

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

**Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT**

**Abbey Vocational School
[Gairmscoil na Mainistreach]
Donegal
Roll Number: 71180F**

Date of inspection: 20 March 2013



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	19, 20 March 2013
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- There was good quality teaching in all lessons and evidence of high quality also.
- The students were very diligent and accordingly the quality of learning was good for the most part.
- The target language was to the fore in the lessons and overall the teaching methods were good as regards encouraging free conversation.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) resources enhanced learning and there was particularly good use of ICT to show Irish being spoken with ease by teenagers.
- The school's participation level at higher level is good in the junior cycle and greatly improving in the senior cycle for the past five years.
- Pupils from the local all-Irish primary school are now enrolling in Abbey Vocational School. This is a significant and positive step forward and it is appropriate that high learning expectations in the subject are provided for these learners in the lessons.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is worth verifying with the students at the start of the lesson that they recognise the learning outcomes from the lesson content and differentiating those learning outcomes in order to serve the students' different learning abilities.
- It is recommended that more use be made of ICT items containing authentic texts of the language being spoken as exemplars for the students.
- It is recommended that the steps already taken to award a significant common proportion of marks in the in-house examinations for ability in spoken Irish should be built upon.

INTRODUCTION

Abbey Vocational School is a co-educational school under the patronage of the County Donegal Vocational Education Committee. The programmes available are the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and Transition Year (TY), which is an optional programme. There are 736 students enrolled in 2012/13. Ten per cent of these have exemption from Irish.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There was good quality teaching in the six lessons observed and evidence of high quality also. The students made every effort to participate in learning activities and accordingly the quality of learning was good for the most part.
- At the start of lessons, attention was clearly drawn to the expected learning outcomes and the students were well encouraged to engage in the work. This created an atmosphere which was supportive of learning from the start. It is worth verifying with the students that they recognise the learning outcomes from the lesson content. It is also worth differentiating those learning outcomes in order to serve the students' different learning abilities.
- The teaching displayed appropriate expectations regarding students' abilities to learn. In one case a text which was central to the lesson was at a level of difficulty that was only appropriate for the most competent learners, however. At the same time, the ambition regarding learning in this lesson was commendable, and it is recommended that the content be differentiated and not over-simplified.
- The target language was to the fore in teaching and good efforts were made to establish natural conversation with the students. More complete answers should be sought in certain instances, for example giving the verb used in the question in the answer, and encouraging the students themselves to ask questions. Overall, however, the teaching methods were good as regards the encouragement of free conversation. As well as being one of the most challenging skills in language learning, regular practice of accurate speaking of the language gives motivation and encouragement to the learners.
- Good care was taken with language awareness through focussing on accurate phrases and structures as opposed to focussing on correcting mistakes with formal grammar. This emphasis on assessment for learning was in keeping with the positive note which was to the fore in the lessons. Mistakes were corrected very well with a class in the senior cycle where the students' ability to recognise the verbs' tenses in questions was fairly weak.
- ICT resources enhanced learning and they were well used in the lessons. The best examples included a short film recorded on a summer college Irish course in which students were interviewed about their experience of the course. Not only was Irish to be heard spoken with ease by their own age cohort: some of these were known to the students. It is recommended that more use be made of ICT items containing authentic texts of the language being spoken as exemplars.
- Students experienced active work in the lessons, with pair work and group work and drama was used in Transition Year to give the students another experience of speaking the language. Drama is a very good way to cater for students' differing abilities.

- It was commendable that a very positive and supportive learning environment for the subject was to be observed in the classrooms assigned to the Irish teachers. It is recommended that this content be renewed from time to time.
- An inspection of copybooks showed that appropriate work was being assigned and corrected regularly and that there was helpful feedback and praise for the students' efforts. This was consistent with assessment for learning practices which were to the fore in the lessons.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision for the subject is very good indeed and the even distribution of lessons throughout the week is excellent except for a small glitch with a class in first year; it would be worth reviewing the low provision in Transition Year with a view to increasing it if possible.
- The provision of resources is very good and sets of dictionaries are available in all classrooms where Irish is taught.
- The decision to provide a supply of Irish books in the library next year is a good sign and that Irish books will henceforth be included in the school project supporting literacy *Leag Uait Is Léigh (LUIL)* or *Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)*.
- There was evidence of great efforts to promote Irish throughout the school during Seachtain na Gaeilge. These included a weekend language trip to the Rann na Feirste Gaeltacht for a large group of students.
- All the teachers had Irish in their degrees, most of them are second language teachers and the quality of Irish of the teachers themselves ranges from very good to excellent.
- All teachers have an excellent record of attendance at the courses provided by the second level support service for Irish.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Planning for the subject is good and positive aims have been identified for teaching and learning the subject. There is scope for defining the learning outcomes more clearly from year to year, and in the case of the Transition Year plan, in order to provide a specific account of what will be learned as opposed to a general account.
- It is good to note that there is a strong emphasis in the subject plan on the use of the language and this was to be seen in the lessons in the efforts made to enable the students to speak the language.
- The detailed analysis made of students' participation and attainment in the certificate examinations provides a good indication of the progress being made in the subject. The school's participation level at higher level is good in the junior cycle and improving greatly in the senior cycle in the last five years.
- There is a focus on including spoken Irish as an integral part of in-house examinations and it is recommended that this be developed further in order to award a common share of

marks to this aspect. There is a discussion ongoing in the department about entering students for the optional Junior Certificate oral examination and this would also be a good step.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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; a response was not received from the board.

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