



Guide to Inspections of Courses in Irish-Language Colleges (Coláistí Gaeilge)

REVISED 2019



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Published by

The Inspectorate
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1
D01 RC96

This guide and other Inspectorate publications may be accessed at www.education.gov.ie

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context

Irish-language colleges (*Coláistí Gaeilge*) provide courses in Irish for post-primary students and senior primary students during the summer months. The courses are intended to provide the students with an opportunity to develop their Irish-language competency and to develop their knowledge and understanding of the life and culture of the Gaeltacht. Courses are generally of a three-week duration.

The Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DCHG) has administrative responsibility for granting recognition to courses provided by Irish-language colleges and for inspecting the course premises and accommodation provided to students. Prior to enrolling students, course providers must be granted approval by DCHG for each of their courses.. The *Regulations under which Recognition is granted to Irish-Language Colleges* (2019)¹ are available at www.chg.gov.ie .

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) conducts an annual programme of inspection at the request of DCHG on a sample of those courses organised by individual Irish-language colleges. Inspections of Irish-language courses are conducted as a means of assuring the quality of the education provided for students and providing advice and support to the teachers, principals and the management committees of colleges.

This Guide provides information on the model of inspection used by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) to evaluate educational provision in courses provided by Irish-language colleges.

1.2 Rationale

Inspections of Irish-language courses provide an external perspective on the work of the college. Inspection reports affirm the aspects of practice that are working well and provide guidance to the Irish-language college as it seeks to bring about ongoing improvement and development in its courses.

Inspection findings also facilitate improvement and change in the courses provided by Irish-language colleges. Findings and recommendations in inspection reports include advice and support for each college which when used alongside its own self-evaluation processes serve to confirm the college's own judgement regarding the strengths of its Irish-language courses as well as priorities for improvement.

The inspections of Irish-language courses are intended to:

- monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the Irish-language courses
- monitor the quality of Irish language and cultural experiences for students
- comment on the management, organisation and operation of courses and the progress made by the Irish-language colleges in implementing the recommendations of previous inspections
- provide advice to principals, teachers, and steering committees about the quality of educational provision in individual courses provided by the Irish-language colleges.

¹ An Irish and English version of the *Regulations under which Recognition is granted to Irish-Language Colleges* is available at www.chg.gov.ie.

Inspections of Irish-language courses focus on three aspects of educational provision and student experience:

- quality of teaching and learning
- quality of leadership and management
- quality of students' experiences of Irish language and culture.

All DES Inspectorate evaluations are conducted according to the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate (2015)*² and with procedures agreed with the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

² An English and Irish version of the *Code of Practice for the Inspectorate (2015)* is available at www.education.gov.ie

2. How are inspections of Irish-Language Courses carried out?

2.1 Before the inspection visit

Notice

Inspections of courses provided by Irish-language colleges generally take the form of a one day inspection. Inspections are normally conducted by one or two inspectors, depending on the number of students attending the course. No notice is provided to the college that an inspection will take place. Therefore, when typical activities are being cancelled for any reason (e.g. trip), the Irish-language course provider should ensure that both the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills are notified at the earliest opportunity. In order to notify the Inspectorate, an email should be sent to colaistegaeilge@education.gov.ie at the earliest opportunity.

Documents

Requests for documentation are kept to a minimum. Typically, inspectors review the course plan, the health and safety statement, the code of behaviour and the anti-bullying policy. The inspector also completes 5 checks to confirm the college's compliance with the provisions of the Children First Act 2015. A sample of the documents that inspectors review is provided in Appendix 2.

Teachers should have their class roll books and their written plans or schemes of work for the duration of the Irish-language course available for inspectors.

2.2 During the inspection visit

Inspection activities include observation of lessons in classrooms, observation of a sample of Irish language and cultural activities, meetings, a review of documents, and the provision of feedback.

Classroom visits and observation of other learning activities

Inspectors evaluate teaching and learning during a selection of the formal lessons. Inspectors have flexibility regarding the scheduling of classroom visits and they draw on the course timetable in selecting the lessons. Typically, the classrooms to be visited are selected during discussions with the principal prior to the commencement of the morning sessions.

Inspectors observe the afternoon activities in order to evaluate the quality of the Irish language and cultural experiences provided for students.

Inspectors may review students' own work and interact with them both within the classroom and during other activities, as appropriate.

Meetings

Typically, inspectors meet with the course principal at the beginning of the day. This provides the principal with an opportunity to outline the college and course context and to discuss the schedule for the day. At this meeting, inspectors are provided with a the principal's plan³ which contains a copy of the timetable, policies, and other relevant and up-to date information (see *Appendix 2*). Inspectors also make arrangements for a meeting with a small group of students.

³ Suggested content for the principal's plan is outlined on page 17 of the *Regulations under which Recognition is granted to Irish-Language Colleges (2019)* is available at www.chg.gov.ie.

The purpose of this meeting is to include the students' voice in evidence gathering processes. The students selected will be representative of the range of students attending the course.

Compliance with Child Protection Procedures

As part of the annual processing of applications for recognition from colleges, the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht ensures that every college has confirmed in writing that it is meeting all requirements as set out on the *Regulations under which Recognition is granted to Irish-Language Colleges (2019)*.

In addition, during evaluation visits, the inspector undertakes 5 checks to confirm of the college's compliance with the relevant provisions of the Children First Act 2015. Examples of the documentation and evidence that should be provided to the inspector are given in Appendix 2. These checks do not include inspection of the school's boarding facilities, their management or their compliance with the provisions of the Children First Act 2015.

In any instance in which a concern in relation to a college's compliance with child protection procedures is brought to the attention of an inspector during the evaluation of a course, the Department of Education and Skills reports the matter to TUSLA, the Child and Family Agency, in accordance with Departmental guidelines for the reporting of child protection concerns. The Inspectorate will also bring the child protection concern to the attention of the DCHG. The DCHG acts in accordance with its own procedures for reporting child protection concerns and this includes direct engagement with the management authorities of the Irish-language college regarding the matter of concern.

2.3 Following the inspection visit

Post-evaluation meetings

Feedback and discussion with individual teachers takes place in all instances where observation of teaching and learning in formal morning classes has occurred. Following the classroom observations, oral feedback is provided to the individual teachers at an agreed time.

Inspectors also meet with the principal and/or another person nominated by the principal at the conclusion of the inspection. The purpose of this meeting is to allow for a professional discussion about the overall quality of educational provision in the Irish-language course. Inspectors communicate the evaluation findings, including, where relevant, the acknowledgement of progress made with regard to the implementation of recommendations arising from the last inspection. Advice about further actions required to fully address the recommendations is also provided, as appropriate.

It is the responsibility of the principal to communicate the inspection findings to staff members and members of the college steering committee.

Where requested, inspectors facilitate further discussion of the key inspection findings and recommendations to the principal and/or chairperson of the college steering committee (or a person authorised by the steering committee).

The Irish-language course inspection report

Following the completion of the post-evaluation meeting and the discussion with the principal, a draft inspection report is prepared. The written inspection report provides a brief outline of the activities undertaken during the evaluation and an overview of the key evaluation findings in relation to teaching and learning, Irish language and cultural experiences for students, and

leadership and management. The progress the college has made in addressing the main recommendations of the last inspection report, where relevant, is also outlined along with recommendations to assist the college in making further progress where appropriate.

3. Publication of Inspection Reports

Inspection reports on courses provided by Irish-language colleges are subject to the normal quality assurance procedures of the Inspectorate. The draft report is issued to the chairperson of the Irish college steering committee for factual verification and later, the final report is issued for college response, as prescribed in *Publication of College Inspection Reports: Guidelines (2015)*⁴ (www.education.ie). In accordance with these procedures, when the report is sent back to the Irish college for response, a copy should be made available by the college management to anyone affected by the report's contents.

The inspection report on the Irish-language course is published on both the website of the Department of Education and Skills (www.education.ie) and that of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Gaeltacht Affairs (www.chg.ie).

4. Acting on the Inspection Report

Responsibility for acting on the findings and recommendations of an inspection report on an Irish-language course rests with the college management authorities. The management authority, as part of its agenda for improvement, should discuss the findings and recommendations of the report and should, along with the principal of the Irish-language course, plan for and oversee the implementation of the actions needed to address the report's recommendations.

Inspection reports should assist Irish-language colleges in their ongoing efforts to improve practice in the courses that they provide. The principal, staff, and management authorities of the college should reflect on the recommendations in inspection reports and address them in their self-evaluation and improvement processes.

What happens if there are issues of concern or if the Irish-language college has not made progress in addressing recommendations?

In the exceptional cases where the findings of an inspection report on an Irish-language course indicate that the Irish-language college has not made sufficient progress in implementing the recommendations from an earlier inspection report or where there are irregularities or serious concerns regarding the implementation of the DCHG regulations governing the operation of the course, these issues are brought to the attention of the management authorities of the Irish-language college as soon as possible. College management authorities should note that the Inspectorate informs the DCHG of these concerns as a matter of course. The DCHG engages directly with the management authorities of the Irish-language college on such matters of concern.

⁴ In all instances in the publication guidelines, the word 'school' refers to colleges, centres for education and all settings in which the Inspectorate carries out its work.

5. Evaluation Framework

Inspections of courses provided by Irish-language colleges focus on three areas: the quality of teaching and learning; the quality of Irish-language and cultural experiences for students; and the quality of leadership and management.

Quality of teaching and learning

Inspectors evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in the formal morning lessons. Typically, inspectors examine the preparedness of the teachers for the lessons, the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies employed, and the opportunities provided to students for learning and speaking Irish in communicative contexts. Inspectors evaluate the extent to which students' proficiency in Irish is being developed as well as considering how their confidence, interest and enjoyment in speaking the language are being fostered.

Quality of leadership and management

Typically, inspectors examine the extent to which the management of the Irish-language course, the organisation of the course and the course plan supports students' learning of Irish and their engagement with Irish-language and cultural experiences. Inspectors consider the effectiveness of arrangements for the management of students during activities and the extent to which resources are deployed in support of students' learning and participation.

Inspectors review the level of progress made by the Irish-language college in implementing the recommendations made in the last inspection report, as relevant.

Quality of students' experiences of the Irish language and culture

In considering the quality of Irish language and cultural experiences for students, inspectors typically review the range, variety and organisation of the activities provided and the extent to which they support the students' use of Irish and give them a sense of Irish-language culture. Inspectors evaluate students' participation in the Irish-language and cultural activities and consider how the activities promote enjoyment and use of Irish among the students.

6. The Quality Continuum

As they analyse and report on the inspection findings in respect of the three areas of educational provision, inspectors use a quality continuum. The continuum is designed to assist inspectors to arrive at evidence-based evaluative judgements and to accurately describe the quality of provision or aspects of the provision.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
Very Good	Very good applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some colleges in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding and provides an example for other colleges of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good ; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
Good	Good applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of students' learning. The college needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good ; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
Satisfactory	Satisfactory applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory ; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
Fair	Fair applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The college will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair , evident weaknesses that are impacting on students' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Weak	Weak applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-college action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak ; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

7. Review of Inspections

A teacher or the management committee of an Irish-language college may request the Chief Inspector to review any inspection carried out that affects the teacher or the Irish college. They may seek a review of the inspection using the procedures outlined in *Procedures for Review of Inspections on Colleges and Teachers under Section 13 (9) of the Education Act (1998) (Revised 2015)*.

8. Publication and Revision of this Guide

This Guide has been prepared following consultation with the Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, and Comhchoiste Náisiúnta na gColáistí Samhraidh (CONCOS), the umbrella organisation for the Irish-language colleges.

The Inspectorate is committed to improving the ways in which it carries out its evaluation and advisory work in courses provided by Irish-language colleges and the content of this Guide will be reviewed periodically.

Appendix 1: Structure of the Inspection Report

CONTEXT

- **Context of this Irish-language college**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

- **Key findings**
- **Main recommendations**

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Quality of teaching and learning**
2. **Quality of leadership and management**
3. **Quality of Irish language and cultural experiences for students**

Appendix 2: Documentation and Checks

The information folder containing relevant policies and planning documents for the Irish-language course should be made available to the inspector (please see *Regulations under which Recognition is granted to Irish-Language Colleges*, 9). These documents include:

- Irish-language course timetable (including the programme of cultural activities)
- information on the college's language-education programme
- child safeguarding statement, including risk assessment
- code of behaviour and policy to prevent child abuse, bullying and anti-social behaviour
- health and safety statement
- individual teachers' plans for the duration of the Irish course

The following are the checks that inspectors will make to confirm that the college is in compliance with the provisions of the Children First Act 2015.

In addition, each teacher visited will be required to confirm that he/she understands that he/she is a mandated person and is aware of his/her responsibilities in this regard.

1. The college is implementing a child safeguarding statement in accordance with the provisions of the Children First Act 2015. This statement has been approved by the college authorities and a commitment has been given to review the statement every second year or when relevant changes arise.
2. The names of the designated liaison person and deputy designated liaison person are clearly displayed close to the main entrance.
3. (a) The college authorities confirm that a copy of the child safeguarding statement has been given to by each teacher employed by the college and;
(b) Each teacher whose lesson was observed by the inspector confirm that he/she is aware of his/her responsibilities as mandated person.
4. The college authorities confirm that the wellbeing of students is addressed as part of the programme for teaching and learning.
5. The college is in compliance with all of the provisions of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) legislation 2012 to 2016.
6. The college authorities confirm that each household employed has confirmed that it will comply with the provisions of the child safeguarding statement that is being implemented by the college.

In the case of checks 1 and 2, the principal is required to furnish the relevant documentation to the inspector.

In the case of checks 3 & 5, the inspector will seek a verbal confirmation from the principal.

In the case of check 4, the the appropriate section at the back of the roll should be shown to the inspector in the case of any lesson observed.