

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of: Irish
REPORT**

**St Bricin's College
Belturbet, County Cavan
Roll number: 70350W**

Date of inspection: 7 February 2014



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	6, 7 February 2014
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with deputy principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to the deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was at various levels, including a level that was good overall, and a level that showed room for improvement.
- In the best lessons, the material was well-differentiated and thus accessible for the students. Other resources were also used, especially information and communications technology (ICT), and there were opportunities for collaborative learning, which varied the lesson very well for the students.
- In certain cases the teacher was too central to the lesson throughout and the language used was too complicated and too challenging.
- Direct translation from English to Irish as a way of making sure that the students understood was being practised too much in certain cases.
- It is an encouraging sign for Irish that the participation and attainment rates at Higher Level in the Junior Certificate examination 2013 were greatly improved in comparison to previous years, and it is recommended that continued efforts are made to maintain these trends.
- The main focus is on improving the students' ability to speak Irish; the students are being entered for the optional oral examination part of the Junior Certificate, and attention is being given to this necessary aspect of the language skills in school assessments.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A common area for improvement is to ensure that the students understand the learning objectives before the lesson begins.
- It is recommended that teachers cut back on the regular use of direct written translation from English to Irish as a way of ensuring student understanding.
- The learning objectives of the lesson need to be achievable in order to motivate and encourage the students.
- It is recommended that the limited provision for the subject in the junior cycle be reviewed.

INTRODUCTION

St Bricin's College is a co-educational post-primary school under the trusteeship of the Cavan and Monaghan Education and Training Board. 206 students are enrolled for the school year 2013/14. A significant number of students are not studying Irish; up to twenty per cent of the overall total. The programmes in which Irish is available are the Junior Certificate, the optional Transition Year, and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was at various levels, including a level that was good overall, and a level that showed room for improvement.
- The teachers used the target language in all of the lessons, and the quality of that provided a very good exemplar for the students.
- The extent of the challenge faced by the students with expressing themselves in the spoken language was especially clear in the junior cycle. Thus the special efforts that are being made to develop this aspect of the language skills merit particular commendation.
- In the most successful classes the material to be taught was well-measured and differentiated, which meant that the material was accessible for the students. Other resources were also used, especially ICT resources, and there were opportunities for collaborative learning, which gave great variety to the lesson. In other cases the teacher was too central to the lesson throughout and the language used was too challenging.
- Although the learning objectives were expressed in all of the lessons, a common area for improvement is to confirm with the students that they understand these objectives from the beginning. In the best instances the learning objectives were reviewed before the end of the lesson in order to evaluate the progress made.
- It was clear from the best lessons that the teacher had considered in advance the difficulties that certain students could face in relation to understanding necessary vocabulary. In order to make a poem that had not been read before easier to understand, the key vocabulary in the text was addressed in various contexts and relevant supporting images were shown.
- It is recommended that teachers be particularly careful regarding the regular usage of direct written translation from English to Irish as a way of ensuring student comprehension. Translation is a particular skill but it is not included among the language skills recommended in the syllabi. It can be helpful, but its usage should be limited.
- The effective use of ICT resources was limited to particular lessons, and it would be worth developing this aspect of teaching.
- The best evidence of the students' ability to engage with both spoken and written language was observed in those lessons in which there were opportunities for collaborative learning. These activities were well-suited to the learning objectives.
- It is worth remembering that it is not the language itself that is being taught in any given lesson but rather attainable aspects of the language that are being developed gradually. This was the clearest difference in the quality of the lessons. The learning objectives of the lesson should be more measured and achievable in order to motivate and encourage the learners.

- The quality of the copybook work was praiseworthy, for the most part. The best ones had constructive guidance and great praise of the students' efforts from the teacher. In certain copies the translation method was overused.
- Good records of the students' achievements in various assessments throughout the year were being kept by the teachers, and arrangements to assess the level of spoken language were registered in the subject lesson plans.
- There was a good atmosphere to be felt in the vast majority of the lessons and overambitious learning goals were the reason for the small number of students whose interest in the lesson waned as time went on.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE-SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Good provision is made for Irish in the senior cycle and the subject gets a good and fair distribution of time on the weekly timetable for all year-groups. The provision for Irish in the junior cycle is limited, however, with each of those three year-groups having only four periods per week.
- It is an encouraging sign for Irish that the participation and attainment rates at Higher Level in the Junior Certificate examination 2013 were greatly improved in comparison to previous years, and it is recommended that continued efforts are made to maintain these trends.
- Good provision is being made for resources, and one of the Irish teachers in particular is developing a great ability to use ICT resources as a learning support tool for the subject for all the Education and Training Board schools.
- The subject is being taught by two very dedicated and appropriately qualified teachers, and another teacher, who takes on extra teaching duties for the subject, is a native Irish speaker.
- The management provides good support for the continuing professional development of the teachers. The two aforementioned teachers have had good attendance at the support service events for the professional development of Irish teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Good arrangements are in place for collaborative planning for the subject, and the minutes include discussion of strategies that support teaching and learning, and agreed improvement goals that have been set out for the subject.
- It is important that the number of students who are not studying the subject be registered accurately, with the reasons given in each case.
- Appropriate attention is given in the subject plan to the development of literacy in Irish and there was proof of the implementation of the strategy in the most productive lessons.
- The Irish Department is focussing a lot on improving the students' ability to speak Irish; the students are being entered for the optional oral examination for the Junior Certificate and attention is being given to this necessary aspect of the language skills in the school assessments. It is recommended that the students' level of ability in the spoken language be specifically noted in school reports.

The draft findings and recommendations arising from this evaluation were discussed with the deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Irish Department were very pleased that the inspectorate acknowledged the significant increase in student numbers taking up Higher Level at both Junior and Leaving Certificate Level and will encourage a continuation of this trend.

The Irish Department were impressed that the Inspectorate acknowledged that the students were offered the Irish oral component An bhéaltriall.

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

The Subject Department will place more focus on oral work from 1st year and will include oral assessment as part of all summative and formative assessments i.e. House Exams, Christmas, Mid Term and Summer.

The Irish Department will review their plan to reflect the needs and abilities of their students with continued emphasis on increasing the uptake at Higher Level.

Small whiteboards provided in all classrooms for 'learning objectives' to get more use at the beginning of lessons.

School management are committed to ensure increased provision for Irish within new Junior Cycle structure.