

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of French
REPORT**

**Comeragh College
Carrick-on-Suir,
County Tipperary
Roll number: 72400V**

Date of inspection: 19 May 2016



**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	19 May 2016
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 three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teacher

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good as evidenced by well-prepared and well-structured lessons.
- The target language was used effectively for communication with students and for instruction purposes.
- Provision for modern languages is very good with both French and German now offered in junior cycle.
- Support for the subject includes a good timetabling allocation for French, well-resourced classrooms and ongoing support for teacher professional development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Listening texts should be further exploited to teach global listening skills.
- More varied questioning techniques should be used in order to create a better balance between teacher input and student participation, and there should be a focus on boosting students' confidence in speaking the language.
- Subject department planning for language modules in TY should be prioritised.

INTRODUCTION

Comeragh College is a co-educational community college under the trusteeship of Tipperary Education and Training Board (ETB). After many years based in two separate town-centre locations, the school has recently moved to a new building. Students are offered the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes as well as an optional Transition Year (TY) programme. The school also offers the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) as part of its participation in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. It has a current enrolment of 265 students.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed. Lessons were well structured and were introduced with a review of prior learning.
- The learning intentions for the lessons were clear and were shared with students. The range of materials chosen was appropriate to the students' abilities and interests. The language-learning skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing were explored through song, aural comprehensions and worksheets. In order to fully exploit these materials for teaching purposes, it is recommended that listening texts be used to teach global listening skills to the students.
- The focus on teaching vocabulary was very appropriate. Visual stimuli were used to ensure that students understood new words and they were encouraged to make use of their dictionaries to look up the meanings. This practice supports the development of their literacy skills.
- As questioning strategies were predominantly teacher directed, a greater variety of questioning techniques should be utilised in order to ensure a better balance between teacher input and student talk, and to allow students to become more active participants in the lesson. Developing a clear progression from easy questions, at the initial stage, to more difficult questions when students are familiar with the text, would also facilitate student learning.
- It was very positive that the target language was used consistently for classroom communication and instruction purposes. However, as students were often hesitant in speaking French, a greater focus on whole-class repetition of new vocabulary is recommended. Such a focus would provide the groundwork for more confident oral work by students.
- Good support for learning was evident in the constant monitoring of students' understanding, and individual help was given as required. Students' efforts were affirmed and it was evident from an examination of their copybooks that their written work is corrected regularly.
- The enthusiasm for the language shown by the subject department helped to create a positive atmosphere during lessons, and students were well-behaved and cooperative. Given the students' evident willingness to learn, there should be a greater focus on boosting their confidence in speaking the language and this goal should be factored into lesson planning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Support for languages is very strong and the study of a language is now compulsory in junior cycle. The decision by school management to offer French and German as a single-subject option band in first year has proved very successful, and the numbers taking a language have increased.
- The timetabling allocation is satisfactory with four single class periods per week in junior cycle. This is good practice as it promotes regular class contact in the initial stages of language learning. While French is not currently available in senior cycle, it is good to note that it will be offered in senior cycle in the next school year.

- The new school building is very well-equipped and resourced. The French room, as a designated teacher classroom, is equipped with a data projector, white board and a visualiser. There is also access to the school's new mobile "labcab" which brings laptops to the classroom when required. A range of French posters and maps are displayed on the walls and very good efforts have been made to create a stimulating learning environment.
- There is a good emphasis on cross-curricular and extra-curricular support for the language including the celebration of European Day of Languages. The benefits are the promotion and strengthening of languages within the school. It is positive also that a scholarship for attendance at a summer language course has been made available to a small number of students in recent years through the auspices of Tipperary ETB. The school has established links with a French school through eTwinning and students participate in a pen-pal exchange. Students from the partner school in France are due to visit the school, and it is hoped to expand this cultural link to include a return visit by the Comeragh College students at a later date.
- Senior management is very supportive of teacher professional development and facilitates teacher attendance at subject association meetings. The school is involved in the Instructional Leadership programme and whole-school professional development events are organised annually.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject department plan for French is comprehensive, and the records go back a number of years, thus emphasising the developmental nature of subject planning. It is good to note that the aims include giving students a positive learning experience and awakening in them a passion for the French language.
- Long-term plans have been prepared for each year group and there is a strong emphasis on the use of effective teaching methodologies. The application of these strategies in the classroom through the selection of one strategy per month represents good practice. Homework and assessment procedures are provided as well as examples of students' negotiated success criteria. It is good to note that as part of its assessment procedures, the school provides a school-based certificate for students with special educational needs who do not sit the certificate examination in the language.
- Given the small size of the French department, it is very positive that there is ongoing collaboration with colleagues in the German department with regard to sharing good practice and in drafting modules for the recently introduced TY programme. As French will be offered for the first time in TY in the next school year, it is recommended that this planning be prioritised. Planning for languages in senior cycle should include looking at all aspects of language learning including cultural awareness and students' oral competency. The ways in which information and communication technologies can be used to support differentiated learning should also be considered.
- An analysis of student achievement in the certificate examinations is undertaken and it is very positive that this analysis is combined with department reflection on the levels obtained. A further step would be to look at how the findings could be used to further inform planning for the subject, especially in senior cycle.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

With regards to the recommendation regarding global listening-this is a strategy that had been employed with different class groups and will be given more emphasis in future lesson planning to be explored more fully.

In terms of encouraging more oral confidence in students, it was remarked on the day by both the teacher and inspector that students were much quieter than would be typical, perhaps due to the fact they were more self-aware being observed by a third party. Strategies used regularly to support confidence within students speaking the target language include different group activities, use of recordings and ePortfolios to support oral work, and Quizlet where students prepare their own flashcards on vocabulary and different themes and the software provides audio so students can model pronunciation.

Also, the students now have use of a full multi-media language lab for more individualised programmes to develop all four skills.

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

TY language planning has been initiated and is ongoing as our first group of students progress through. We have requested that these students be timetabled co-currently so that the two groups can be divided into French and German. The use of the fully equipped multi-media lab facilitates individual programmes through the use of language apps and allows students to work through their portfolios with tailor made programmes based on their own targets and needs.

All students of French have regular access to the multimedia suite and continue to avail of the use of ePortfolios through Showbie. Students continue to access Quizlet to develop their own speaking and reading resources.

Through collaboration between the French and German Department, an emphasis will be put on developing different questioning strategies and making these more student-led and integrating regular global listening activities.

The school hosted a very successful visit by our ePals from Collège St Viateur, Amplepuis. Both parties have agreed to strengthen and develop the link in the future and look forward to promoting future visits between the two schools.

The French Department continues to promote languages annually through European Language Day and again this was successfully marked in September 2016 in collaboration with the other language departments within the school.

It is also noted that an increase in First Year enrolments had further yielded an increase in the uptake of French and German in the school and this is something that, along with the results analysis, is helping inform planning for the future.