

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

**Subject Inspection in French**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Ballymahon Vocational School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Ballymahon Co Longford
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	71690F

**Date of Inspection: 07-11-2017**



**WHAT IS A 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.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	06-11-2017 and 07-11-2017
<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

Ballymahon Vocational School is a co-educational post-primary school with an enrolment of 409 students. The school participates in Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools, the action plan of the Department of Education and Skills for educational inclusion. The school offers the junior cycle, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) Programme, the 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 ranged from good to very good.
- The quality of assessment was very good overall, with scope to expand the use of oral assessments to all year groups and further develop learning intentions.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for French is good.
- Teachers provide students with a range of innovative co-curricular activities to foster interest in the subject and extend the learning experiences beyond the classroom.
- The quality of planning and preparation was good, with scope to devise and integrate subject-specific strategies to promote literacy and numeracy amongst the student cohort.

#### Recommendations

- Learning intentions require further elaboration at the outset of lessons and a review of learning should take place towards the end of the lesson.
- Strategies to explicitly promote literacy and numeracy should be embedded in both subject planning and in teaching and learning practice.
- Tasks aimed at developing student confidence in oral skills should feature more prominently within lessons and oral assessments should be introduced for all year groups.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good.
- Teacher-student rapport was very positive and classroom management was excellent with students both on task and motivated in all lessons observed.
- French was spoken to a high standard by both teachers and served as the language of communication and instruction throughout most of the lesson observations. In the few instances where the teacher spoke French to a lesser extent, this practice should be reviewed in order to ensure optimal student exposure to French.
- Students generally interacted with teachers in French and their pronunciation was sensitively corrected by teachers where necessary. Engaging and spontaneous teacher-student interactions in French took place, including discussions relating to the recent school holidays and brief revision of material covered in earlier lessons.
- Student-student interactions featured in every lesson to varying degrees. Students were hesitant at times during such activities and it is therefore recommended that tasks aimed at developing student confidence in oral skills should feature more prominently within lessons and that oral assessments should be introduced for all year groups.
- Teaching approaches were varied and included digital presentations and video clips to effectively underpin the lesson content. The lessons generally progressed at a pace that was both challenging and supportive.
- Teachers engaged students from the start of every lesson, however the learning intentions require further elaboration in order to provide greater clarity to students as to more specific aims of the lesson as well as to allow for assessment and a review of learning to take place at the end of the lesson.
- Teachers employed rapid-fire questioning strategies to very good effect, often with a view to promoting sociocultural knowledge amongst students. Examples included references to French publications and the international rail links that extend through France. In these instances, the information was carefully elicited from students and then used to scaffold upcoming tasks. These questions were also distributed amongst the students and served as a means of differentiating learning.
- Homework was regularly assigned, monitored and, in numerous instances, teachers' written comments notably identified strengths in students work as well as areas for improvement. This is very good practice.
- Literacy and numeracy featured explicitly in a lesson through the noting of relevant keywords on the whiteboard, through the referencing of key subject-specific expressions that lined the classroom wall and through the eliciting of numbers and dates from students in the target language. These good practices should be further embedded within the teaching of French in the school.
- The classrooms were print-rich and vibrant, with various relevant materials prominently displayed. Best practice in classroom seating arrangements was observed in one classroom where the furniture has been arranged into stations, thus creating the optimal conditions to promote a student-centred learning environment.

## 2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The quality of provision and whole-school support for French is mostly good in terms of appropriate allocation of time and the spread of lessons across the week to ensure regular contact time. Current timetabling arrangements for first-year and TY, where the spread of lessons is less than optimal should, however, be kept under review.
- The study of a modern foreign language is optional within the school and a number of first-year students are opting out of language learning after the initial taster programme. The numbers of students studying French is in decline and, while the school informs students and parents of the implications of not studying a language for future career choices, the long-term impact of this trend should be reviewed in order to ensure ongoing provision for the subject.
- The current provision for French in TY should be reviewed. Currently, the study of languages in TY involves a rotation structure where the year is divided in two and all students study French for one half of the year and then Spanish for the second half. Opportunities to maximise student progress with the language studied at junior cycle should be explored.
- French is actively promoted by the teachers within the subject department. Many interesting and highly innovative approaches were noted, including a 'pop-up *crêperie*' and a successful e-twinning initiative. This is commendable as it reinforces student interest in the subject and their knowledge of French culture.
- Teachers have engaged in a good variety of continuing professional development (CPD) through specific programmes in France and in Ireland.

## 3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of individual and department planning and preparation was good.
- Schemes of work were well documented and served as practical working documents. Teachers have begun planning for the new subject specification, introduced in September 2017, which will require adjustments to existing schemes in due course. To further develop subject planning documentation, strategies to integrate literacy and numeracy into the subject area should also be devised.
- Student outcomes in state examinations are analysed on an individual teacher basis and such analysis and review is used to inform planning for continued improvement. A review of successful strategies adopted in other departments within the school may also be of assistance in terms of strengthening both uptake and attainment.
- The minutes of recent subject department meetings were presented during the evaluation and, as is good practice, contained evidence of agendas relating to organisational matters and to teaching and learning issues.
- The position of co-ordinator is regularly rotated in order to build professional capacity within the school. This is very good practice.

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 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.

## 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 in 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;