

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of GERMAN
REPORT**

**St Brendan's Community School,
Birr, County Offaly
Roll number: 91491L**

Date of inspection: 13 March 2015



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

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	12 + 13 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 6 class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good with many examples of excellent practice evident.
- The variety of effective methods used by teachers in all lessons contributed very well to good student engagement and high quality learning.
- The quality of language learning materials created and sourced by teachers was outstanding.
- The provision of a base classroom for the teaching and learning of German and the print-rich environment enhanced student learning.
- The German department comprises a well-qualified and highly dedicated team of teachers.
- The quality of subject department planning is excellent and collaboration between members of the teaching team is very effective.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Greater emphasis should be placed on developing students' oral skills during lessons and formal oral assessment of students' oral skills should take place for all year groups.
- An increase in the strategies associated with assessment for learning (AfL) should be used in lessons and in the correction of students' written work.
- Given the great capacity for leadership among the teachers of German a subject coordinator should be appointed.
- Timetabling for the subject should be reviewed to ensure a more even distribution of German lessons across the week.

INTRODUCTION

St Brendan's Community school is a co-educational post-primary school located in Birr, Co Offaly. The school provides the Junior Certificate, the Transition Year programme, the Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. German is one of two modern languages on offer in the school. Choosing to study a modern language is optional in junior and senior cycles. The current enrolment in the school is 913.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good with many examples of excellent practice evident in the lessons observed.
- Teacher use of the target language ranged from excellent to good. German was used to very good effect in lessons to introduce topics, to elicit responses from students and to assign tasks.
- There was scope for development in the student use of the target language. In particular there is a need for teachers to provide tasks which will give students increased opportunities to speak full sentences in the course of lessons. There is also a need to focus on improving student pronunciation by giving dedicated pronunciation exercises and feedback to students about how to improve.
- A range of highly effective methods was used in the course of lessons and the quality of original materials created and sourced by teachers to support the learning of German was outstanding.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) was very good. Students were enabled to work individually on computers at their own pace to complete motivating tasks in German. Student engagement in these tasks was very good and student enjoyment was obvious.
- Very good use was made of a number of strategies associated with the principles of Assessment for Learning (AfL) such as brainstorming, think-pair-share and group work. To build on this, some other AfL strategies should be considered such as using show me boards, traffic lights, increased wait time when asking questions and more self and peer assessment in the course of lessons.
- Students' written work is well monitored and corrected on a frequent basis. To develop students' written skills in German, teachers should adopt a common approach to giving formative feedback to students in line with AfL approaches. Students should be encouraged to find and analyse errors and should be given clear guidance on how best to improve.
- Classroom management was excellent, student behaviour was exemplary and learning activities were well managed by the teachers.
- The atmosphere in all lessons was very good and a strong commitment to using a student-centred approach pervaded. Interpersonal relations were very positive and conducive to providing a most supportive environment for learning.
- Bright and colourful displays of student work, posters and other suitable materials were on show in the base classroom and these enhanced the learning environment.
- Assessment of students' written, reading and aural skills takes place regularly. The very good practice of formal oral assessment for the 'mock' Leaving Certificate provided by external personnel is noted. In keeping with the spirit of the syllabus, it is recommended that students' oral skills be assessed formally in all years and that

consideration be given to enabling students to take the optional oral for the Junior Certificate.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good provision for German in the school. All students have access to the language in junior cycle. It is noteworthy that the uptake for the subject has increased significantly in the last two years and is a testament to the commitment of teachers to the subject.
- German is allocated a satisfactory amount of time on the timetable. However, because German is an optional subject, it is scheduled at the same time as many practical subjects which require double periods. The scheduling of double periods means that students have less frequent contact with the language than is desirable. In light of this, care should be taken to avoid the scheduling of double periods for the last two periods in the day twice a week as happens for the current second-year students.
- German is well resourced. There is one base classroom and this year, following a request from the German department, a number of noticeboards and other resources were purchased for the room. The quality of language learning materials on display in the base classroom are a tribute to the teachers who have worked very hard to make this an excellent learning environment.
- School management is supportive of teachers' engagement with continuous professional development (CPD). Individual teachers showed a very high level of commitment to most relevant subject-specific CPD including taking courses in the area of ICT and modern language teaching. One member of the German department participates in an online forum for modern language teachers which is a highly effective way of sharing best practice across schools.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The quality of subject planning is excellent. There is clear evidence of collaborative planning in the development of the subject plan. The plan is theme based in line with the requirements of the syllabus and good records are kept of subject department meetings.
- A very good feature of the subject department plan is the integration of the school's literacy and numeracy strategies with the planning for the delivery of German in the school. This aspect of the plan is indicative of teachers' creativity and innovation as well as adherence to a whole-school approach to the development of literacy and numeracy skills among the students.
- At the time of the inspection there was no subject coordinator in place owing to the fact that there had been changes in personnel. Given the excellent capacity within the existing team of teachers to take on the role of subject coordinator, and that this role offers a professional development opportunity for teachers, a subject coordinator should be appointed by management.
- Due to the high quality teaching and good collaborative work that were evident in the course of the inspection, the German department should consider peer visits to each other's lessons. Peer collaborative review would enhance the school self-evaluation processes in the school and the German department is very well placed to lead such an initiative.

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 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.

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