during the lesson, and to the activities which would most appropriately afford the students opportunities of practising that language. In addition, it was clear that most of them had devoted time to locating and devising attractive resources which would encourage the participation of the students.

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Irish was the language in use in all the classes observed. The teachers spoke only in Irish to the students. The students had a reasonable understanding of the teacher's speech, indicating that Irish was the normal language of communication in class. The large majority of students made commendable efforts to speak Irish, whether in answering the teacher's questions, expressing opinions or describing an event. All teachers are asked to seek full sentences of each student, including those of lower ability. This recommendation is made, firstly to ensure that each student can communicate effectively, even at a basic level, and also to convey to students that verbs, nouns and other elements of language have to be manipulated, depending on the context in question.

While questioning by the teacher was the most frequently employed strategy of eliciting responses from the students, many teachers utilised pair work or group work so as to get students to speak to one another. This is a most effective practice and its use should be extended even further. Teachers are reminded that it is not necessary to wait until the last stage of a lesson before students are assigned interactive tasks. In fact it would be better if short interactive periods were created throughout the whole lesson.

The learning and teaching resources employed included audio clips, certificate examination papers, work sheets, flash cards, textbooks, posters, photographs and video clips. The vocabulary lists and the sample language structures displayed on the walls were of considerable assistance to students, particularly when speaking. These were also of great help to the teachers when reminding students of language points or practising the exact structure of idioms with a class. The teachers appreciate the effectiveness of resources which appeal to the eye and they are complimented on the use they made of everyday materials which stimulated the opinions, participation and imagination of students.

The teachers and students approached the class activities in an incremental way. Frequently, the subject matter of lessons was based on a previous lesson and at the beginning of these classes the teachers revised the language previously acquired by the students. In the course of the development of the lesson, students were assigned activities which further enhanced the knowledge previously acquired. Use was frequently made of reading passages or listening passages as a means of presenting the new elements of language to the students. Additionally, all teachers made use of their own spoken Irish, a practice which is of fundamental importance as it indicates that Irish is a living language. In this context, each teacher is encouraged to follow a practice observed in a significant number of classes, whereby an open conversation on current affairs is initiated at the beginning of each lesson. Not alone does this create class spirit and good relationships but students frequently practise their listening and speaking skills in the course of such an exercise, albeit unconsciously.

It was good that the students were assigned various tasks in the course of the lessons observed. As all the tasks were thematically linked, the same elements of language came into play again and again, thus enabling the students to consolidate the newly-acquired language. A further advantage of this approach was that it ensured the continuing participation of students. It is recommended to teachers that, when designing future activities, they would allocate tasks to students which transfers the burden of work from teachers to students and will result in the students speaking more and thinking more.

In one instance, the attention of students was drawn to language points as they arose in the course of the lesson. This is a good idea as students better understand a rule of grammar if they see it in use. It would be worthwhile for teachers to discuss with one another ways in which accuracy in Irish could be taught in an integrated fashion. Such strategies include setting aside a section of the white board on which to record the language points as they arise and the assignment of a homework exercise, or a group task in class, whereby students would be required to explain the relevant grammar rules.

It was clear that many teachers had a well-established system regarding the use of copybooks. Particular note was taken of copybook notes in which students had kept their own records of class work. The teachers are to be commended on their on-going monitoring of these copybooks. A source of information such as these is of particular value to students when they are revising the term's work.

## ASSESSMENT

The progress of students is assessed in various ways. Among the methods used are oral testing in class, the correction of written homework, monitoring of class work, class tests, in-house examinations, preliminary examinations and formal oral examinations. Common examinations apply as much as possible. This is an commendable approach as it ensures that all students in a year group follow, to a great extent, the same language programme. The teachers acknowledge the importance of assessing all the skills of language on a regular basis and, accordingly, in addition to written examinations, oral tests and listening tests are frequently administered to all students. The assessment system for Irish is comprehensive, and the teachers are to be highly commended for ensuring that the attainments of students over a wide range of skills is given recognition.

The Irish department has a homework policy which is based largely on what is set out in the school's homework policy. Additionally, it contains references to other methods of assessment which relate specifically to Irish – the assessment of the students' speaking abilities, for example. It also includes references to the importance of giving worthwhile feedback to students. Some ideas were shared with the teachers as regards ways in which they might check the students' written work and give them feedback on the standard being attained while requiring that the students would correct the work themselves. To this end, it is recommended to teachers that they would encourage students to take greater responsibility for locating the correct versions of the language errors they make. There are many opportunities here for peer assessment or group tasks.

Strategies relating to *Assessment for Learning* are being explored at a whole-school level. As part of a pilot scheme, the teachers of Irish have placed a particular emphasis on informing the class of the homework set for that evening at the beginning of a lesson. Overall, they are of the opinion that this is a reasonably effective strategy but that it is not appropriate to all learning contexts. The teachers are complimented on their continuing efforts to enhance the students' experience of learning and assessment. A further strategy advocated by *Assessment for Learning*, and which would be worth testing in future, is the sharing with the students of the intended learning outcomes at the beginning of a lesson. This strategy is particularly beneficial for language learners as it gives them to understand what it is they are expected to be able to say or to know if they participate actively in a class. If this practice were to be established, it would then be possible to build on it and to assign self-assessment tasks to students at designated times.

The management carries out a formal analysis of the attainments of students in the certificate examinations. This information is shared with the teachers and feedback is invited from them. This is a good practice.

Parents are kept informed of the progress of students in a number of ways. The school journal is used for the writing of notes and for recording examination results. School reports are sent home six times a year. In addition, meetings between parents and teachers are held once a year.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Irish enjoys a high status in this school.
- Classes are equitably allocated to the teachers.
- Teaching aids are readily available.
- The teachers acknowledge the importance of integrating ICT into class activities.
- Every effort has been made to create a stimulating learning environment in the classrooms in which Irish is taught.
- The teachers are especially interested in developing their professional skills.
- There is a wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities that promotes the use of Irish outside the classroom
- Subject-development planning is an integral element of the teachers' work.
- Classroom practice is openly debated at planning meetings.
- Extensive preparation had been made by all the teachers for the classes observed.
- Irish was the language in use in all the classes observed.
- Students were assigned a variety of activities, including pair work and group work.
- An extensive range of stimulating resources was utilised.
- Students effectively consolidated those aspects of language newly presented to them.
- Particular note was taken of the records of their learning kept by many students in their notebooks.
- There is a comprehensive system of assessment in place whereby all the language skills of students are evaluated.
- Every effort is made to keep all relevant parties informed as to the progress of students.

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

- It is recommended that consideration should be given to the benefits which would accrue from implementing a mixed ability system in Second Year.
- It is recommended that use should be made of learning and teaching methods which give the student a more active role still in class activities.
- It is recommended that the *Assessment for Learning* strategies being implemented should be further developed.

A post-evaluation meeting was held with the teachers of Irish and the principal at which the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

*Published, September 2010*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**



## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

*Translated from Irish version*

We are highly satisfied with this Subject Inspection. We wish to thank the inspector for the help and guidance she provided.

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

*Translated from Irish version*

Further to the main recommendations outlined in the report, a mixed-ability system will be implemented throughout Junior Cycle within two years. First-year classes are already of mixed ability. We will also make every effort to prioritise the other two main recommendations. Many thanks.