

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of French
REPORT**

**Coláiste Daibhéid
An t-Ardán Theas, Corcaigh
Roll number: 71124S**

Date of inspection: 10 December 2010



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Daibhéid. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in French and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal and subject teachers. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

This Irish-medium post-primary school has an enrolment of 191 students in the current school year. French is the main modern language on the curriculum. It is to the credit of the school that it promotes language diversification, with Russian being offered in Transition Year (TY) and Japanese to fifth and sixth-year students as part of the Post-Primary Languages Initiative. There are also plans to offer Chinese in TY in 2011.

French is offered to all students and uptake is almost universal. Students with special educational needs also take French. Classes are organised as mixed-ability groups. This is appropriate particularly given the common nature of the modern languages' syllabus. This practice is commended as it supports the school's policy of encouraging as many students as possible to sit higher-level examination papers.

Time allocated to the teaching of French is in line with practice nationally. The distribution of lesson periods across the week is not entirely satisfactory as a number of class groups have two periods in one day. Whilst appreciating that some of these have resulted from the considerable practical difficulties involved in replacing an absent teacher, and the fact that this caused some necessary adjustments to the timetable, it is advised that as a general rule this be avoided when timetabling language lessons.

The French department is staffed by three teachers. Professional collaboration is encouraged. Much of the communication is informal, although there is at least one formal meeting annually. Currently French teachers do not have a system of keeping a record of matters discussed and decisions taken. In the interests of supporting the meaningful overall development of the subject it is recommended that the French teachers establish such a practice. This will ensure that such meetings support the effective implementation of any action plan for the development of the subject generally.

School management plans for, and facilitates, teacher professional development. Discussions with the teachers suggested that involvement in subject-related professional development, or in activities with a professional development component, have been limited to the involvement of one teacher in the examination of Leaving Certificate Oral French. Consideration might now be given to the benefits of membership of the professional organisation, to the possibilities offered by Department schemes such as the French/Irish Teacher Professional Visits scheme, outlined in the recently published Circular 0028/10, and the summer scholarship scheme jointly organised with the French Cultural Services. To date the school has not sought the services of French language assistant. It is also suggested that this be considered as it can animate and support the teaching and learning of the subject in a school in a very real way.

Since the school is situated on two adjacent campuses students are located in base classrooms to avoid unnecessary movement. This means that language teachers do not have a designated classroom base. Notwithstanding this, it should still be possible to create a linguistically and culturally supportive learning environment in the students' base classrooms as appropriate. There was very limited evidence of such environments in the classrooms visited during the evaluation.

The school is well equipped technologically; all classrooms have a computer and data projector and there is also internet access in the school. Equipment available to French teachers also includes tape recorders, CD players and televisions. Teachers have gathered a limited number of resources such as crosswords, games and books. It is strongly advised that the French department should include planning for the acquisition of further suitable resources as part of an action plan for the development of the subject generally. Such resources would enrich and extend learning opportunities for students and ensure that the most able are suitably challenged.

French teachers indicated that some informal cross-curricular links are made with teachers of Music, Geography and History. The school has organised trips to France, and French teachers have organised events such as a Fête de Noël. Planning for the long-term development of provision should also consider planning for the inclusion of a further number of suitable co-curricular and extracurricular activities.

French is a key subject in curricular provision in this school. Management is well informed about the subject and supportive of the development of provision. Evaluation evidence suggests that overall quality of provision could be enhanced by planning for a number of the developments suggested here. This might best be addressed through the preparation of a long and short-term action plan for the enhancement of provision in the subject.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Planning documentation examined included the staff handbook, a general subject plan and year specific plans. The TY plan was unavailable at the time of the evaluation. The subject plan focuses largely on subject-related organisational details while the year plans focus on recording items to be covered on a termly basis. It is recommended that the subject plans be more closely referenced to syllabus documents; take a thematic approach; deal with issues such as learning outcomes, the incremental development of language-related skills and differentiation. It is suggested that all plans should be prepared and stored electronically so as to ensure ease of access.

Lessons observed had been well prepared and were documented in one case. Attention had been paid to prior learning, to the selection of resource materials and to the reinforcement of learning

through the assignment of homework. Lessons were most supportive of student learning where planning and preparation had also taken account of the clarification of intended learning outcomes, language specific content and differentiation.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Four lessons were observed as part of this evaluation; two at senior and two at junior cycle. The quality of teaching in lessons observed varied from quite good, to good to very good. Attention to planning and preparation ensured a generally good lesson pace.

The target language was used in all lessons observed. Students generally showed good comprehension. While there were some examples of student use of the target language for ordinary classroom communication, it was suggested that the opportunity existed for greater teacher use of the target language as part of normal classroom interactions. It was good to see authentic listening material being used in junior lessons; this supports the acquisition of accurate pronunciation and intonation from an early age, and is most important.

Where classroom observation noted some teaching of vocabulary in isolation, or a segmented and examination focused approach to the teaching of oral language, it was suggested that a thematic approach would be more effective; that it would allow for the ongoing natural integration of all four language skills and a focus on reproducible linguistic structures rather than on vocabulary in isolation.

Depending on the choice of lesson focus, it was clear that lessons were being taught with an awareness of the importance of the integration of all four language skills; this was positive. The benefits of supporting the development of listening skills generally, by orally anticipating content and by focusing on an initial global listening of a piece, were discussed. Discussions with the teachers also referred to the importance of planning for the incremental development of the various skills in students.

It was very good to see examples of student language awareness being developed using an inductive approach, good error analysis and the encouragement of student self-correction. There was some evidence of the building of student cultural awareness also.

Student engagement and participation was facilitated by the use of questioning, the inclusion of some games and some integration of the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). More generalised use of open or global whole-class questions and the use of 'wait time' was recommended. The idea of getting students to ask each other questions was suggested in order to ensure the consistent participation of the whole class and greater student use of the target language. Whole-class engagement could also be supported by the use of an oral brainstorm at either the start or conclusion of a lesson.

Classroom observation provided clear evidence of student learning. Good habits of learning were being established and where used, spider diagrams, visual resources and the highlighting of key words supported learning.

Classroom management was very good in all lessons. It was clear that there was a very good rapport between teachers and students. Students communicated easily and freely with their teachers. Teachers were supportive, encouraging, affirming and humorous in their dealings with students.

ASSESSMENT

It was evident that homework is assigned and that students are actively encouraged to use their journals. Written work assigned is corrected and teachers maintain records. Student progress was best supported where correction was thorough and detailed, where it included suggestions or advice for improvement and where students themselves were encouraged to correct key errors.

The school employs an assessment system which combines continuous and terminal assessments. Where appropriate, examination papers are common to group within a year; this is commended. Oral examinations are held for sixth-year students and there is some assessment of student oral competence in first year. It is suggested that the school should extend its practice of formally assessing student oral competence. It is also recommended that the results of such assessments be documented in reports and commented on as appropriate.

School management monitors student achievement and related trends and patterns. Students are encouraged to take higher level and an analysis of results would suggest that results in French are commensurate with students' results in other subjects.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- French is a key element of curricular provision.
- Access to, and uptake of, the subject are very good.
- The target language is used in lessons.
- School management is aware of subject requirements and supportive of quality provision.
- Student-teacher rapport and classroom management are very good.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- In so far as is possible, teaching time for the subject should be more evenly distributed.
- French teachers should reflect on provision and devise and agree an action plan for the development of the teaching and learning of the subject generally.
- Subject-specific planning should evolve and develop.
- Consideration should be given to the benefits of applying for a French language assistant.
- The school should extend its practice of formally assessing student oral competence.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of French and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The board and the French department would like to express their thanks for the main findings and recommendations which were presented to us following the subject inspection of French in Coláiste Daibhéid on the December 10 2010.

We note the recommendation regarding the distribution of lesson periods and, as the inspector recognised, the situation arose this year due to particular constraints.

The French department has already begun to deal with the recommendations regarding planning.

We mentioned to the inspector the difficulties that would arise in relation to having a French language assistant in a Gaelcholáiste. As the individual would not be an Irish speaker, this could interfere with the ethos of the school as the assistant would not be able to communicate in Irish. Having said that, we have applied for the services of a French language assistant as part of the Jules Verne scheme run by Cork Corporation.

We are satisfied that our system of assessment of oral competence is working effectively but we will review it internally.

This is a translation of the response provided by the board.