

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection in French**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St. Mary's C.B.S.
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Borris Road Portlaoise Co. Laois
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	63430G

**Date of Inspection: 29-01-2020**



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agus Scileanna**  
Department of  
Education and Skills

## **SUBJECT INSPECTION**

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

### **HOW TO READ THIS REPORT**

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in French under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	28 and 29 January 2020
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during four lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

St Mary's CBS is an all boys' Catholic voluntary secondary school, under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). The school offers the junior cycle, an optional Transition Year programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme to its 816 students.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good; aspects of very good practice were observed in most lessons.
- Lessons took place within an affirming learning environment and the enthusiasm of the teachers for their subject was evident.
- Students effectively engaged in self and peer assessment strategies; oral and written formative feedback on student work was less regularly observed.
- Teacher questioning was employed as a strategy in all lessons, with a particular emphasis on whole-class responses.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for French is very good.
- The quality of individual and collaborative planning was good with scope to develop target setting for ongoing improvement in student attainment.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should extend both oral and written formative feedback on student work.
- Teachers should select individual students for questioning more regularly, in order to support the assessment of their learning and challenge students of all abilities.
- Teachers should give consideration to further collaboration with the other language subjects in the school, and develop specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets to support ongoing improvement in student attainment.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the lessons observed was good; aspects of very good practice also featured in most lessons.
- Teachers spoke French to a high standard and spoke the language throughout most lesson observations. This is commendable.
- Students had opportunities to engage in the target language with their teachers in every lesson; opportunities to develop students' oral skills through dialogue with their classmates were observed in most lessons. To increase student voice and further develop their oral skills, such good practices should feature at more regular junctures within all lessons.
- Overall, very good advance planning for lessons was observed, with all necessary materials and resources prepared in advance.
- Teachers presented specific learning intentions at the start of all lessons. Commendably, a plenary was provided at the end of each lesson to review and assess the learning.
- Lessons progressed at a good pace, with student learning carefully scaffolded across a variety of activities that assisted in allowing students to make progress in their learning; these included placemat exercises, brainstorming activities and a range of teacher-developed resources.
- Teachers made every effort to ensure that the integrated approach to language teaching was central in their preparation and delivery, with a variety of skills treated in lessons. For example, grammar was carefully woven into the lesson structure and was contextualised in order to facilitate communication. In other lessons, aural skills development consolidated the overall theme of the lesson. This is very good practice.
- Teachers circulated and provided individual support where necessary. In addition, they report that a recent team-teaching initiative, trialled with a Leaving Certificate French group, was very successful in supporting the diverse range of student needs.
- Student self and peer-assessment strategies were regularly observed in lessons and these worked to good effect.
- Regular formal summative assessment of student learning takes place and there is an appropriate system of reporting on students' progress to parents. An in-house oral assessment is in place for all students of modern foreign languages, and the optional Junior Certificate oral examination has been an established tradition in the school. This is very good practice.
- Questioning was employed by teachers in all lessons, often as a strategy to revise previous learning. At times, there was an over-emphasis on whole-class chorus responses, which led to a lack of clarity as to the correct answer. In those instances, individual student errors, both in pronunciation and grammar, remained undetected and uncorrected.

- To enhance and support accuracy in oral formative assessment, as well as to challenge students of all abilities, teachers should extend the practice of directed questions eliciting responses from individual students.
- A sample inspection of copybooks indicated that homework was being regularly assigned and monitored. Examples of homework corrections, where teachers' written comments identified strengths and guided students towards improvement, were less obvious. This should be addressed.
- Information and communications technology featured regularly, often as a presentation tool or through the use of visuals that served to engage students and develop their vocabulary.
- Lessons took place within an affirming learning environment and the enthusiasm of the teachers for their subject was evident.
- The classrooms are teacher-based, with various posters, expressions and relevant materials displayed. Classroom seating arrangements were also arranged in a manner favourable for the creation of the best conditions for a student-centred learning environment.

## **2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for French is very good.
- Within the context of a school operating an hour-long lesson timetable, there is an appropriate allocation of time and spread of lessons across the week to ensure regular contact time with the subject.
- Most students opt to study a language on entry to the school and it is positive to note that students have the possibility of studying two foreign languages at junior cycle; this supports government policy, as outlined in *Languages Connect – Ireland's strategy for foreign languages in education*.
- It is commendable that staff have engaged in a wide-range of continuous professional development including as examiners for the State Examination Commission and further study to broaden their linguistic expertise to include Italian and Mandarin Chinese.
- Teachers have successfully applied for the services of a foreign language assistant over a number of years. In addition, the subject has been promoted by the teachers through cinema trips, French-themed breakfasts, visits from theatre groups to the school and cultural trips to France. This has all served to promote the subject and deepen students' linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge.

### **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of individual and collaborative planning was good, with some areas for development.
- Traditionally, the language departments within the school have operated independent of each other; however, recent moves towards the formation of a single modern foreign languages department have taken place. The teachers report that this is facilitating dialogue and enhanced collaboration amongst teachers of language subjects within the school.
- Schemes of work presented during the evaluation provided significant detail as to the content to be covered for each year group. Junior cycle schemes have been updated to reflect the requirements of the 2017 specification for modern foreign languages; to build on this good practice, outlining the time-bound nature of course delivery is advised. At senior cycle, a greater focus on methods of assessment is recommended.
- A review of the data emerging from certificate examinations indicated some need for vigilance in terms of overall attainment within the subject. Teachers should give consideration to further collaboration with the other language subjects in the school, and develop SMART targets. This should support ongoing improvement in student attainment.
- Minutes of subject department meetings contain evidence of agendas relating to organisational matters and to teaching and learning issues. This is good practice.
- The position of co-ordinator is voluntary and regularly rotated; this serves to support the development of leadership capacity within the subject department.

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

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.

## THE INSPECTORATE'S QUALITY CONTINUUM

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> 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 schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <b>outstanding</b> and provides an example for other schools 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
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> 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 pupils' learning. The school 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
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> 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
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school 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 pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school 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;