An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Subject Inspection of Irish
REPORT

Abbey Community College
Abbey Road, Ferrybank,
County Kilkenny
Roll number: 76082H

Date of inspection: 18 April 2012

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN IRISH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	18 April 2012
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- In the lessons observed very good use was made of Irish as the language of communication, instruction and classroom management.
- All lessons included a range of learning activities but not enough opportunities were provided for authentic communication in the target language.
- Learning objectives were presented on the whiteboard at the beginning of all lessons, students had a good understanding of what they were required to achieve and lessons were paced appropriately.
- Efforts made to provide students with a programme of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in order to enrich student experience of Irish as a living language are to be commended.
- Effective use was made of information and communications technology (ICT) in some of the lessons observed.
- The work completed to date in planning for teaching and learning Irish is commended.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that more opportunities for communication in the target language be created in classes to enable students to make functional use of what they learn.
- It is recommended that the department subject plan for Irish be developed and the schemes of work set out in a more integrated manner in order to optimise their benefit and effectiveness.
- Student communicative skills should be assessed from first year onwards and parents should be informed formally of the changes taking place in Irish in the state examinations.

INTRODUCTION

The Abbey Community College is a co-educational school under the joint patronage of County Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee (VEC) and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary. There is a current enrolment of 669 students. The school offers a wide range of educational programmes which include the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- In the lessons observed very good use was made of Irish as the language of communication, instruction and classroom management. On the whole, teachers did their utmost to avoid the use of translation from Irish to English when determining student understanding of lesson content.
- The aim and learning objectives of the lessons were displayed at the beginning of all lessons observed and, in certain cases, a short appraisal of the achievement of those objectives was carried out at the end of class. This approach is commended and it undoubtedly helped maintain student focus on the work and, consequently, lessons were appropriately paced.
- In many of the lessons observed use was made of group and pair work as well as games. All these approaches are highly commended. With the exception of one case where students were engaged in pair work practising for the oral examination, class activities were not sufficient to provide opportunities for authentic communication in the target language. It is recommended that teachers discuss this issue and agree strategies which would provide students with opportunities to make functional use of the target language amongst themselves.
- Use was made of ICT in a few of the lessons observed and this is highly commended. Teachers should continue to develop their skills in this area and should ensure that widespread use is made of technology to support students in their learning.
- The school has a wide range of resources for the teaching of Irish. It is recommended that these resources be used more during Irish lessons. Very effective and constructive use can be made of these resources to place the lesson content in a contemporary and interesting context for students. It is recommended therefore that regular use is made of podcasts, Irish communications media, magazines, DVD's, television programmes, music, posters, photographs and any other material which would be useful for teaching the language.
- Students were well mannered and polite in the lessons observed. During lessons teachers circulated among students answering questions, encouraging student effort and correcting written work. A good atmosphere of mutual respect was evident in all Irish classes.
- In all lessons observed constructive use was made of key words. That approach is commended as a support for literacy development, however, it would be worthwhile ensuring that students can correctly pronounce new words and phrases and utilise them in oral and written sentences. In many instances appropriate attention was paid to Irish phonetics. This good practice should be extended to all classes.
- Classrooms were well decorated with materials relevant to teaching and learning Irish. Student work, grammar materials, information and vocabulary posters were all included in displays. In order to make optimum use of this material it is recommended that teachers direct student attention to these displays from time to time during lessons.

Materials of this type can be very supportive of literacy development. The widespread use of pocket dictionaries during lessons was noted, this approach also supports the development of literacy. The use of online dictionaries is demonstrated to students and it was reported that these are used in class to provide students with experience of using them.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Timetabled allocation for Irish is satisfactory with four class periods per week in first year and five class periods for every other year group in junior and senior cycles, apart from TY where three periods per week are provided. It is intended also to provide a fifth period in first year from next year onwards. This decision is commended.
- Worthwhile efforts are made to enrich student experience of Irish as a living language through the celebration of *Seachtain na Gaeilge*. This year has seen the establishment of *Cumann na nGaedhal* which offers students an opportunity to come together to speak Irish in an informal way. The VEC awards a certain amount of money to enable the school to offer part-scholarships for students to visit the Gaeltacht areas. Some suggestions were made to teachers of Irish regarding other activities that could be organised in order to enhance communication opportunities for students outside the class.
- Good ICT facilities are available to teachers of Irish and it was reported that these are used on a regular basis. It is recommended that teachers continue to develop their experience and expertise in the use of this very valuable resource.
- Teachers of Irish are welcome to present proposals to the school principal for materials and facilities to support learning the language. It is recommended that an inventory of facilities and resources is compiled and these added to little by little, so that a good library of resources is available to support the teaching of the language.
- Fifth and sixth-year students undertake formal oral examinations in Irish. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all classes from first year onwards and that the results of this assessment be shown as a separate mark in the reports issued to parents. Parents should be informed formally about the changes to Irish in the state examinations.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Each year one of the teachers of Irish is nominated as coordinator of planning for teaching and learning Irish.
- Teachers meet four times per year. Minutes of these meetings show that teachers discuss a wide range of issues. It is evident from minutes that emphasis is placed on improving student achievement and that teachers are seeking to increase the numbers of students obtaining high marks in the state examinations. A substantial number of students take higher-level Irish in the state examinations and the work of teachers and school management in this regard is commended.
- The amount of time and effort involved in developing the subject plan for teaching and learning Irish is evident. In order to build on this good work it is recommended that schemes of work should be set out in a more integrated way with details of topics, teaching methodologies, facilities and resources, teaching objectives and assessment

methods. Specific reference should be made to literacy and numeracy development in these schemes also.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and the subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation. 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.

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