

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Roll number: 76102K**

**Coláiste an Eachréidh  
An Coiléar Bán  
Baile Átha an Rí  
Contae na Gaillimhe**

**Date of inspection: 26 March 2010**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA** | **DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SCIENCE**

**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 Coláiste an Eachréidh, Athenry, County Galway. 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 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.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Coláiste Eachréidh was established under the auspices of County Galway Vocational Education Committee in the year 2006. This is the first all-Irish post-primary school to be established in County Galway to accommodate students from all-Irish medium primary schools in the catchment area of Athenry. There is one class group in each year of the junior cycle and this year the first cohort of students began the leaving certificate programme. It is planned to introduce Transition Year (TY) within the next two years and parents or guardians were made aware of this two years ago.

All class groups are organised on the basis of mixed ability and the vast majority of class groups have daily input in Irish. Additional classes are provided for students whose Irish is limited and for students with recognised learning needs in accordance with the school's policy on Irish. The mainstream class teacher is a graduate of Irish. Management provides every encouragement and support to the department to undertake continuing professional development, including in-career workshops organised by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS). An inservice day on the teaching of Irish in the context of immersion was organised. The school is congratulated for promoting the importance of continuing professional development in the school. The cooperation between Coláiste an Eachréidh and other schools in the vocational education scheme is also commendable in terms of sharing facilities and human resources in order to ensure the best provision for the students.

The school has very good facilities which support the teaching and learning of Irish. A computer with broadband connection is available in every room as well as an interactive board in some rooms. The teachers have easy access to televisions, hard disks, multi-use digital disks, and overhead and data projectors. A computer room is also available on a booking basis. The department has sourced a lot of aids and it is recommended that it augment this collection on an ongoing basis. The list of aids available to post-primary students on the website of the SLSS and

the website [www.cogg.ie](http://www.cogg.ie) would be of value as a reference point when developing teaching and learning resources in the future.

The students are given the opportunity to participate in a wide range of co-curricular and extracurricular activities, which are organised by the school, the vocational education committee, or by organisations such as Conradh na Gaeilge and Gael Linn. The school deserves high praise for encouraging students to participate in such activities, which greatly enrich the learners' experience of Irish and the Irish culture in accordance with the school's mission statement and the Irish policy.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

It is commendable that the aims and objectives laid out for the teaching and learning of Irish have been developed within the framework of the whole-school policy for language. The department is congratulated on the special emphasis being placed on giving students optimum competency across the four major language skills in accordance with the main principles of the syllabus. It is recommended that an action plan be devised to promote the language in the school with a view to implementing the aims and objectives in the whole-school policy, and also those set out in the Irish plan. It would also be beneficial to define a timeframe for the action plan as well as nominating staff members to achieve the targets. It would be very worthwhile for the school to forge strong links with the Irish-medium education movement and to cultivate additional links with other Irish-medium colleges operating in English-speaking environments.

Curriculum plans for the teaching and learning of Irish comprise lists of topics organised on a monthly basis. These plans contain good detail on the department's approaches and practices. There is an emphasis on the integration of grammar in the topics, roleplay and language games in the students' learning experience. It is recommended that the plans for the various year groups be further developed. In the case of topics (1-14) as laid out in the curriculum for the junior cycle, it is recommended that the material be adapted to suit the school context and that it be contemporary with the learners' life experience and time. Students attending the school come from various language backgrounds and as a result they have different competencies in Irish. In this context, and in accordance with the recommendations in the immersion literature, it is recommended that a bridging language programme be designed to instill competence and develop self-confidence in the language among the students for the immersion context before the end of the first term in first-year. It is recommended as a guideline in the development of curriculum plans, that the teaching topics and the learning aims, the methodologies, the resources, the time periods and the assessment methods be specified. In this way, the planning will be done to teach the language thematically and in an integrated manner across the various aspects of the syllabuses in accordance with the approach recommended in the Irish syllabuses. Examples of such integrated planning are to be found in *Guidelines in support of Teaching the Revised Course in Literature* from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2004).

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

There was a high standard in the short-term planning and preparation of all the lessons observed during the inspection. The lessons were characterised by good structure in accordance with the learning targets, and on the whole the lessons evolved in a developmental manner. It is commendable that the learning objectives were shared with the students at the beginning of

classes and again as the learning activity changed. It is recommended that debriefing sessions take place with the students at appropriate junctures during the lessons to provide an opportunity to the learners to demonstrate or to clarify what they have learned. This approach is beneficial as it cultivates learner independence when they are required to identify their own learning outcomes. The learning aids prepared for lessons were very good, and the PowerPoint slides and work sheets increased the students' participation in the learning activities. In the case of one class, a differentiated worksheet was employed with a core task for all students, as well as an extended task for those who had completed the core task before the allocated time had expired. This differentiated approach is commended in dealing with the mixed-ability context in particular.

A range of good teaching and learning methodologies was used in all the lessons observed during the inspection. In one class there was a good balance between the teacher's input and students' activities as well as variety in the number of language skills, which were integrated thematically during the lesson. Individual work was reinforced with paired tasks where worthwhile communicative opportunities were created for the students to practise their receptive and productive skills as well as facilitating peer learning. Such teaching and learning techniques are congratulated, and it is recommended that more use be made of them in other classes. Singing was being used as a strategy for enriching students' vocabulary, and the effectiveness of this methodology was evident from the learners' clear understanding of the meaning of the songs. This practice is commendable.

A revision lesson on grammar comprised the subject matter for another class. A good standard of whole-class presentation supported by clear recording on the board characterised the class. The teacher had to devote a considerable amount of time to the detailed analysis of the grammatical point and to recording the details. Students then took more time to make a copy of this. As an alternative approach, it is recommended that a revision handout be prepared. In this way the students would have more time to practise the point of grammar, while the teacher would have more opportunities to scaffold the students who may be challenged by such a task.

Good questions were directed at individual pupils and this increased the participation of students in the majority of lessons. It is recommended that wider use be made of this method of questioning in the course of every class so that the stronger learners do not dominate the questioning.

Exemplary class management skills were employed in all lessons during the inspection. Encouraging affirmation was always given for the quality of efforts and the opinions being provided by the students. The students participated willingly in the lesson activities. High expectations for learning and behaviour characterised every class.

It is commendable that a high standard of spoken and written Irish was being used in all lessons. The students' attention was being directed towards pronunciation and dialect matters during the lessons. It is recommended that this approach be also used when teaching grammar. A target point can be selected for the course of a lesson or a series of lessons, and the same point of grammar can be revisited repeatedly in the communicative context of the text where the point arises. This will result in a reduction in the monotony which attaches especially to a lesson focussed on grammar and the students will learn the grammar rules in a graduated manner.

There was a good learning environment in the classroom where the majority of Irish classes were being taught. Materials relating to Irish and the teaching and learning of Irish were on display on classroom walls. A number of notices in Irish were also on display around the school. It is

recommended that the number of such notices and also the number of permanent notices around the school in general be increased.

## **ASSESSMENT**

All students in the school undergo summative examinations on two occasions during the school year. A report based on these assessments issues to homes. It was evident in a document provided by the school that the four major language skills are included in the students' summative assessment. This practice is commendable, and it is recommended that parents or guardians be informed about the students' achievement across all language skills in school reports.

The school has developed a comprehensive homework and school-diary policy. The class teachers manage the homework diaries and parents sign the diaries on a weekly basis. Parents and teachers also use the diaries as a conduit for communication. These approaches are commendable. The random sample of diaries which were reviewed indicated that homework is regularly assigned with the emphasis being on written, memorisation and on revision tasks. Although this practice is in line with the guidelines on homework in the whole-school policy, it is recommended that this be reviewed in the context of language teaching, so as to include variety across all language skills in homework tasks. Such an approach would reinforce the student's competency in all the skills instead of prioritising just one skill. It is commendable that the random sample of diaries observed indicated that the homework in almost every subject was being recorded in Irish as is appropriate.

It was evident from the copybooks which were reviewed randomly that a good range of work had been done in accordance with the syllabus requirements, and that there were good practices to be observed in relation to corrections. Corrections focussed on grammatical or spelling errors were observed in the students' work. The majority of corrections provided clear guidelines on the correct form of the word, or else the correct spelling was provided. Developmental corrections were also in use, which provided clear learning guidelines to the students. These correction practices are commendable as they demonstrate an understanding of the learning to be gained for students from the correction process. Regarding corrections there is a need to be mindful about the extensive use of red pen marks as seen in some copybooks, in the context of the negative effect such practice can have on the learner's intrinsic motivation.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Very favourable provision and support exist for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school.
- There was a high standard in the short-term planning and the preparation which was carried out for all the lessons observed during the inspection.
- A good range of teaching and learning methodologies was in use in all lessons, and exemplary class-management skills characterised every lesson.
- The school has developed a comprehensive homework and school diary policy as well as good procedures for formative and summative assessment. The practices in use for correction of students' work were also commendable.

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

- It is recommended that an action plan be devised to promote the language in the school with a view to implementing the aims and objectives in the whole-school policy for Irish, and also those in the plan for Irish.
- It is recommended that the long-term curriculum plans be developed into current schemes of work that are specific to the school's immersion context.

A post-evaluation meeting was held 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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