Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Meán Scoil Phádraig Naofa
Castleisland,  
County Kerry
Roll number: 61250R

Date of inspection: 10 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning was good in most lessons observed.
• Lesson management, content and methodologies were suited to the ability level of the students and the time of year.
• Some good practice was observed with regard to use of the target language as the main language of instruction and communication in the classroom. However, in lessons where English dominated, students lacked opportunities to use French in their interactions with the teacher and each other.
• Teacher-directed questioning was effective as a way of monitoring students’ progress but did not allow sufficient opportunity for pair work or encourage independent learning.
• Students were polite and co-operative and showed interest in the language in a relaxed and positive learning environment.
• Timetabling provision for French is good with single class periods in all years.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• The use of French for communication and teaching purposes should be increased.
• A focus on improving the standard of pronunciation is required.
• Short-term subject planning for French should focus on the implications for teaching and learning of the increased student enrolment in the next school year.
• Teachers should explore ways of incorporating information and communication technology (ICT) into their language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Meán Scoil Phádraig Naofa is a voluntary secondary school under unitary management serving the population of Castleisland and its hinterland. The school has a current enrolment of 105 boys. The curricular programmes on offer in the school are the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).
TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The standard of teaching and learning in French was good in most lessons observed. While lesson content, pacing, the integration of resources and classroom atmosphere were good, an improvement is needed in the extent to which French is spoken in some lessons.

• Lesson content and pace were appropriate to the class group and to the time of year. Listening exercises served as a useful stimulus and helped to focus students in their examination preparation.

• Resources such as worksheets and handouts were used effectively to meet the needs of students, particularly in examination classes, where exercises were adapted to cater for both ordinary-level and higher-level students.

• The teaching of vocabulary was a feature of some lessons. Students demonstrated a good knowledge of vocabulary. As students are taught in mixed-ability groupings, greater use should be made of visual aids such as graphic organisers as a way of further supporting students’ learning by enabling them to make word associations.

• The use of the target language by the teachers for communication and instruction purposes varied. Good practice was seen when the emphasis was on communication in French rather than on translation. Where English was used by the teacher for communication purposes, students were less likely to ask or answer questions in French. In order to address this imbalance, efforts should be made to increase the use of the target language. Questions should be rephrased where possible to promote answering in French, and students in junior cycle should be taught phrases for use in normal classroom interaction and encouraged to make regular use of them.

• As the standard of pronunciation was observed to be sometimes poor, time should be spent on improving pronunciation. Exploiting listening material to teach both global listening skills and accurate pronunciation would boost students’ confidence in speaking the language.

• There was effective classroom management. Students were well behaved and co-operative and as a result, a positive learning environment was evident. Some students demonstrated a high level of interest and motivation, and they were challenged to reach their potential in all aspects of their work.

• Students’ understanding of the work of the lesson was monitored through frequent questioning by the teacher, both individually and to the class group in general. As this questioning was largely teacher-directed, more opportunities for students to work together should be provided in order to facilitate independent learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• French is a core subject in junior cycle, and it is positive that most students continue to study the language to Leaving Certificate level.

• The timetabling allocation is good with four single class periods per week in first year and five single periods per week in other years. Students are generally taught in mixed-ability class groupings, although separate ordinary-level and higher-level class groups are provided, depending on the number of students involved.
• Good co-curricular support is evident. The school tour to France enables the students to experience French language and culture at first hand, while the long-established links between Castleisland and its twinned town in Brittany help to emphasise the relevance of learning the language.

• There is constant monitoring of students’ progress through a system of class tests and formal in-house examinations. The small class sizes allow for regular feedback between teachers and students.

• Homework procedures are in place as well as a policy on assessment. Homework is assigned regularly, and it is good to note that the teachers include comments and suggestions for improvement when marking assignments.

• While the school has a computer room, classroom resources for the use of ICT are currently limited. The resources are due to be upgraded in the near future, with the acquisition of a range of equipment including data projectors, visualisers and computers. The resources will add a new dimension to the teaching of the language and the teachers should explore how best to incorporate the new technology into their practice.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• Good progress has been made in the development of a subject plan. Minutes of subject-department meetings and related documentation dating back a number of years are retained as part of the subject file. As a result, reference documents on methodologies for language teaching already form part of the plan. The documents could serve as a useful starting-point for further work on effective teaching strategies.

• It is very positive that the subject department has recently undertaken a general review of the subject in the school. The students have been consulted and progress to date has been evaluated. The importance of the promotion of French within the school has been highlighted by the teachers as a key factor in creating a positive attitude towards language-learning among the students.

• The projected increase in enrolment in the next school year should be used as a focus for future subject planning, with particular reference to the first-year intake. An action plan for French should be drafted to include targets and strategies to increase the use of French for communication and instruction purposes, greater use of visual aids and the promotion of independent learning.

• Individual planning and preparation for lessons was of a good standard. Records are maintained of students’ progress.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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; a response was not received from the board.

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