Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

C.B.S. Secondary School
Tralee,
County Kerry
Roll number: 61440W

Date of inspection: 11 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods  
• Examination of students’ work  
• Feedback to principal and teachers |

• Review of relevant documents  
• Discussion with principal and teachers  
• Interaction with students

MAIN FINDINGS

• The standard of teaching and learning was very good.
• There was very good use of the target language for classroom communication and teaching purposes by the teachers while students demonstrated an understanding of the language and a willingness to speak it.
• While students were given opportunities to engage in independent learning through the use of discussion and pair work, there was some over-reliance on teacher directed questioning.
• Students were interested in their work and the atmosphere in the classrooms was relaxed and positive.
• The timetabling allocation for French is generally satisfactory with the exception of Transition Year (TY) where the provision for the subject is not in line with best practice.
• A comprehensive subject plan is in place, and there is evidence of a culture of collaborative planning within the French department.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• More varied questioning techniques should be employed as well as more use of peer learning in order to reduce the emphasis on teacher-directed questioning.
• The timetabling allocation for French in TY should be reviewed in order to provide students with dedicated lessons in French.
• An assessment of oral proficiency should be included as part of the assessment procedures in TY in order to highlight the importance of the spoken language.
INTRODUCTION

C.B.S. Secondary School, The Green is a voluntary secondary school for boys under the trusteeship of the Edmund Rice Schools Trust (ERST). It has a current enrolment of 605 students. The curricular programmes offered by the school are the Junior Certificate, an optional TY programme and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed.
- Lessons were very well structured with listening comprehension, grammar, oral work and homework organised around a theme as recommended in the syllabus. The aims and objectives were shared with students at the start of the lesson.
- There was an appropriate emphasis on revision of vocabulary and grammar as well as on refining examination technique with some class groups. It was very positive that the handouts and work sheets addressed the learning needs of all students, whether ordinary level or higher level.
- The teaching of grammar was a particular strength. Students demonstrated a good knowledge of the rules and were familiar with French grammatical terminology.
- The strategy of inviting students to make comparisons, or to suggest the advantages and disadvantages of a particular issue, encouraged their participation and provoked some authentic discussion among senior-cycle students. Good cultural awareness was also highlighted through the comparisons made between life in France and in Ireland.
- There was consistent use of French by the teachers for communication and teaching purposes, and care was taken to avoid any unnecessary use of English. As a result, students were constantly challenged to speak in French during the lesson. Visual stimuli such as pictures, flash cards and even items of food and clothing were used effectively to illustrate the meaning of new words with junior cycle students. This approach encouraged students to listen carefully and ensured that they concentrated on learning the new vocabulary.
- It was very good that opportunities for students to work in pairs were included and students enjoyed working together. This practice should be further extended especially where there was an over-reliance on teacher-directed questioning. Employing a greater variety of questioning techniques would allow for a better balance between teacher-talk and participation by students during the lesson.
- Practices and procedures relating to homework are good. Students’ written work is monitored regularly while positive comments in the copybooks provide affirmation and suggestions for improvement.
- Activities such as games and a sentence-matching exercise, were well chosen to support students’ learning, and were of particular benefit where there were both ordinary-level and higher-level students in the same class group. Key words were highlighted on the posters on the walls and these displays provided additional support for learning.
- Students were co-operative and focused on their work, and a positive teacher-student rapport was evident.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Students in first year take both French and German as part of a subject-sampling programme. The study of a foreign language then becomes optional in second year when a choice is offered between a language and a practical subject. While a decrease has occurred in the number of students taking French in recent years, it is very positive that this trend has been reversed through the efforts of the subject department to promote the subject within the school.

- The timetabling provision for the subject is satisfactory for most year groups with all single periods in junior cycle and senior cycle. The timetabling of language classes in TY is more problematic with students of French and German sharing the same lesson and teacher. As this is not good practice, the allocation should be reviewed in order to ensure that students are able to benefit from separate language lessons.

- Assessment procedures are good and include twice-yearly examinations. The use of common assessments in first year and second year reflects the collaborative approach of the teachers and provides an overview of achievement within a student cohort.

- The modes of assessment for TY should be expanded to include an assessment of oral competence so as to underline the importance of fluency in the spoken language in senior cycle.

- The displays of posters in the classrooms ensure an attractive language-learning environment. The school is well equipped with resources for information and communication technology (ICT). Each room has a computer and data projector and all rooms have broadband access. The teachers have availed of in-service courses on ICT and good progress was evident in the integration of ICT for teaching and learning purposes in the classroom.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The teachers of French work well together as a team and there is clear evidence of collaborative planning in the ongoing development of the subject plan.

- The plan is very comprehensive and reflects all aspects of syllabus and programme requirements. As part of their planning, the teachers have initiated a review of their subject and have successfully addressed the decrease in numbers through consultation with students and by updating textbooks and resources.

- Students’ achievement in the certificate examinations is compared with national norms. A further analysis of this data with specific reference to languages should be carried out. Such an analysis would facilitate the tracking of trends in relation to the uptake of languages and levels by students. The findings could be used to inform future school and departmental planning for French.

- There was thorough individual planning and preparation for all lessons. The teachers’ commitment to their work is evident in the extensive range of teaching resources that they have developed for the subject both collaboratively and individually.

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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