

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of French
REPORT**

**Saint Mary's Diocesan College
Drogheda, County Louth
Roll number: 63841E**

Date of inspection: 9 March 2015



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF
OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date of inspection	9 March 2015
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during five class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in half of the lessons observed, while in the remaining lessons there was scope for development in terms of progressing student learning.
- French was used as the language of instruction in most of the lessons evaluated.
- A range of strategies was observed, some of which were more effective than others in promoting active student engagement and learning.
- There is good whole school provision and support for French.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should adopt some of the assessment for learning (AfL) strategies to encourage more active student participation and engagement with the target language.
 - Due attention should be given to the development of all the language skills.
 - Teachers should build up the practice of providing formative feedback on students' written work.
 - Subject planning meetings should include discussion of teaching and learning and the development of action plans to support the subject improvement agenda.
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INTRODUCTION

Saint Mary's Diocesan School, Drogheda, is a voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 810 male students. The school offers the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate and an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. The study of a modern European language is mandatory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good or very good in half of the lessons observed. While some good practices were noted in the remaining lessons, there was scope for development in lesson structure and skills development in order to progress new learning.
- Teachers used the target language consistently in most of the lessons observed. Good practice was noted where French was used both in the delivery of the lesson and when speaking to individuals and small groups of students. Where French was used to a more limited extent, teachers should extend its use, employing methods other than translation to support understanding and to optimally challenge students.
- Students in one lesson were actively encouraged and afforded good opportunity to communicate in French. This practice should be extended to all lessons. To this end it is recommended that teachers use some of the assessment for learning strategies (AfL) that promote full student participation.
- The lesson content was communicated to students at the outset of all lessons. To maximise the benefits of this practice, teachers should articulate their plan in terms of proposed learning outcomes, which can be revisited at the end of the lesson to assess student progress.
- A range of strategies was observed, some of which were more effective than others in promoting active student engagement and learning. Flashcards effectively supported vocabulary revision and contributed to writing skills development in one lesson. Exemplary practice was noted in another lesson where the use of a creative video clip and supporting worksheets actively engaged the students and challenged them to their full potential. Strategies such as these, which promote skills transfer, should be extended to all lessons.
- Pair work for the purpose of supporting oral skills development and collaborative learning was observed in most lessons. In one lesson, students, each with a different range of questions to ask of their partner, worked in pairs and then changed partners to continue the activity. However, the time allocated for what was potentially a very good activity was too long and limited the progression of new learning. All student tasks should be kept short and focused.
- A good balance between teacher instruction and student activity was observed in some lessons. There were other lessons however, where greater attention to developing all the language skills is recommended. In lessons where the focus was on revision, it should be carried out in a manner that supports the consolidation and application of learning across different contexts.
- Homework was assigned in all lessons and some of the corrections noted in copybooks included affirmative comments. When assigning homework, it is recommended that translation exercises be avoided in favour of exercises that enable students to progress

their writing skills in French. It is also recommended that the practice of giving formative feedback be built up to support students' understanding of how they can improve their written work. Homework contained in some copybooks although annotated, contained a number of errors that had not been highlighted. This needs to be addressed in order to maximise the learning opportunities inherent in the completion of homework.

- Many of the students indicated good willingness and capacity to interact in French. Others were more reticent and, while able to answer questions already completed in the lesson, had difficulty transferring their learning across contexts. Greater attention to oral skills development and the use of AfL strategies such as think-pair-share are recommended in these instances. An annual oral assessment should also be introduced for all students to build up their confidence and communicative competence.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole school provision and support for French in the allocation of time, timetabling and the provision of resources. It was noted that a considerable number of students are not studying a modern European language in senior cycle. School management needs to ensure that these students and their parents fully comprehend the implications of this decision for their future educational and career choices.
- The teacher-based classrooms visited had varied displays of posters and samples of student work. This good practice should be further extended to include charts of relevant grammar points and key expressions for the topics being studied or for general classroom interaction.
- To support ongoing linguistic and pedagogical upskilling, all teachers are encouraged to avail of the range of scholarships, in-service programmes and seminars provided for teachers of French.
- While very good ICT resources are available in all classrooms, there was very little evidence of active and creative use of ICT to support teaching and learning. It is recommended that the creative use of ICT be extended.
- The school should consider applying for a language assistant to support the teachers and students in their language learning endeavours.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Teachers meet for the purpose of collaborative subject planning and a subject plan is in place, setting out the school context and including schemes of work for each year group. However, there is insufficient detail in these schemes of work to fully inform teachers' practice. To address this, it is recommended that schemes of work be set out in terms of the topic to be studied, the intended learning outcomes, proposed methodologies, resources and assessment.
- Minutes indicate that the issues discussed at meetings are predominantly of an organisational nature. It is recommended that issues of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice be incorporated into all future subject planning meetings. This would support the implementation of methodologies and AfL strategies currently written into the general subject plan, but not reflected in the lessons observed.

- Discussion of examination outcomes is also central to the subject planning agenda. This is welcomed as a review of student attainment over recent years indicates scope for improvement. As part of such discussions teachers should compare uptake of levels and outcomes in French with trends in other subject areas within the school and from year to year in addition to comparing against national norms. Specific action plans should then be developed for the purpose of raising student attainment.
- The Transition Year plan needs more detail as to how it is delivered. The current plan did not actually reflect the richness of the lesson observed.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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 of St Mary's Diocesan School are very pleased with the French Inspection Report. The Board welcomes the acknowledgement of the quality of teaching in the French Department. The Board however would like to make the following points in relation to the report:

- Assessment for Learning is a teaching & learning strategy which is in place throughout the school and is revised accordingly.
- Oral Formative feedback is given regularly in French lessons throughout the school.
- The school runs a comprehensive guidance programme which includes a Senior Cycle Options Night where parents and students are given a detailed presentation on all subject choices and the implications of such choices. In addition, the members of the French team make presentations to the students in advance of the Options process.
- The school has applied for a language assistant for the previous few years but has not been successful in acquiring one yet.

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, senior management and staff welcome the recommendations of this report. All are committed to continuing to improve the quality of Teaching and Learning as experienced by our students. The French Department are incorporating the recommendations in their subject planning and senior management have ensured that all subject departments are appraised of these recommendations to inform their department planning.