

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Coláiste Chill Mhantáin
Wicklow
Roll number: 76099B

Date of inspection: 4 February 2013



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

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	1 and 4 February 2013
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 overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good, with some examples of excellent practice.
- Most lessons were well structured and paced and a range of effective methodologies was observed.
- French was used as the language of instruction in most of the lessons observed.
- Quality learning was promoted in lessons where the methodologies involved active student engagement.
- Subject planning has been developed to a high quality.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should adopt a more integrated approach to the different language skills in lessons.
 - Pair or group work should be incorporated into all lessons to support active learning.
 - The current class formation for French in Transition Year (TY) should be reviewed.
-

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Chill Mhantáin is a co-educational community college in Wicklow town with 743 students. It was opened in September 2011 following the amalgamation of two schools in the town. The study of a modern language is mandatory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good and was good in the majority of lessons. Examples of excellent practice were noted in some lessons.
- Teachers began lessons by outlining the lesson plan in terms of the learning objectives or the content to be covered. To build on this good practice, all teachers should articulate the objectives in terms of what the students should know or be able to do by the end of the lesson. This will promote student engagement and give students more responsibility for their own learning. The learning outcomes should be reviewed at the end of lessons to ascertain if they have been achieved and to assess progress.
- Most lessons were well structured and paced. There was one situation however, where a chosen activity lasted for the entire lesson. This would have been more effective as a phase at the end of the lesson to assess learning in an enjoyable way. Greater attention to the management of the lesson is recommended in this instance.
- There was consistent use of the target language by the teachers in most of the lessons observed. In one lesson however, where students new to the language were mixed with students who had completed Junior Certificate French, the necessity to use translation became more pronounced as the lesson progressed. Better language provision is required to afford opportunities for those students, who are intending to continue French at senior cycle, to hear and use the target language.
- Students in some lessons made very good efforts to interact with the teacher in the target language. To extend this commendable practice throughout, students should be given the necessary expressions to ask questions, express difficulty and make requests in simple French.
- Very good practice was noted in one lesson where a thematic approach facilitated the smooth integration of all the language skills. There were also examples of the seamless integration of grammar instruction into the body of some lessons, a practice which should be extended to all lessons. There were other lessons where good work in developing discrete language skills was observed. However, greater attention to the development of oral skills within a more integrated approach is recommended in these lessons.
- Question and answer sessions were an integral component of all lessons. Teachers should build on this practice by inviting students to ask questions of each other, as peer interactions will extend students' capacity for mutual communication.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was integrated into all lessons, primarily through the use of PowerPoint presentations. Where video-clips were used, they were effective in supporting the work of the lesson. Students in one lesson used ICT to practice and assess their own learning. To further enhance the quality and enjoyment of language learning, teachers should consider more creative uses of ICT, in addition to downloading authentic reading, visual and audio materials sourced from the internet or relevant French media.

- Pair work was very skilfully integrated into one lesson for the purpose of developing students' oral competency. The use of pair or group work is essential to promote oral skills development and active learning. It is thus recommended that every lesson should include at least one short, focused, pair or group task. Greater use of student tasks will also support a good balance between teacher instruction and student activity.
- The quality of student learning ranged from fair to very good. In most lessons, students were well-behaved, participated actively and applied themselves to the tasks assigned. They also demonstrated good willingness and competence in communicating with the inspector in French. In the lesson where the student cohort was diverse, a number of the students remained disengaged and talkative throughout. This impacted on the quality of learning for others.
- Homework was assigned in all lessons. High quality corrections and developmental feedback were noted in some copybooks. In one lesson however, homework was monitored rather than corrected and this needs to be addressed. It is also recommended that students are given more homework involving the manipulation of language in order to support the development of their writing skills.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school provision in the allocation of time for French and in the provision of resources, including ICT. However, the current timetabling of French limits class contact with the subject in some senior cycle classes to three times weekly. Senior management should explore ways, whereby student contact with the language could be increased through the timetabling of more single periods across the week.
- Classrooms are teacher based. The classrooms visited had displays of French posters and, in some rooms, charts of key words. Very good practice was noted in one lesson where these keywords were referred to during the lesson thereby supporting literacy development. All teachers should adopt or extend this practice with additional displays of key expressions and relevant grammar rules.
- As part of ongoing professional development, teachers should consider applying for the scholarships and in-service programmes available to support the teaching and learning of French. Plans to promote e-links with France are also welcomed as they support teacher professional development in addition to affording students enjoyable language learning experiences.
- Senior management should review the class formation for French in Transition Year as the current practice limits the valuable learning opportunities that the current TY programme can offer students who wish to improve their language learning skills and competencies.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Very good work has been carried out to develop a subject plan that meets the needs of students in the amalgamated school. The minutes of meetings indicate discussions of issues of practical or immediate nature. To further support effective subject planning, teachers should integrate discussion on teaching and learning into planning meetings. This will allow for the sharing of good practice, for action planning to progress learning outcomes and will support effective self-evaluation in future years.

- The work schemes currently in place for each year group are well laid out. To further build on this good work, learning outcomes at senior cycle should be articulated in terms of skills development; for example, how to give an opinion, to debate or discuss topics. In this way, students can learn to apply such skills across different topics.

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 French Department inspection occurred on Friday 1st of February and both Third and Sixth Year students were scheduled to begin their mock examinations the following week. Upon reviewing the overall findings, we are delighted that the inspectorate acknowledged the high quality model of subject planning we have implemented. It is through this structure that our subject departments engage with School Self Evaluation (SSE) and identify ways to enhance further the learning environment and experience of our students. It is also affirming to have it noted that French was used as the ‘language of instruction’ in classes, with examples of ‘excellent practice’ in teaching and learning noted. This experience is reflected in the very good higher level uptake of students in our school and, indeed, their positive engagement with the language and their teachers.

As explained during during the post inspection feedback, senior management did explore ways to address the number of occurrences of French during the week and it is most disappointing the inspectorate did not firstly acknowledge what had been achieved in the timetable. French runs in two bands in our school at Senior Cycle to accommodate student preferences. French is part of a compulsory language programme in Junior Cycle where all students are required to choose a language with the exception of students who have official exemptions. It is also worth noting that French in Fifth Year occurs four times in the week in one option band however, 100% feasibility could not be achieved when French was designed as requested by inspectorate. When one is timetabling one accepts that feasibility is not a desired starting point. It is actually a requirement to commence timetabling. I would also add that all subject teachers within the band met and agreed to trial this but it was not possible. All schools work within staffing constraints and, for the inspectorate not to acknowledge what was achieved, following the reasons being detailed by the Principal, is most disappointing.

It is worth noting that the inspectorate did observe the integration of ICT in most lessons and, as a natural development resulting from the continuous professional development of our teachers in ICT, we will continue to plan and build on its integration into teaching and learning. We would like to acknowledge our appreciation to all teachers who completed this continuous professional development outside of school hours (not Croke Park) in a response to further engaging students. However, we would contend that a wide range of creative ICT use was demonstrated on the day

of the inspection, for example through the engagement of interactive language learning sites (both junior and senior) in the language laboratory, through authentic French audio-visual clips and through, the use of Power Point presentations.

As our school embraced SSE, we have identified that further inservice on AfL and Cooperative Learning would be a positive step. The inspectorate acknowledged how, in one class, pair work was skilfully integrated and, although not observed in every lesson it is a strategy adopted by the school in every department. To read that homework was assigned in all classes is not surprising but to have the practice of “quality correction and development feedback” acknowledged was most rewarding for the department and the school.

During the school year 2012-2013 our school had access to a French language assistant. This is was a wonderful support to our department, our students and our teachers. The French team strategically used this resource to support their planning, teaching and learning. This is an initiative we would encourage the DES to commit to into the future. It is however regrettable that the inspectorate did not choose to mention, comment or acknowledge in the report this initiative.

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

Our school management accept the recommendations of the inspectorate however would like to note the following actions both planned and undertaken.

1. Teachers have adopted a more integrated approach to the different language skills in lessons and this is clearly addressed in subject department meeting records and classroom experiences.
2. Through future inservice, applied for in June 2013 and in response to our SSE process pair and group work approaches will have a particular focus.
3. The class formation of French in Transition Year has been reviewed and a change has occurred that senior management will commit to during future planning. This has resulted in better language provision for students who intend to continue French to Leaving Certificate level.
4. As our school continues to engage with the process of SSE, all teachers now actively and consciously share the learning objectives with all their classes. To further develop student engagement with the language, the Department have planned a French Exchange for Easter 2014.
5. Through our Literacy Policy the practice of using key words is now embedded in our school practice.
6. Although not noted in the inspection our school will continue with applications for Language Assistants from DES. This, we acknowledge, has to be shared by all schools but we would hope that our turn would come around again in the near future.
7. Our French department do share best practice with one another and will in future minute this at department meetings.