

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta

Department of Education and Science

**Subject Inspection of Spanish
REPORT**

**Castleknock College
Castleknock, Dublin 15
Roll number: 60100Q**

**Date of inspection: 30 April 2007
Date of issue of report: 8 November 2007**

[Subject inspection report](#)
[Subject provision and whole school support](#)
[Planning and preparation](#)
[Teaching and learning](#)
[Assessment](#)
[Summary of main findings and recommendations](#)

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN SPANISH

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Castleknock College. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in Spanish 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 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 subject teachers. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Castleknock College, a fee-paying school for boys, was founded in 1835 by the Vincentian Community. Most students come from the local community of Castleknock and its immediate surroundings. The college currently has 569 boys enrolled in the school.

The school offers the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes, together with a core Transition Year (TY) programme which is taken by all students. Support for languages in the school is very good. First-year students choose their subjects prior to entry to the school and all students must study a modern European language. They may choose one of Spanish, German and French or a combination of French/German or Spanish/French. This is excellent provision. At senior cycle, TY students may retain two languages or choose to continue one language. Leaving Certificate options are student-centred in that students choose their Leaving Certificate subjects and these are then matched to a 'best-fit' timetable to facilitate most students' choices. Two fully qualified teachers of Spanish are employed by the school, both of whom have about two-thirds of their timetables allocated to Spanish classes.

Uptake for Spanish in both junior and senior cycle is good, with two class groups currently in each of first, second and third years. This year there is one class group for Spanish in the TY and one class group in each of fifth and sixth years. All classes are of mixed ability. Students with special educational needs are fully integrated into mainstream classes, with ongoing contact maintained with the learning-support team regarding any relevant information concerning the students' needs.

Time allocation for the teaching and learning of Spanish is sufficient in all year groups. Junior cycle classes and the TY group have four lesson periods during the week, while fifth-year and sixth-year classes have five class periods per week, which is good provision. However, as some class groups only have contact with the subject on three days of the week due to double periods, it is suggested that the spread of lessons over the week could be reviewed in subsequent timetabling, to provide more evenly distributed teacher-contact time.

Facilities for the teaching and learning of Spanish are good. Language teachers are classroom based, and it is commended that both teachers have availed of this opportunity to create a stimulating and culturally rich environment for language learning through the display of students' project work, maps and other language-related posters and visual aids. Resources for teaching the language include CD players/tape recorders, video recorders, DVD players and overhead projectors. Requests for further resources are provided on a needs basis and are met favourably. The school has undertaken a major rebuilding development which is nearing completion and this will include a suite of language rooms and two new computer rooms. This offers huge potential for the further development of language teaching within the school and planning for the language includes research into resources to further the teaching of the language. It is suggested that the incorporation of an interactive whiteboard into one of the language rooms could perhaps be considered as, when used effectively, these can contribute greatly to language teaching and learning. More information on interactive whiteboards can be obtained from the National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) website at www.ncte.ie or the Becta website at www.becta.org.uk.

At present, students of Spanish can book access to a computer room during lesson time and this has been availed of mainly by TY students. It is planned that, with the completion of the new wing, access for language classes to one of the two new computer rooms will be further facilitated. Teachers have access to a number of computers to prepare and download material for lesson planning. It is suggested that this is an area which holds great potential for the further development of language teaching in the school and in the course of the evaluation some ideas were given with regard to this.

Although the school does not have a formal partnership with a Spanish school as yet, plans are ongoing to develop links with a school in Madrid. The school has applied to participate in a Comenius project which will include a partner school in Spain. This will create many possibilities for meaningful contact between the schools and is to be encouraged. Individual students are encouraged to spend some of the Transition Year in Spain, attending school with Spanish students and hosted by families. A number of Spanish students attend Castleknock College and

the presence of these native speakers in the school creates opportunities for both teachers and students to have immediate access to authentic language opportunities and to gain an insight into Spanish life and culture.

The school is to be commended for actively facilitating the professional development of Spanish teachers, one of whom has recently completed a language course in Spain. It is good practice that ideas for teaching methodologies gleaned from this course were then shared and discussed among the team. Both teachers attend meetings of the Association of Teachers of Spanish and are aware of current developments regarding the teaching of Spanish through this contact with the professional teaching body.

A school Spanish club which meets regularly has been organised by the Spanish team. Activities to date include visits to *tapas* restaurants and Spanish films, among others. A *día de cosas hispánicas* was held last year and the European Day for Languages was celebrated by all of the modern European languages represented in the school. Much credit is due to teachers for organising these extracurricular activities which greatly enrich and broaden students' learning experiences.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

To date, the school's involvement with whole-school planning has mainly been concerned with the new building development, policy development and a review of assessment. However, time for subject teams to meet has regularly been assigned and work on individual subject plans has been ongoing. All subject groups meet formally about three times per year and the modern European languages teams meet together, which is good practice, as this sharing of expertise can enrich teaching and learning. A co-ordinator for Spanish has been appointed and it is suggested that this role be rotated from time to time. Minutes are kept of planning meetings and a long-term plan for Spanish has been prepared. It was evident that teachers of Spanish also often meet informally to discuss plans for the subject.

The long-term plan for Spanish includes yearly programmes for each year group, a list of suggested teaching methodologies and resources, information on exchange programmes, state-examination information and details of the Spanish club which operates within the school. The plan, which should be syllabus-based rather than textbook-led, uses the recommended thematic approach to language teaching with its integration of the language skills, and shows evidence of both cultural and language awareness, as recommended by the *NCCA Leaving Certificate Spanish Draft Guidelines for Teachers*. The inclusion in the plan of possible teaching methodologies and suggested resources for use in the classroom is to be commended and it is suggested that this could be further developed to relate these to the specific topics and themes for each year group. A communal bank of resources could then be built up around particular themes and shared by the team. This could then lead on to discussion among the team about teaching methodologies which worked well with particular classes, and further encourage a sharing of ideas.

There is scope for the team to develop the TY programme for Spanish and some good ideas regarding the inclusion of film studies and short novels were suggested by the teachers during the evaluation visit. In planning a review of the programme it would be important to ensure that the four language skills are equally catered for. Other areas recommended for the future development of planning for Spanish include planning for differentiated tasks for mixed-ability groups and further research into ways in which information and communications technology (ICT) can effectively be utilised to enhance the students' learning.

Teachers have built up their own supply of teaching resources and materials from a variety of authentic sources, including the internet, magazines, newspapers and textbooks. Individual

lesson planning was of a high standard, with good preparation evident in all cases. Planning provided for a variety of activities within the lessons and some examples of active-learning strategies were used in most of the lessons seen. Students were obviously used to pair work and group work. Topics were chosen with the students' interests in mind.

Students do not study the prescribed text for the Leaving Certificate examination, *La Aventura de Saíd*, but it is suggested that some copies could be made available in the library for those students who would enjoy reading this short novel about the problems of immigration as experienced by a young boy from North Africa who arrives in Spain. To ensure that students have access to a wide range of reading material which includes literary-style texts, and to provide students with an insight into the cultural life of young Spanish people, it is recommended that a collection of short Spanish novels, such as the *Barco de vapor* or the *Gran Angular* series, be built up over time.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was evidence of very good teaching and learning of Spanish. Students were at all times fully engaged and student-teacher rapport was very positive. The atmosphere in all lessons was pleasant and conducive to learning and students responded well to the tasks presented. Teachers' expectations were high and students' efforts were regularly affirmed, to which students responded positively. Activities were varied and included active-learning tasks such as student brainstorming exercises, pair work, group work, role-plays, a student survey, working with maps and searching for specific information on Spanish websites. Other activities observed included listening exercises, worksheet exercises, individual questioning of students, a students' debate and teacher input.

Good use was made of the overhead projector and the white board. In one lesson a sun diagram was used effectively in conjunction with a brainstorming exercise to revise vocabulary for food. In another lesson, strategies for remembering vocabulary were shared with students by comparing Spanish words with words already familiar to students. Student activities were well managed and instructions clear so that students were in no doubt about what was expected of them. Lessons were well paced and the content suited to the level and ability of the students.

The target language was used very effectively for classroom communications in most of the lessons seen. Posters with phrases for classroom communication were displayed in the classrooms, serving as prompts for students. In one lesson it was suggested that Spanish could be used for all instructions rather than reverting to English at times, and that students should be trained and encouraged to ask for explanations in the target language, but in most instances it was evident that students were well used to hearing and using Spanish for classroom interactions. Students demonstrated a willingness to speak Spanish and showed a good standard of spoken Spanish and a high level of vocabulary retention and understanding overall. The standard of students' presentations during a senior cycle debate about the pros and cons of bullfighting was good, with students obviously expressing their own thoughts on the subject. Some minor suggestions were given regarding this latter lesson, about benefiting from the participation of the native speakers in the class to highlight different phrases for expressing opinions.

When students found difficulty answering a particular question during oral practice, teachers responded tactfully and sensitively. There was evidence of the use of differentiated questioning techniques for students of differing abilities and teachers strategically placed students with other students of differing abilities to good effect during pair work. However, there is scope for the further development of differentiated tasks within lessons to enhance students' individual achievement. As previously suggested this is an area which could be addressed in the subject-planning process.

In one lesson, students were working in the computer room to research specific information regarding Spanish festivals. A high degree of planning had gone into the preparation of suitable websites and students were all actively engaged in the task. The aims of the lesson were shared with the students at the outset, which is good practice. It was suggested that a plenary session at the end of such lessons would be of benefit in order to consolidate learning and to clear up any queries which students may have.

In a junior cycle lesson, students were actively engaged in giving and receiving directions. A good range of activities was incorporated into the lesson, with brainstorming, listening comprehension and role plays followed by a written production exercise being set for homework. This integration of the various language skills around active-learning activities is excellent practice. Students demonstrated a high level of understanding and ability when questioned by the inspector at the end of the lesson. It was suggested that the use of picture flashcards or similar visual stimuli would also have been of benefit in introducing or revising similar vocabulary, to facilitate learning and to further aid retention. In another instance where a junior cycle class was working around the theme of food, visual flashcards could also have been used at times instead of giving the English meaning of the words. It is recommended therefore that, as part of planning for the subject, a bank of visual resources be gradually built up around the various themes.

In all lessons seen, good attention was paid to grammar. Students are encouraged to keep vocabulary notebooks or folders to note key vocabulary and grammar for revision purposes. The standard of work in copybooks seen was good overall.

ASSESSMENT

In-house examinations take place at Christmas and in the summer, with pre-examinations being held for state examination classes in the spring. These are all followed by reports to parents. Mid-term class assessment is also carried out in the autumn and spring terms. TY students have four examinations during the year in the core subjects, including the modern language or languages which they have chosen. Parent-teacher meetings are held once a year for all year groups.

Informal assessment, such as regular vocabulary and grammar tests, is carried out in class on a regular basis and a record kept of each individual student's progress. It is to be commended that assessment of both oral and aural skills is carried out in all year groups as part of formal assessment for the language. Common tests are carried for the different year groups.

Homework is assigned, monitored and corrected regularly. Copybooks show evidence of comment-based corrections and this is good practice.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- Support for languages at the school is very good.
- Language teachers are classroom based, enabling them to create a stimulating and culturally rich environment for language learning.
- Facilities and resources for the teaching and learning of Spanish are good.
- Both students and teachers have access to information and communications technology (ICT).

- Links are being developed with Spain and students are encouraged to partake in exchange visits to Spain.
- The school actively encourages the professional development of its Spanish teachers.
- Time is provided for the subject-planning process and long-term planning for Spanish is ongoing. Suggestions for the further development of this are contained in the body of this report.
- Individual lesson planning seen was of a high standard.
- There was evidence of very good teaching and learning of Spanish.
- The atmosphere in all lessons was pleasant and conducive to learning and students responded well to the tasks presented.
- The target language was used very effectively for classroom communications in most of the lessons seen.
- Classroom activities were varied and included the integration of the various language skills around active-learning tasks.
- Student activities were well managed and instructions clear.
- Students demonstrated a willingness to speak Spanish and showed a good standard of both oral and written Spanish overall.
- Homework is assigned, monitored and corrected regularly.
- Formal and informal assessment, which commendably includes both oral and aural assessment in all year groups, is carried out regularly and progress communicated to parents.

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

- It is recommended that, in tandem with the subject-planning process, a bank of visual resources, such as picture flashcards or pictures/photos for use with the overhead projector, be gradually built up around the various themes.
- It is recommended that a collection of supplementary reading material for students of Spanish, including some short literary-type texts, be collected over time.
- There is scope for the further development of differentiated tasks within lessons to enhance students' individual achievement.

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

