

**Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection: Irish  
REPORT**

**Saint Gerard's  
Bray, Co. Wicklow  
Roll number: 618111**

**Date of the inspection: 2/ 3 October 2006**

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**Report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching in Irish**

This report was written following a subject inspection at Saint Gerard's School. It outlines the results of the assessment of the standard of teaching and learning in Irish and makes recommendations for the development of instruction in this subject in the school. This assessment was made over a period of two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed instruction and learning. The inspector had contact with both the pupils and with the teachers. The students' work was examined and discussed with the teachers. School planning documents and teachers' written preparation work were examined. Following the assessment visit, the inspector gave a verbal report of the results of the assessment to the principal and to the subject teachers. 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.

**Subject Provision and Whole School Support**

Classes are of mixed ability in first year until the Christmas break. Between January and the summer break students are divided into three higher level and one ordinary level classes. A common examination paper is set at Christmas. Every effort is made to encourage students to continue at the higher level but by third year students are divided into two classes at higher level and two classes at ordinary level. In senior cycle there is usually one higher level class and two or three ordinary level classes.

There are 31 students in the school who have an exemption from learning Irish and they are offered learning support during Irish classes. This arrangement is commended.

Every effort is made to provide an interesting programme of co-curricular and extracurricular events during "Seachtain na Gaeilge" and during the year. Efforts are made to organise different events for each year group. For instance set dancing classes, drama workshops, quizzes and debates are organised and a magazine is produced in some classes. The school also participates in the Gael Linn debates and in informal debates with other schools. The school participates in a table quiz with a local all Irish school. Special visitors are invited to give talks on aspects of Irish culture from time to time. For instance the music group "Kila" was invited to perform in the school a couple of years ago and it is reported that the occasion was a great success. The teachers' efforts in organising these events are highly commended. This additional work reinforces the teachers' efforts in the classroom and provides the students with an opportunity to experience Irish as a living language in various enjoyable settings. The importance of using Irish outside the classroom cannot be overemphasised.

It was reported that parents are advised to send students to Irish colleges in the summer. The majority of first year and second year students go to the Gaeltacht and some continue on in the colleges as *cinnirí* when they are older. This approach is highly commended as a period in the Gaeltacht helps students acquire Irish as a living language. Their increased level of interest in learning the language when they return to school is of major benefit. As so many students in the school go to the Gaeltacht it would be worth considering forming an Irish Club in the school with the assistance of the *cinnirí* in the senior classes. It might be possible to register with one of the youth organisations that support such clubs.

The Irish teachers as a team apply to the Principal each year for a budget for the provision of resources and materials for the subject. It was reported that "Foinse" is used regularly in the senior classes and that sufficient reading books are purchased for some classes. It is recommended that an audit of the materials and resources available in the school for teaching Irish take place immediately and such materials and resources should be available in a central location, where all teachers can access them.

Some Irish teachers have their own classroom. Some of the classrooms were decorated in an interesting manner that created a pleasant learning environment. The teachers' work in this regard is commended. It is recommended that additional material be displayed in each classroom used as a classroom for Irish language teaching.

### Planning and Preparation

One Irish teacher is nominated as a planning co-ordinator for the teaching and learning of the language. Teachers are given opportunities to meet once a month. Division and allocation of classes, and work schemes are the main items discussed at these meetings. Arrangements for "Seachtain na Gaeilge" etc. are also discussed.

Last year a series of dedicated meetings were held in the school to enable the teachers to develop a plan for the teaching and learning of the language as part of the School Development Planning process. That plan encompasses the syllabus and a work scheme for each year and each level in the school. The teachers' work in this regard is highly commended. Clearly, effort and a good deal of thought were expended on the plan itself. It is recommended however, that a certain amount of development should now be implemented as regards the plan and details of the aids and resources used in teaching various aspects of the course included. The plans for various classes should be integrated into one plan and every Irish teacher should receive a copy. It is also recommended that a single plan should obtain for Transition Year and teachers should decide the content of that plan. That plan should then be followed irrespective of whatever teacher is responsible for the Transition Year. The strong emphasis on the students' experience of Irish as a living language and on other interesting aspects of learning the language as outlined in one plan observed is recommended.

Excellent new technological aids are available in the classrooms. The teachers are now easily able to show films and extracts from television programmes. It is recommended that there should be a comprehensive description in the Irish plan of materials that could be used in the classroom to support various aspects of learning the language.

It was reported that a laptop computer was provided for each teacher last year. Training was provided in the use of these computers and it is intended to provide further training in order that the teachers will be able to display aspects of lessons in *PowerPoint* in future. It is recommended that planning for the effective use of information and communication technology should form part of the plan for the teaching and learning of Irish. Although better facilities will be available in the school shortly planning could commence as well as limited use of the computers in the meantime.

Every class observed had been carefully and comprehensively prepared. In certain cases class plans were provided. Notes and leaflets for distribution to students were prepared and each class developed at a brisk pace.

## Teaching and Learning

The use of Irish for teaching, communication and management was very good indeed in every class observed. Clever and effective efforts were made to avoid Irish to English translation in the majority of classes and this approach is commended. Students were encouraged to ask and to answer questions in Irish and in general they were happy to do this. Pair-work was used to a certain extent and this approach is commended. It is recommended however, that prior consideration be given to the work aims and to planning the pair-work to suit the ability levels of the students. Students were asked consecutive questions in the class in order to encourage them to speak and to affirm knowledge. It is also recommended that the system used by the teachers whereby they provide first year students with sentences used in the management of classes be broadened and developed. The teachers need to discuss strategies that ensure these methods work and that all teachers make use of the same approach in order to encourage students to speak Irish in the classes.

The teachers were enthusiastic and vibrant in the conduct of the classes observed. Teachers moved about the classrooms speaking to students, correcting them and ensuring work was progressing and that students understood the targets to be met. Discipline was excellent. The whiteboard was used effectively in some of the classes observed.

The teaching of grammar was interwoven during the classes and a good deal of time was spent in senior classes preparing vocabularies and discussing sentence structure with students. It is recommended that a pocket dictionary be made available to each student in the junior classes and that it be kept in the school until third year. By such time the students should have sufficient experience in using the dictionaries correctly to hold them at home and to use them with homework preparation.

The use made of the overhead projector in the majority of classes observed is highly commended. It is a good aid for providing information to students in an enjoyable way. It is recommended however, that the material displayed is interesting and relevant to students and not out of date. It is recommended that a much broader range of materials and teaching resources be used in the classes to make the teaching and learning of the language more interesting for students. It is very important to illustrate aspects of the learning in enjoyable and attractive ways. If for example, a class is discussing a film or television programme, extracts of the film/programme should be shown in the class so that the students will understand and experience the subject of the class. A broader use of the Irish communications media, of music and of new technology in the classes is recommended. It is very important to use a range of interesting resources with the Transition Year students in particular and there are wonderful opportunities available during the year to portray Irish in a totally new way to the students. It is recommended that the teachers discuss strategies among themselves for the use of a broader range of resources.

The efforts made to connect the lesson material directly or indirectly to the students' own lives are highly commended. This is very important in the interest of giving students opportunities to speak about their own contemporary lives in Irish. It is recommended that this happens as often as possible in all classes. The connection made between an English poem and an Irish poem in one class observed is also commended. It is recommended that if possible connections between aspects of the different syllabi be identified to make the lessons more interesting.

## Assessment and Achievement

Reports are forwarded to parents four times a year, two after the Christmas and summer exams and two at the end of October and at Easter. Continuous assessment is taken into consideration in the preparation of the reports in October and at Easter. Parent/teacher

meetings are arranged once each year except for the sixth year class when two meetings are arranged.

It was reported that good use is made of the year head system and that parents are informed immediately if there is a problem with a particular student.

The copybooks showed clearly that homework is assigned and corrected regularly. It was also evident from the classes observed that certain teachers make effective efforts to ensure variety in homework between written work and communicative work in preparation for the class. This variety is commended. It is evident however, from some of the copybooks that in certain cases different practices are followed re the correction of homework. It was felt that an effective system was not in place in every case. A sub-committee was reported to be working in the school at present on developing a homework policy. It is recommended that the teachers discuss a common system for issuing and correcting homework in the context of this sub-committee.

It was noticed that students had a problem with some aspects of Irish grammar, including the copula "is". Although it is accepted that grammar programmes are set out for different year groups it would be worthwhile for the teachers to discuss the common difficulties and agree on an approach to tackling those.

The following are the main strengths and the areas for development that were identified in the assessment:

- ? The diversity of the programme of extracurricular and co-curricular events organised by the Irish teachers for the students during "Seachtain na Gaeilge" and throughout the year in order to give them experience of Irish as a living language, is commended.
- ? The encouragement of students to spend at least one period in the Gaeltacht is commended.
- ? The teachers are commended on their work in decorating classrooms and creating a pleasant learning environment in them.
- ? The school management is commended for nominating a co-ordinator for the subject and for providing appropriate time for the Irish team to plan for the teaching and learning of the language.
- ? The practical support and training provided for the entire school staff in relation to new technology aids is commended.
- ? The work carried out by the teachers on a plan for the teaching and learning of Irish in the school is recognised and commended.
- ? The use of Irish for management, teaching and relations was very good in the classes observed. Overall, every effort was made to avoid the use of Irish to English translation.
- ? The teachers were vibrant and enthusiastic in their conduct of the classes observed and discipline was excellent.
- ? The use made of overhead projectors in the classes observed is commended.
- ? The connection made between lesson material and the students' lifestyles in the classes observed and the connection between an English poem and an Irish poem in one case observed is commended.

**The following recommendations are made in order to build on those strengths and to identify areas for development:**

- ? It is recommended that all the materials and resources for the teaching and learning of Irish should be listed and made available to the teachers in a central location.

- ? Building on the considerable work done by the teachers on formulating a plan for teaching and learning Irish and conducting appropriate development of that plan, is recommended.
- ? It is recommended the plan should describe the use of a broader range of resources in the classroom and plans for the use of new technologies.
- ? It is recommended that the teachers discuss strategies for various devices to ensure, in the first instance, the first year students' language practice and the continuation of that language practice as they progress through the school.
- ? It is recommended that greater use be made of dictionaries and pocket dictionaries in the classes.
- ? It is recommended that a common system for corrections be discussed in the context of the school's work on developing a homework policy for the school in general.

Post assessment meetings were arranged with the Irish teachers and with the Principal at the end of the assessment at which time the draft findings and recommendations were presented and discussed.