

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Saint Vincent's CBS
Glasnevin, Dublin 11
Roll number: 60400F**

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REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING OF IRISH

THIS INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Saint Vincent's CBS as part of a Whole-School Evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning of 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 the teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with the students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school-planning documentation and teachers' written preparations. Following the evaluation, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject teachers.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

Students are allocated to streamed classes in first year based on their achievements in literacy and numeracy tests. All students taking part in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) are allocated to the lowest stream in each year of the junior cycle. Although management and teachers are commended for providing Irish as outlined in *Siollabas don Teastas Sóisearach: Gaeilge* for JCSP students and their peers in other classes, only the foundation level is available to JCSP students. It is strongly recommended that management review the allocation of students to streamed classes and that it considers allocating them to mixed-ability classes for the first year of junior cycle at least. It is also recommended that management ensure that each student has access to Irish at a level which is appropriately challenging to his or her ability. Students taking the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

study *Gaeilge Chumarsáideach* in the first year of the programme. This provision is praiseworthy because it creates continuity in their learning from junior to senior cycle.

The time allocated to Irish on the school timetable is satisfactory for all classes except those focused on the JCSP, at present. It is recommended that the same number of class-periods be allocated to all junior-cycle classes, because all of the students are studying the same syllabus and in order to ensure equal opportunities. Apart from classes which are focused on the JCSP, the distribution of Irish classes throughout the week is commended because students are provided with a regular daily input in the language.

There were four teachers of Irish in the school at the time of the inspection, three of them having Irish in their degrees. The teachers' competence in Irish for the purpose of teaching was satisfactory in most cases. Where a teacher's competence in Irish is not satisfactory, it is recommended that management should provide suitable support to help the teacher develop his or her language skills. In addition, management is strongly advised to encourage and support the teachers in availing themselves of professional development opportunities based on methodologies and other aspects of the language, as provided by the Second-Level Support Service for Irish, for example.

The variety and range of aids and resources available for the teaching and learning of Irish were very limited. It is recommended that the teachers plan to increase the range of resources available for Irish and that they submit applications to the management to make televisions and overhead projectors available to the department, as well as extra CDs and DVDs. It would be very helpful if one or two dedicated classrooms were provided for Irish, so that teachers would have easier access to the aids and resources they need for their classes. A further advantage of such an arrangement would be that an environment could be created in the school which would be supportive of the learning of Irish.

A high percentage of the total number of students in the school had exemptions from Irish in accordance with the provisions of Circular M10/94. It was reported that the vast majority of those students had received their education outside the state until they were eleven years old. Learning-support programmes, or other school subjects at senior cycle, are provided for students who are exempt while Irish classes are in progress. It was also reported that students who are exempt but who remain in class with their peers while Irish is being taught, are encouraged to study the language. These arrangements are commended.

Events and competitions were organised for *Seachtain na Gaeilge* to provide experience of the language for the students outside of formal classes. It is worth mentioning that a prize-giving occasion was being organised in the school for competition-winners at the time of the evaluation. The teachers are commended for their work in this area. It is recommended that an account of the events and the competitions be included in the plan for Irish. Teachers should also bear in mind that such activities need not be confined to national events and festivals only.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The school is engaged with the school-development planning process. A department of Irish has been established and one of the teachers acts as co-ordinator. The department of Irish holds formal meetings four times a year and they also hold informal meetings. Students' progress, general planning-matters concerning each year group and selection of textbooks are the main topics on the agenda for these meetings. Minutes of the formal meetings are kept and made available to management. This practice is commended.

Attention must now be focused on planning for the subject and a comprehensive plan developed for Irish as part of the school curriculum. As part of this work, it is recommended that: aims and objectives be set out for Irish in the school and that these serve the needs of the students and the syllabuses; a framework of expected learning outcomes at different stages be laid out and that these should be based on the language functions referred to in the syllabuses, and on the various language skills; the plans for the year

groups should indicate integration in the development of the different language skills and the various aspects of the courses, including language and cultural awareness; the plan should include an account of the teaching and learning methodologies and strategies to be used to achieve the expected learning outcomes, including information and communication technology (ICT), the assessment methods to be used and differentiation strategies; the plan should include an account of the aids and resources available for Irish; the plan should indicate how the needs of the JCSP and of the LCA programmes would be met, as well as an account of the co-curricular and extra-curricular events organised to support student learning. It is further recommended that the plan should contain evidence that it is being monitored and reviewed regularly.

The good level of planning and preparation undertaken in some cases ensured that the classes were well structured and had clear aims and objectives. It is recommended that these good practices be more widely adopted.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The roll was called and students answered in Irish at the start of some of the classes observed. This is good practice and it is recommended that it be adopted as normal practice at the start of all classes. It is also recommended that a few minutes be spent at the opening of classes on conversation in Irish on topics of general interest, while the students are settling down, having come from situations in which another language was the medium of communication. It would be worthwhile, as part of this conversation, to encourage students to give the day and date in Irish, as was done in a certain case observed. To support this work, it is recommended that the teachers of Irish plan for the everyday classroom language required by the students and that, as part of their learning programme, the students be enabled to use that language.

Irish was to the fore as a medium of instruction in some of the classes observed. It is strongly recommended that the target language be more consistently used in classes.

Work was undertaken, in the classes observed, on a range of topics which accorded with the syllabuses. In most cases, the students were informed of the class content at the outset. It is recommended that this be further developed and that the expected learning outcomes would be shared with the students. This would enhance their understanding of their learning. It is also recommended that the teacher list the expected learning outcomes, and the tasks to be undertaken, on the whiteboard and that a few minutes be set aside at the end of class to allow the students to reflect on what they have learnt. In a few cases, the tasks undertaken by students during class were based on a common theme. This is good practice which helps, when well-organised, to reinforce learning, to cater for different learning styles and to integrate the development of the various language skills, as recommended. It is recommended that this practice be more widely adopted. The differentiation in presentation of content, as observed in one case, was particularly praiseworthy. There was an obvious emphasis, in this case, on adapting the material to the learning needs of the students, so that they could progress according to their individual abilities. It is recommended that this good practice be further developed and adopted in other classes.

Effective use was made of the whiteboard in a few cases, to record key-words, phrases and answers. Particularly praiseworthy are those instances in which the material was well-organised on the whiteboard and in which it was a valuable support to students as they undertook various tasks. Students in all classes undertook the tasks on an individual basis. It is recommended that pair-work and group-work be also used, to create authentic communicative situations and to foster co-operative learning among the students. It is furthermore recommended that a clear time-limit be set for tasks and that students be made aware of this, as was done in a certain case. It is also recommended that teachers use authentic texts from the broadcasting and print media, to present Irish to the students as a living modern language.

It was evident in the majority of the classes that teachers relied on translation to English to explain vocabulary to the students or to check their understanding of the material. It is recommended that this practice be avoided and that strategies such as mime, gesticulation and word-recognition skills, for

example, be used instead; these methodologies would better facilitate students in their language acquisition and, in the process, would enhance the use of Irish in class. Work on grammar was integrated into the content of classes and in a manner that suited students' ability-levels. This is good practice.

There was a collaborative atmosphere, which was supportive of learning, in the classes observed. The teachers moved around in the classrooms, helping individual students. Students were praised for their efforts and, in this context, teachers should remember that students understand words of praise in Irish as readily as those in English used in a good number of classes. Questions were posed to individual students in most cases and this helped to ensure participation in the classwork. The use of questioning challenges students in their learning according to their ability-level, and this strategy should be further developed.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment of students' work is based on their participation in class, on homework in certain cases, as well as on class tests and house examinations. The classes taking state examinations sit 'mock' examinations in the second term of their examination-year. House examinations are conducted twice a year and formal reports on students' achievements in those examinations are sent home to parents and guardians. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning, an element of which is homework. Homework was checked and assigned in a few of the classes observed. It is recommended that it should be the norm to set and correct homework. Considering that a whole range of language skills must be developed, homework need not be based exclusively on written work or on memorising material. Students should also be empowered to organise and keep order on their work and supported in achieving that objective. It is strongly recommended that it is ensured that JCSP profiling statements are appropriately completed in the case of all students and that examples of students' work on the key assignments of the LCA programme be readily available.

Account is taken of all the language skills in the results of house examinations for Transition Year, fifth and sixth years. This practice is highly commended and it is recommended that it be more widely used, so that it would become normal practice to include assessment of all the language skills when assessing the work of students in all year groups. The assessment of Irish in the school would then correspond more closely with the aims and objectives of the syllabuses.

In the case of a minority of the classes observed, regular correction had been done on students' work in the copybooks examined. Notes of praise for students' efforts were occasionally included. It is recommended that the teachers of Irish agree an approach to corrections based on assessment for learning (AfL/McF). Such an approach should acknowledge students for work well or correctly done and offer guidance on how to improve it. Further information on AfL is available at www.ncca.ie.

It was noted that in some cases positive comments on students' behaviour and work were included in a small number of the student journals reviewed. This is good practice and it is recommended that it be more widely used to support students' learning in class.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The amount of time allocated to Irish for most of the classes is satisfactory.
- Irish as outlined in *Siollabas don Teastas Sóisearach: Gaeilge* is provided for all students in the junior cycle.
- The department of Irish is established on a formal basis, one of the teachers acts as co-ordinator and the management allocates time for formal meetings.
- In the case of Transition Year, fifth and sixth years, all the language skills are assessed.

- The atmosphere in the classrooms was supportive of learning and students were praised for their efforts.
- Students were given a variety of tasks to undertake in class.

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

- It is recommended that, when recruiting staff, the management ensure the teacher's competence in Irish for the purpose of teaching and ensure that suitable supports be provided to allow teachers access to professional development opportunities.
- It is recommended that the use of Irish as the medium of instruction and communication be extended and that translation to English be avoided.
- It is recommended that a comprehensive plan be developed for Irish as part of the school curriculum.
- It is recommended that the expected learning outcomes be shared with the students at the start of class.
- It is recommended that the good practice regarding differentiated teaching, observed in one case, be extended and that pair-work and group-work be used.
- It is recommended that an adequate supply of aids and resources be made available for the teaching and learning of Irish, ICT resources included.
- It is recommended that homework be set and corrected regularly.
- It is recommended that the profiling statements for JCSP students be appropriately completed in line with the guidelines.
- It is recommended that examples of students' work on the key assignments for *Gaeilge Chumarsáideach* (LCA) be readily available.

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

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