

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

**Subject Inspection in French**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	St. Mel's College
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Longford Co. Longford
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	63750B

**Date of Inspection: 12-03-2019**



## **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>	11 & 12 March 2019
<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 class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

St Mel's College is a secondary school for boys, with an enrolment that currently stands at 528 students. The curricular programmes on offer are Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year programme, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was fair; limited aspects of satisfactory practice featured in all lessons.
- Current teaching practices are mostly traditional and teacher-centred; effective strategies in areas such as student engagement, target language use, differentiation or formative assessment were less readily observed.
- The presence of both a foreign language assistant and native French speakers in lessons assisted in the enhancement of student's language awareness.
- Very good timetabling arrangements are in place, with an appropriate provision to the subject ensuring regular student contact with the language; there is scope for additional teacher engagement in continuing professional development (CPD) in order to develop the teaching and learning practices, as well as promote and sustain the subject's place on the curriculum.
- The overall quality of individual and collaborative planning and preparation ranged from fair to satisfactory; action is required to develop the schemes of work and to refine targets for improvement in attainment.

#### Recommendations

- Teachers should devise and implement an action plan that targets the development of dynamic student-centred learning environments, with a particular emphasis on progressing student capacity in their oral use of the language.
- Practice in the areas of formative assessment and differentiation, with a focus on lesson pace and level of challenge in order to fully support the needs of all students, should be developed by teachers and implemented in all lessons.
- Further CPD courses for the purposes of pedagogical upskilling should be availed of by all teachers.
- Teachers collaborative planning for improvement should focus on developing the schemes of work and on devising specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) targets in order to bolster attainment in the subject.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was fair; limited aspects of satisfactory practice featured in all lessons.
- Teacher-student rapport was mostly good and students were generally on task during lessons.
- Target language use in the classroom varied; while teachers demonstrated good capacity in the language, instruction was overly scaffolded in English. This approach should be reconsidered.
- Student engagement in the target language was limited, with few opportunities noted for students to speak French with each other. The development and provision of spontaneous student-student oral interactions, as well as greater attention to accuracy in student pronunciation, is recommended.
- Translation to English featured regularly as a lesson task. Overall, the target language should be more prominent within lessons and teachers should, where possible, find alternatives to translation in order to raise expectations and maximise outcomes for students.
- The presence of a foreign language assistant, as well as native French speaking students, in lessons assisted in the enhancement of student's language awareness and receptive skills. Teachers exploited these resources adequately.
- Active learning methodologies observed included students working in small groups to translate texts and, in another lesson, students were asked to answer questions related to a reading comprehension in pairs. While it is positive that students engaged in such activities, there is scope to develop more purposeful tasks, particularly in areas that would serve to encourage student-student oral interactions.
- Teachers briefly outlined the proposed learning at the start of lessons. This practice should be extended further to develop specific learning intentions, outlining what the students should know or be able to do by the end of the lesson.
- Overall, a teacher-led approach to lesson delivery dominated and the lesson pace was insufficiently challenging for students to progress their learning. The lessons observed would have benefitted from a greater sense of urgency and vibrancy.
- On a number of occasions, the lessons commenced after the assigned time. While the physical layout of the school campus is such that some time delay is inevitable, a review of the provision of an informal afternoon break, which further reduced the allotted time in a lesson observed by approximately ten minutes, is advised.
- Grammar was taught in an isolated context in a lesson; best practice would suggest that an integrated approach to teaching, where the various language skills are taught within an over-arching theme, is more effective.

- Students noted vocabulary from the board and were regularly asked to transcribe notes into their copybooks. Dictionary use was encouraged to good effect as an alternative strategy to support vocabulary acquisition in one lesson, and this practice should be extended.
- A formative assessment strategy observed involved the use of 'exit slips', where students were encouraged to reflect on their learning at the end of the lesson. While homework was regularly assigned, strategies to enhance student learning through the provision of written formative comments on student work were not observed.
- Teachers circulated the classroom during lessons, providing individual support where necessary, in order to differentiate learning. There is scope to develop questioning as a strategy to extend and assess learning and, more generally, teaching and learning practices that promote differentiation should be developed in order to better respond to the mixed ability needs of the student cohort.
- Information and communication technologies (ICT) were used to deliver lesson content through digital presentations and, in a good use of ICT, a quiz was used to assist student recall of a French movie.
- Regular formal assessment of students' work takes place and the system of reporting on their progress to parents is appropriate. An in-house oral assessment is in place for second and sixth-year students of modern foreign languages. This should be extended to other year groups in order to build student confidence in the target language.

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

- Very good timetabling arrangements are in place, with an appropriate provision to the subject ensuring regular student contact with the language.
- Students benefit from the services of a foreign language assistant to support them in their learning of the language. Overall, however, there is scope to promote the language in order to maintain student interest and uptake of modern foreign languages, especially at senior cycle where evidence indicates that the continuation rate has declined significantly.
- Teachers have recently availed of CPD provided by the support services and the principal is very supportive of such engagement. This involvement should now be furthered to involve more subject-specific CPD, with a view specifically towards ongoing pedagogical upskilling in order to develop more dynamic and engaging learning environments for students.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The overall quality of individual and collaborative planning and preparation ranged from fair to satisfactory.
- Collaborative schemes of work require considerable development in order to become effective working documents. In particular, development should focus on the time-bound delivery of content, development of the learning outcomes, methodologies, assessment and resources.
- Outcomes in certificate examinations are reviewed and compared to national averages. Teachers and management have accurately identified significant concerns in outcomes at both junior and senior cycle; broad strategies aimed at improving outcomes have also been documented. Such analysis and review should now be refined through the development of SMART targets for improvement.

- Subject department meetings are formally documented and contain good evidence of agendas relating to organisational matters and teaching and learning issues.

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;