

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection in French

REPORT

Ainm na scoile / School name	Colaiste Na Sionna
Seoladh na scoile / School address	Banagher Co. Offaly
Uimhir rolla / Roll number	76105Q

Date of Inspection: 30-04-2019



**An Roinn Oideachais
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

Dates of inspection	29 & 30 April 2019
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and key staff• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Banagher College, Coláiste na Sionna, is a co-educational post-primary school under the trusteeship of Laois and Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB). All curricular programmes, including an optional Transition Year (TY), are offered to its 573 students.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good.
- Teachers spoke French throughout most lessons; there was some scope to provide more regular opportunities for students to speak French with each other.
- Teaching took place within a purposeful and affirming learning environment.
- Summative assessment practices are very good; formative assessment strategies, particularly regarding the provision of written feedback on student work, were less readily observed.
- Very good timetabling arrangements are in place to support students' regular contact with the language; the study of a modern foreign language is optional in the school and uptake is below the national average.
- The overall quality of individual planning was very good; collaborative planning and preparation ranged from satisfactory to very good.

Recommendations

- Teachers should provide students with more opportunities to engage in the target language with each other.
- Teachers should work to develop formative assessment strategies, with a particular emphasis on expanding the provision of written feedback on student work.
- The senior management team (SMT) should review current practices in order to strengthen and promote uptake of languages, in line with national policy goals outlined in *Languages Connect – Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026*.
- Existing schemes of work should be reviewed and developed in order to enhance their usefulness as effective working documents.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good.
- Teachers spoke French consistently and to a high standard in most instances; this served to provide students in those lessons with exemplary linguistic models.
- Students used the target language with their teachers to respond to questions and in some lessons they were provided with tasks that allowed engagement with each other for the purpose of oral skills development. Overall, however, there is scope to expand these opportunities as part of the student learning experience in the subject.
- Teachers made very good efforts in most lessons to ensure accuracy in student pronunciation through whole class drills and sensitive individual attention.
- Active learning opportunities featured regularly in lessons and were mostly successful. In a small number of instances, the tasks provided were not conducive to student engagement and students ignored instructions to collaborate. Going forward, a greater focus on tasks aimed specifically at student oral skills development should assist in addressing this.
- Teachers presented the proposed learning to students at the start of all lessons. This provided a good overall structure to the lesson and the tasks that derived from this initial presentation allowed students to effectively progress their learning.
- An integrated approach to language teaching was in evidence, with a variety of skills treated in each lesson. Grammar, when taught, was carefully woven into the lesson structure and was contextualised in order to facilitate communication. This is very good practice.
- Teachers were well prepared for lessons; supplementary materials provided to students also assisted in reinforcing the learning of the topics under discussion.
- Questioning strategies served as a means of differentiating learning and were noted to be very good. This was particularly evident at the outset of lessons where revision of prior learning was facilitated through spontaneous questions that were distributed amongst a wide cohort of students.
- Teachers developed students' sociocultural awareness to good effect, most notably through the references paid to the recent destructive fire at the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris.
- Information and communications technology featured through relevant video clip tasks and revision games that served to actively engage students in the tasks at hand.
- A sample review 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 readily observed. This should be addressed.
- More generally, formative assessment strategies featured occasionally through the use of show-me-boards. This reinforced the learning and such practices should be extended to allow for further monitoring of student progress.

- Students are formally assessed on a regular basis and parents are appropriately informed of such progress. The optional Junior Certificate oral examination is in place and teachers report that this has been very supportive in terms of students' development in the language.
- Teachers worked hard to ensure that lessons took place within a purposeful and affirming learning environment, with individual support provided to students at regular intervals.
- Literacy and numeracy received due attention in lessons with key vocabulary and dates noted on the board and, in a classroom, useful transactional statements were laminated to each student table.
- Most teachers have their own base classrooms and a language-learning environment was in evidence in most of those rooms, with various posters, expressions and relevant materials on display to further support students' linguistic and socio-cultural development.
- Current classroom seating arrangements are traditional and it is suggested that, where possible, that these be arranged in a manner more favourable to the creation of a student-centred learning environment.

2. SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Time allocated to French is very good and students have regular contact with the language.
- The study of a language is optional with current timetabling bands in first-year placing modern foreign languages on an option line alongside practical subjects. This has resulted in a less than optimal uptake of languages at both junior to senior cycle.
- In order to better support language uptake on entry to the school and to work towards the goal of ensuring that all Junior Cycle candidates present for a foreign language examination by 2026, as outlined in *Languages Connect – Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education*, this practice should be reviewed.
- All teachers are experienced in the teaching of French, however, not all are graduates in the subject area. This should be addressed.
- Commendably, most staff within the subject department have engaged in a range of relevant continuing professional development, the benefits of which were evident in lessons observed. These opportunities should be availed of by all members of staff currently teaching the subject.
- Teachers promote French and work to strengthen uptake of the language through, for example, visits to the local primary school, a pen-pal exchange and French theatre visits. They have also been successful in encouraging students to avail of private homestay programmes to develop their language skills.
- The school has availed of the services of a foreign language assistant on a number of occasions in order to deepen their language and cultural awareness.

3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The overall quality of individual planning was very good; collaborative planning and preparation ranged from satisfactory to very good.
- The subject department plan is collated into a single modern foreign languages document; this is positive. Very good progress has also been made in terms of embedding the 2017 junior cycle modern foreign language specification into the relevant schemes of work.
- For the documents pertaining to other year groups, there is scope to expand those templates to include a greater focus on specific methods of assessment and detail as to the delivery of content. Recent changes to the TY programme in the school, including an increase in the time allocated to French, will also necessitate a review of that scheme of work in order to enhance its effectiveness as a working document.
- A review of the data emerging from certificate examinations indicated impressive increases in attainment both at junior and senior cycle over recent years; however, uptake of the higher level paper varies and should be monitored on an ongoing basis.
- There is a long-established tradition of minute-keeping within the subject department and a review of such documentation indicated regular discussions relating to organisational matters and to teaching and learning issues. This is 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 in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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
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 schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is outstanding 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
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 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
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 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
Weak	Weak 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;

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomed a very positive subject inspection on the French Department. The Board was pleased with the quality of teaching and learning ranging from good to very good.

The Board noted that a purposeful and affirming learning environment, the quality of summative assessments, good timetabling and the quality of individual planning are commended by the report.

Overall, the Board was pleased with the findings cited in the report.

Area 2 Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection.

The Board of Management of BCCNS in collaboration with the French Department will endeavour to focus on the recommendations from the subject inspection.

Methodologies whereby opportunities for students to engage in the target language being considered in planning is supported by the Board.

The Board will also support formative assessment with a focus on written feedback being addressed by the French department.

Finally, the Board will encourage the SMT to review and promote the uptake of languages. The Board encourages the French Department to review existing work.