

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School  
Rosbercon, New Ross, Co. Wexford  
Roll number: 636300**

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

**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING OF IRISH**

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**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning of Irish and offers recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted during one day on which the inspector visited classrooms and observed 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 preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and the subject teachers.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT**

First years in the school are in mixed-ability classes. The students are then divided between ordinary level and higher level for second-year Irish, based on the students' wishes and the results of first-year exams. It was reported that there are two higher-level classes and one ordinary-level class in second year. This arrangement continues into third year and frequently into fifth year according to student ability. There is just one higher-level class at sixth year. It was reported that there is good flexibility for students regarding access to the various levels, but that an effort is made to keep as many students as possible in the higher-level classes.

Ten students in the school have exemptions from the study of Irish. Those ten are students who got their primary education abroad, or are international students. They remain in the Irish classes under the supervision of the teacher or attend lessons from the learning-support teacher as appropriate. There are seven teachers of Irish in the school and the majority of them have many years' experience in teaching the subject.

Provision for Irish on the timetable is satisfactory, with five class-periods per week for junior cycle classes and five per week for senior cycle classes. Six periods per week are available this year for fifth years because the classes are large. The extra period was allocated to compensate for class-sizes. Transition Year students have three classes per week. It is recommended that the school management investigate the possibility of increasing that number of class-periods. It is difficult to provide an interesting comprehensive programme of Irish in three periods per week.

The teachers of Irish run a programme of events annually for 'Seachtain na Gaeilge' in recent years. As recommended in the subject inspection report on Irish in October 2003, this programme of events has now been developed and other year-groups besides first and second years are involved in the events. It is recommended that the programme of events be further developed and that efforts be made to organise other extra-curricular and cross-curricular occasions during the

whole school year. Transition Year students might be requested to make an input into running some of the events, especially during 'Seachtain na Gaeilge'.

It was reported that there is no dedicated budget for the teaching and learning of Irish, but that teachers are welcome to approach the principal with applications for resources and aids. The resources for Irish are available at a central location in the school, where teachers have access to them. It was not evident, however, that regular use was being made of the resources available. Neither did the inspector get the impression that there was a good selection of materials involved. It is recommended that the resources available in the school for teaching the language should be registered and listed and that teachers ensure that they are used in the teaching of Irish.

Teachers do not have their own rooms in the school, due to shortage of space. The students remain in their own classrooms and the teachers move about as necessary. It is therefore difficult for teachers to create an Irish atmosphere in the classrooms. However, a good selection of material was on display on the walls, e.g. charts focused on aspects of grammar as well as samples of the students' work. The work involved in those charts is commended but teachers are advised to make them more conspicuous so that students can utilise them in class.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

One of the teachers of Irish has been designated co-ordinator of planning for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school. This responsibility is transferred to a different teacher each year, a laudable arrangement, since it allows every member of staff to assume leadership in co-ordinating various elements of planning for Irish.

The teachers of Irish meet formally three times a year. The allocation of classes and students is discussed at the first meeting, as well as the results of State exams and the choice of textbooks. The second meeting is concerned with the programme of events for 'Seachtain na Gaeilge' and the organising of exams. The agenda for the third meeting is determined by the year's work and various problems that arise. The teachers have undertaken the formulation of an overall plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school as was suggested in the inspection report of October 2003. Their efforts in this regard are highly commended. It is now recommended that the teachers build on this work and develop an integrated plan for Irish that would encompass not just the topics to be covered by the different year-groups, but the methodologies and learning objectives, and the resources to be used in the various classes. Teachers are also advised to include the use of information and communication technology (ICT) also in the general plan for Irish.

It is further recommended that teachers plan for the provision of a wide range of interesting aids and resources for the teaching and learning of Irish. It is vitally important to ensure that a wide range of resources is available to teachers for use in their classes.

A plan has been prepared for the teaching of Irish at Transition Year. It is not quite clear, however, whether students have the opportunity to go on the outings mentioned in the plan. It is recommended that the Transition Year plan be reviewed, with all the teachers of Irish making an input. It is suggested that a programme of interesting events be drawn up, with particular emphasis on oral Irish and the development of students' communication skills. That programme should be followed, no matter which teacher is in charge of the classes. It is also recommended

that there be a cross-curricular element in the teaching of the language and that students be given an opportunity to experience different areas of the curriculum through the medium of Irish.

Good, careful preparation had been made for all the classes observed. Notes and worksheets had been prepared for distribution to the students in the classes. The classes observed moved along at a steady pace, due to the effective planning done beforehand.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The use of Irish as the language of management, instruction and communication in the classes observed was excellent. Very little translation of Irish to English was heard in the classes. The teachers' enthusiasm for using the target language in class deserves great merit. Students, on the whole, were prepared to ask and answer questions in Irish. In a few cases, however, English was accepted from the students as the language of communication, although the students involved were taking the higher-level course. It is strongly advised that teachers ensure that Irish is the language of communication in the Irish class, used not just by the teacher in communicating with the students, but vice versa also, especially in the case of students who are competent in the language. It was also noted that teachers required complete sentences, rather than accepting single words, as answers to their questions. This approach is to be commended.

The inspector felt that the students' pronunciation was fairly faulty in some cases observed. Teachers are advised to tackle this problem and to correct the students' pronunciation in a sensitive way that will not undermine their self-confidence. The teachers themselves too are advised to pay attention to matters of pronunciation and accuracy in their classes. Good example should always be given.

The blackboard was used effectively in the classes observed. New vocabulary, questions and points of grammar were written on the board for students. Continuous closed and open questions were asked of the students. In some cases observed they were asked to read aloud and, in general, all students were afforded opportunities to participate in the class and in the learning. This approach is laudable.

The teachers were energetic and enthusiastic in teaching the classes observed. They managed to set the students to work without much ado and ensured that students had a wide range of tasks to complete as part of each class, which allowed the lessons to move along at a good pace. This method also helped to hold the students' interest in the subject for the duration of the lesson. The students were enthusiastic and participated in the work and the inspector noted the good communication between students and teachers in the classes.

In some classes observed, the inspector noted particularly the practice of using different strategies to create communication opportunities for students. A range of strategies was used, among them role-play, group-work, pair-work and games. This methodology is highly commended, but teachers are reminded to ensure that appropriate preparation is made for these activities so that students will derive the maximum benefit from them. Teachers should also arrange for an oral component for students in each Irish class, so that all of their language skills are being developed. It is also recommended that teachers use mixed-ability grouping for pair-work or group work, so that the students with greater competence in the language can help the others.

In some cases observed, the inspector felt that there was too great an emphasis on the use of the textbook. Teachers are strongly advised to use the textbook as a source of reference and as an aid

in the lessons, rather than as the main teaching instrument. Teachers are advised to use other aids and to source authentic texts to supplement the material in the textbook. They are further advised to use Irish-language media more widely, especially TG4, to make the learning of Irish more attractive and more interesting for students. It was felt that in some classes observed, opportunities were missed for showing extracts from programmes in Irish as part of the lesson, to enhance the teaching and learning. It was reported that there is a special room in the school in which films/TV programmes can be shown. It is recommended that more use be made of this room or that appropriate equipment be provided so that teachers can show relevant interesting programmes in the classroom.

Effective use was made of the blackboard in all the classes observed. The inspector also noted the use of prompt-cards in a few classes observed. This approach is commended, subject to ensuring that the cards are up-to-date and attractive to the students.

Particular note was taken of one class observed, where a lesson on sport was taught, taking advantage of the students' interest in the subject and also drawing on the rivalry between the students' two home counties. The lesson worked splendidly and the students were totally involved in it. Links were made also, in a few classes observed, between the subject-matter of the lesson and the students' everyday interests. This methodology is most effective because students show far greater interest in learning the language if it is relevant to their own experience of the world around them. It is therefore important to link some aspect of a lesson to something in the students' own lives which is of particular interest to them.

The effective linking of a lesson to work previously done in class, in one lesson observed, is commendable. The strategy ensured that students had an opportunity of revising work already done and that they had another opportunity of using vocabulary and sentences they had previously learnt.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The students are continually assessed up to Christmas, by means of class tests given once a month. The Christmas results are based on that continuous assessment and on minor tests in the class. Formal school exams are organised in the summer. Reports are sent home to parents twice a year, at Christmas and in the summer.

It was reported that common exams are organised for first and second years and for any other year-group which has two classes of the same standard. This arrangement is highly commended. Teachers are at present discussing the feasibility of doing oral exams with fifth-year students and with those in Transition Year. It is strongly recommended that teachers go ahead with the organisation of those oral exams. It is considered important, however, that all the language-skills be assessed before Transition Year. The students become shy and nervous about speaking other languages as they get older. It is difficult to start assessing their communication skills in Transition Year. It is advisable that the teachers of Irish discuss the possibilities of assessing the communication skills from first year on.

It was reported that regular use is made of the school diary to monitor students and any problems that may arise. It was evident from the copybooks examined that homework is given and corrected regularly. It was considered that careful correction had been made on the copybooks examined. Different systems of correction were in use, however. The teachers of Irish are advised

to devise for themselves a common system of correction that would ensure continuity from year to year and from teacher to teacher. It is also advised that a special correction system be worked out for the higher-level classes in the senior cycle in particular, which would ensure that students learned from their mistakes. It is important that the maximum benefit be derived from all the work done on correcting the copybooks.

Awards and trophies are given to students for prowess in sport and other notable achievements. No awards are made for academic achievements. It is recommended that the possibility be considered of awarding an annual prize to the student who made the greatest contribution in some area of Irish. It is important to give Irish a high profile in the eyes of the school community.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the assessment:

- The provision for Irish on the school timetable is satisfactory on the whole.
- Great credit is due to the development that has been done on the programme of events for ‘Seachtain na Gaeilge’ as was suggested in the inspection report of October 2003.
- The work done by the teachers on formulating a plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school as part of the School Development Planning process is acknowledged and commended.
- The use of Irish as the language of classroom management, instruction and communication was very satisfactory in the classes observed.
- There seemed to be a very good atmosphere in the classes observed as well as a pleasant relationship between students and teachers.
- The creation of opportunities for communication in some of the classes observed, through the use of pair-work, games, role-play and group-work, is highly commended.
- The work done on organising common exams for appropriate classes deserves great praise.
- Good careful preparation had been made for all the classes, a range of tasks had been drawn up for implementation in class and, as a result, lessons moved along at a good pace.

The following general recommendations are made to enhance the strengths outlined above and to identify areas for development:

- It is recommended that the teachers continue to develop the programme of events for ‘Seachtain na Gaeilge’, and furthermore, that other extra-curricular and cross-curricular events be organised during the whole school-year.
- It is recommended that the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school be further developed, to incorporate teaching methodologies, learning objectives and resources for use in the classes in the plan.
- It is recommended that the Transition Year plan be developed, placing the emphasis on learning the language in various pleasant ways, always prioritising the communication skills of the students.
- Teachers are advised to use a wider range of aids and resources in class, especially authentic materials from the Irish-language media and not to over-emphasise the use of the textbook.

- It is recommended that all the language skills, including spoken Irish, be assessed from first year onwards.

Post-assessment meetings with the teachers of Irish and with the principal were organised at the end of the assessment to present and discuss the main findings and recommendations.