

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School
Raphoe, County Donegal
Roll number: 81011L

Date of inspection: 25 September 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

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

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	24 and 25 September 2012
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 eight class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, with some examples of very good and creative practice.
- There was varied use of the target language by the teachers in the lessons observed.
- An integrated approach to the teaching of the different language skills was observed in all lessons.
- A range of methodologies was observed, many of which resulted in good learning outcomes.
- There is a significant gender imbalance in the uptake of languages at both junior and senior cycle.
- Good progress has been achieved to date in subject planning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should extend their use of French in the classroom and reduce their dependency on translation as a methodology.
 - Teachers should afford students more opportunities for oral skills development and engage in follow-through activities that will assess student learning.
 - School management and teachers should develop a strategic plan to address the current challenges regarding the uptake of languages.
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INTRODUCTION

The Royal and Prior Comprehensive School is a co-educational post-primary school with 518 students. It serves a wide catchment area in Co. Donegal and has a diverse student cohort. The school currently participates in the DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) scheme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good. There were some lessons where very creative and engaging practices were observed while in others, some modification of the methodologies used would have enhanced the learning outcomes.
- Some teachers used French consistently as the language of instruction while others reverted back to English as the lesson progressed. Teachers should extend their use of the target language thereby affording students the opportunity to hear French and improve their aural comprehension skills. Where comprehension difficulties arise, alternative strategies to translation should be considered.
- In some lessons, students modelled the teacher's questions, asking them of each other. This good practice should be extended throughout and progressed to support more spontaneous student interactions in the target language. Students should also be actively encouraged to use French for classroom interactions such as asking questions, making requests and expressing difficulties.
- The good practice of communicating the lesson plan to students should be further enhanced by articulating it in terms of what the students should know by the end of the lesson. Teachers should revisit these learning outcomes to ensure that they have been achieved.
- Most lessons were well structured. The topic approach facilitated the integration of the different language skills. Good practice was noted where key expressions identified in listening texts served to support follow-up oral and written activities. However, greater attention to the pace of the lesson is recommended in some instances in order to maximise student learning.
- Some of the methodologies observed were very effectively exploited and resulted in good student participation and learning. For example, brainstorming and the use of spider-diagrams, as observed in some lessons, enabled students to apply their learning from previous contexts to the work in hand. Further development of these activities is recommended to build up families of words which, in turn, will extend students' capacity to better manipulate the target language.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was effectively integrated into some lessons, engaging the students and progressing their learning in an enjoyable manner. To further this good practice in all lessons, teachers should supplement core materials with authentic reading, visual and audio materials sourced from the internet (www.french.ie) or relevant French media.
- Pair work was observed in all lessons. This is good practice in supporting oral skills development. However, teachers should follow through on the tasks assigned to ensure that learning has taken place. To this end, students should be asked to report back to the class on the work they and their partners have completed.
- While a range of methodologies was observed in all lessons, many of them were underpinned by translation. Greater use of tasks where students are challenged to understand and use the target language without translating is recommended.

- Students were well-behaved and applied themselves to the work in hand. However, there were some who did not actively participate in the lesson, volunteer answers or engage with the inspector's interactions. However, the above-mentioned recommendations should help build up their confidence and competence in mastering the language.
- An examination of students' copybooks indicated that homework has been assigned and corrected. Some copybooks had examples of very good formative correction of work where students had to manipulate the language. This good practice should be extended throughout. Teachers should also review students' class-work copybooks from time to time to ensure that they are noting and organising their work correctly. Such an endeavour will also serve support literacy development in the French classroom.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole school provision and support for French, the allocation of time and timetabling.
- The current model of subject-option bands at junior cycle is negatively impacting on the uptake of languages among boys. This should be addressed as a matter of priority. School management should also ensure that all students and their parents fully comprehend the implications of not studying a language for future educational choices.
- A print-rich environment supporting the learning of French was evident in all of the classrooms visited. Good practice was noted where charts of classroom language were affixed to students' desks, while the use of a whiteboard in one room facilitated an initiative inviting students to write up and illustrate expressions they wished to learn over time. These good practices should be further developed as the year progresses.
- Ongoing professional development is pursued by the teachers through attendance at activities of the French Teachers' Association. Teachers should also consider applying for the range of scholarships and in-service training grants available to support both linguistic and pedagogical upskilling in France.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- A modern languages policy is in place, meetings are held and records kept. The position of co-ordinator is rotated. These are good practices.
- The minutes of meetings indicate departmental attention to general planning as well as to resolving issues of a practical nature. This good practice should be further progressed, by assessing the current status of modern languages in the school and exploring ways to improve uptake. Meetings should also be used to review the effectiveness of the methodologies and assessments used and for the sharing of good practice.
- Good progress has been achieved to date in developing subject plans which set out learning objectives and details of lesson content for each year group. It is recommended that, over time, these plans be further developed in line with the syllabus. The plans should be documented in terms of learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment protocols. Teachers should also draw up a departmental strategy for supporting literacy and numeracy development in the French classroom.
- The current Transition Year plan has a strong focus on Leaving Certificate material. There is need for more evidence in the plan as to how this material is delivered to ensure

that the methodologies used reflect the principles of an effective TY programme; promoting active and independent learning.

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 Board of Management of the Royal and Prior Comprehensive School has welcomed the report by the Inspectorate. It was pleased that the report emphasised the high quality of teaching, the range of methodologies used in the classroom and the level of subject planning which has been achieved to date.

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

The Board also accepts the recommendations by the Inspectorate and will do all possible to implement the recommendations including an immediate strategic review of the current challenges of how French is selected as a Junior Certificate subject.