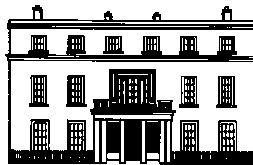


**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of Irish  
Report**

**Coláiste Chraobh Abhann  
Kilcoole, Co. Wicklow  
Roll Number: 76076M**

**Date of inspection: 26 November 2009**



**A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F  
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N  
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S**

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

---

**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Chraobh Abhann, Co. Wicklow. 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 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 deputy principal. 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.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

The students in first year are organised within two bands. There are two class groups in each of the two bands. There is one higher-level class group in each band and the other two class groups are mixed-ability. The same arrangement continues in second and third year. Transition Year (TY) is optional in the school and usually two class groups opt for that programme. The class groups for that year are mixed-ability, which is in keeping with the philosophy of Transition Year. In the fifth and sixth years, there is one higher-level class group, one ordinary-level class groups, one mixed class group for ordinary and foundation level, and one foundation-level class group.

The timetable provision for Irish is, on the whole, satisfactory with four periods per week for first year, and for second and third year at ordinary level. The classes that take higher level have five periods per week in second and third year. Five periods are provided for classes in fifth and sixth year, which is good provision. Only three periods per week, however, are available to class groups in TY. It is recommended that school management should review this provision. It is difficult to provide continuity and an interesting programme which is of benefit to students with three periods per week.

Five teachers are engaged in the teaching of Irish in the school. They all have the appropriate qualifications and the majority of them have years of experience of teaching the subject. The class groups and the different levels are rotated among all the teachers, taking continuity into account in the junior and senior cycles. This is good practice, in that it affords opportunities for all teachers to gain experience of teaching the various levels and age groups.

Ninety-one of the entire student population of five hundred and eighty-one students have an exemption from the study of Irish. Learning difficulties constitute the reason for sixty-one exemptions and students whose primary education was received abroad and who had neither Irish nor English when they enrolled in the school account for eighteen more exemptions. There are two other students in the school who spent a period longer than three years outside the country who also have an exemption from Irish. There are some students in the school who have an exemption from Irish, but who engage in learning the language and school management gives every support to this decision.

The Irish teachers in Coláiste Craobh Abhann make commendable attempts to give the language a profile outside of the classroom. For example, it is reported that good efforts are made to organise Irish occasions and events during Seachtain na Gaeilge. Irish is chosen as one of the languages that are celebrated on Languages Day. The work being done by the teachers to give the language a higher profile in the school is commended. Coláiste Craobh Abhann is a relatively new school and it is recommended that the teachers and school management explore further ways of giving the students an experience of Irish as a living language.

It is recommended, for example, that the possibility of establishing an Irish language club be considered and that it be registered with Feachtas, an Irish language youth organisation, which would provide a focus for a club of this nature. It is recommended also that the programme of events during Seachtain na Gaeilge be developed and extended throughout the whole year in order to ensure that a continuous programme of events is available. It is also recommended that the possibility be considered of sending a group of interested students to a Gael Linn course in communications that is directed specifically towards TY students.

There is no tradition to date of students from Coláiste Craobh Abhann attending Gaeltacht or Irish courses in the summer. Strenuous efforts are being made by school management and by the Irish teachers to inform students and their parents of the advantages of these summer courses. It is recommended that both students and parents are informed about courses that are available locally and about courses further from home in the Gaeltacht and other areas. Three Gaeltacht scholarships are provided annually by the County Wicklow Vocational Educational Committee, which is a great help to the school in fostering this tradition.

The Irish teachers have their own classrooms and the rooms were, in general, attractively and stimulatingly decorated with posters, charts, the work of the students and other materials relevant to the learning of Irish on display on the walls. The work of the teachers in this regard is commended.

A few of the Irish teachers have attended the inservice courses provided by the Second Level Support Service for Irish. It is recommended that all Irish teachers avail of the opportunity to attend one of these courses at different times in the year.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

The Irish teachers meet together as a group once a term. Minutes are kept of these meetings and are also forwarded to school management. It was reported that the Irish teachers also hold regular, informal meetings, as the need arises during the year. A co-ordinator from among the Irish teachers is nominated on an annual basis for planning the teaching and learning of the subject. This is good practice, in that it gives all the teachers the opportunity to play a leadership role in relation to planning for Irish and in relation to the promotion of the language in the school. The duties of the co-ordinator are defined precisely and they include planning and organisational

responsibilities, such as for example, convening meetings, disseminating information for school management and the Irish teachers, collecting plans from the teachers and inserting changes in the plan for Irish on an annual basis.

A plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school was presented on the day of inspection. The plan gives an account of the organisation of the Irish department in the school which includes, among other matters, data on the distribution of students in classes, the timetabling of the subject for the different class groups and levels and opportunities for the use of ICT. The plan further outlines topics to be covered for the various class groups and levels. The work that has been carried out to date on the plan is commended. It is recommended, however, that there be more details provided in the plan regarding the use of a wider range of methodologies with different class groups and levels and more details in relation to the use of resources and materials in the teaching of Irish. It is also recommended that the section of the plan that refers to the use of ICT be developed further. The list of materials and resources, which are available in the school for the teaching and learning of the Irish, should form part of the plan. Consequently, there would be a much greater likelihood that teachers would make regular use of a range of resources and materials in the Irish classes.

During the evaluation a plan was presented for the teaching and learning of Irish in TY. It was clear from that plan that an effort is being made in the school to teach and to present Irish to the students in an interesting manner during the year and this approach is commended. It is recommended, however, that the plan for TY be extended and developed and more details included regarding cross-curricular and co-curricular initiatives. It is recommended that the school looks towards developing a co-curricular programme in Irish during that year. Invitations could be extended to drama groups and to guests to come to the school, which would give another perspective to the students on learning the language. It is recommended also that more details be included in the plan in relation to the students' projects and to assessment methods. It would be important of course that the project work be conducted through the medium of Irish.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

The use of Irish as the language of management, instruction and communication was very good in the lessons that were observed. The teachers are congratulated for their commitment to the use of the target language. A few lessons were observed, however, where too much use was made of direct translation from Irish to English to ensure the students' understanding of the content of the lesson. In some lessons also the practice was observed of translating the Irish version of a piece of written work into English for the students so that the Irish and English version of the same piece of work could be viewed together. This is not good practice, and it is recommended that it be avoided as a teaching methodology. However, there were a few lessons where great efforts were made to avoid the use of translation through a range of strategies and this approach is highly commended. It is recommended that the teachers discuss among themselves some strategies to avoid the use of translation where there is no need for it.

Good efforts were made in the vast majority of classes to provide opportunities for students to communicate in Irish through the use of pair work and group work. This is good practice and it is recommended that these strategies be extended to all lessons. It is essential that opportunities to speak in the target language are created regularly for students so that they may use what they learn in class in a practical, applied manner. The teachers in the majority of classes made continuous efforts to demand answers and questions in Irish from the students and this is good practice. It was difficult to stimulate students to speak in a few lessons and it is recommended

that the teachers decide and agree on a range of strategies to address the issue of some students who demonstrate a reluctance in relation to learning Irish.

The teachers were wonderfully energetic during the lessons and good efforts were made to make the lessons interesting and relevant to the students. Good use was made of a range of resources in the classrooms to add to the students' interest in the subject and to place the content of the lessons in a contemporary context for them. The textbook was used as an aid in the classroom and not as the main resource for teaching. The teachers are commended for their work in this regard. VIFAX, an interactive Irish media programme from Maynooth University, was employed in a couple of lessons observed.

Effective use was made of information and communication technology (ICT) in some other lessons, where stimulating slides on lesson content were assembled for the students. In another lesson, the students were brought to the language laboratory and a short lesson on listening exercises was conducted there. All of these effective approaches are commended. There are excellent ICT facilities in the school and, although the Irish teachers are making good use of them, it was felt that the facilities could be used to greater advantage, particularly in relation to the language laboratory. ICT courses are being provided around the country by the Second Level Support Service for Irish and it is recommended that the Irish teachers endeavour to attend one of these courses in order to add to their skills in this area of teaching.

A range of activities was in progress in all the lessons observed which meant that the students were busy and learning at all times. The teachers circulated around the classrooms during the lessons to ensure that the students were applying themselves to their work and that they understood what was to be done. In a few lessons observed, humour was employed to encourage students to work and this strategy worked well. The teachers were patient with and were understanding of students who had difficulties with learning the language. Elements of grammar were taught as lessons progressed and the attention of the students was directed to difficult points of grammar. However, it is recommended that students are asked to put new words or phrases in simple sentences to ensure that they have an understanding of their meaning and their correct usage in written and spoken Irish. It is recommended also that regular repetition be used to ensure that students are able to pronounce and to say words properly.

At the beginning of one lesson, the aims and targets for the lesson were displayed on the whiteboard. This approach is commended as it gives shape to the learning for the students. In a few lessons also, the homework was put up on the whiteboard and the students were given time to write down the work and directions in their diaries. This is commended as good practice.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Great emphasis is placed on assessment in the school generally. The progress of the students is assessed through a series of examinations at the mid-term break, at Christmas, in the summer and at Easter. Reports are sent to parents at Christmas and in the summer. Formal in-house examinations are being organised in the school this year for the first time and this approach is commended. The parents are also kept informed about their children's progress by means of meetings between parents and teachers and by the regular use of the school diary.

There was plenty of work to be seen in the vast majority of the copybooks that were examined. There was variation, however, in relation to the correction systems in use in different class groups. In certain cases, it was obvious that much effort and time were spent on the correction of the copies. In other cases, it was difficult to make out the corrections, and ticks were used simply

to correct the work. There was need for more careful correction in other cases, especially in relation to grammatical accuracy. It is recommended that the teachers discuss this matter and agree a common system in relation to corrections in the copies. It should be ensured that there is direction given for the students in relation to progress and references to the merit of the work, especially for higher-level students. A structured system of correction should be agreed upon by the Irish teachers and put in place which would help students to learn from their mistakes.

The number of students who took the higher-level papers in the Junior Certificate Irish examinations in the year 2009 was satisfactory. There was an increase in the number of higher-level students in 2009 and it is recommended that school management and the Irish teachers strive to maintain the figures at this level in the future. School management and teachers need to monitor the numbers taking Leaving Certificate higher-level Irish in the coming years. Initiatives, such as attendance at Irish summer courses, extra-curricular and co-curricular programmes in Irish and emphasis on spoken Irish in the school, in order to stimulate and nurture the interest of the pupils in learning the language, should be helpful in this regard.

All teachers in the various subjects meet together at the beginning of the year to discuss the results of the students in the state examinations. The results are analysed and are compared with national averages and patterns. At these meetings, the teachers are requested by the principal to discuss ways in which the academic standards of the students could be raised. This approach and the attention paid to the progress of the students are commended.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The efforts made to celebrate Seachtain na Gaeilge in the school by organising a range of activities and occasions to give students an experience of Irish as a living language are commended.
- The work that has been done to date in relation to planning for the teaching and learning of Irish is commended.
- The use of Irish as the language of management, communication and teaching was very good in all the lessons which were observed.
- Good efforts were made to provide opportunities for the students to communicate in Irish through the use of pair work and group work.
- The efforts of the teachers to make the subject matter of the lessons interesting and relevant for the students through the use of a range of activities and a range of facilities, including ICT, are commended.
- The emphasis that is placed in the school on assessment. The way in which examination results and the progress of the students are analysed is also commended.

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

- It is recommended that school management should review, if possible, the number of Irish periods per week that are provided in TY.
- It is recommended that the Irish teachers and school management explore innovative, creative ways in which Irish as a living language can be presented to the students.

- It is recommended that some development be done on the plan for Irish, focusing in particular on the plan for TY, the use of ICT in lessons and the use of a range of resources to make the learning of Irish more interesting for the students.
- It is recommended that an effective correction system is agreed for Irish which would ensure that students learn from their errors on a progressive basis.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal and the deputy principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations were presented and discussed.

*Published March 2011.*

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management at Coláiste Chraobh Abhann is very satisfied with the report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching in Irish at the school issued by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate as a result of a subject inspection held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2009.

In particular, the Board acknowledges the very positive comments and commendations recorded by the Inspector in relation to the quality of teaching and learning of Irish at Coláiste Chraobh Abhann. The Irish Department members feel encouraged and valued by the very definite strengths which were identified and commended or highly commended by the Inspector in the report.

All relevant education partners have had an opportunity to discuss and evaluate this report. A full and thorough review of the recommendations has taken place and a progressive course of action has commenced. The Irish Department is and will continue to be core to the implementation of this plan.

Having completed the consultation process, the Board of management would like the following observations and comments noted regarding the recommendations made by the Inspector:

- The current provision of Irish on the Transition Year Programme is three periods. It was recommended by the Inspector that this provision be increased. After consultation with the TY Core Team and the Irish Department, it was decided to keep this current provision intact until a full review of the overall school curriculum is held. This review is due in the next round of School Development Planning which commences in 2012. It was felt that an increase in periods in any of the core subjects on offer in TY would lead to a diminishment of the comprehensive range of activities, subjects and modules currently on offer on the programme. This would, in turn, be counter-productive in terms of achieving one of the overall aims and objectives of the transition Year Programme.

It was noted in the report that some of the Irish Department members had attended in-service courses provided by the SLSS. A recommendation was made 'that all Irish teachers avail of the opportunity to attend one of these courses at different times in the year'. However, the Board requests it be noted that all Irish teachers have attended the complete set of in-service course provided by the SLSS and the PDST in their subject area to date.



**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 school has reviewed the recommendations for development and will act to progress and further improve the quality of learning and teaching Irish. Some actions have already been planned or undertaken and these are outlined below:

- The Irish Department and school management have further developed its policy regarding the promotion of Gaeltacht visits for students. As part of this policy, all parents and students will receive an information letter and brochures regarding the Gaeltacht. Gael Linn has visited Irish classes to speak to students regarding the benefits of attending the Gaeltacht. This visit will take place on an annual basis.
- The Irish Department will continue to develop the Irish subject plan with a particular emphasis on resources, ICT and the promotion of Irish as a living language and culture.
- Irish teachers will collaborate and review their individual correction systems in the interest of developing a uniform correction system across the Department which will ensure that students learn from their errors on a progressive basis.

Finally the school would like to thank the visiting Inspector for her positive feedback during the inspection period. Teachers found the process and the resultant report to be an acknowledgement of their enthusiasm, commitment and dedication to the learning and teaching of Irish at Coláiste Chraobh Abhann.