REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>25, 26 and 27 October 2011</th>
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<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
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<td>• Interaction with students</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning was very good or good in the majority of lessons observed.

• Information and communication technology (ICT) has been well integrated into the teaching and learning of the subject.

• The target language was used in all lessons observed although there was some variation in the level of teacher linguistic competence.

• There is a strong tradition of the teaching and learning of modern languages in the school and they continue to be key part of its curricular provision.

• A departmental structure has been put in place but greater levels of collaboration would enable the department to operate more effectively.

• Uptake levels of French are good; levels of uptake of higher level in certificate examinations are very good and results achieved very satisfactory.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Over time, arrangements should be made to formally assess the oral competence of all students.

• Leadership and communication within the French department should be strengthened, practice discussed and good practice shared.

• Consideration should be given to applying for the services of a French language assistant.

• The French department should devise a time-bound plan for the development of subject provision.
INTRODUCTION
Coláiste an Phiarsaigh is an Irish-medium mixed voluntary secondary school located in the greater Cork city area. Currently, the school has an enrolment of 539. It provides Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate. French is one of four modern languages offered as part of the general curriculum. Japanese and Chinese are offered in TY.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Lesson content had been carefully selected. Learning outcomes were clarified at the outset of most lessons. Other good practices included the linking of content to the lives of the students, the incorporation of material drawn from current French news, the use of a French film and clips to support the development of students’ cultural awareness, the inclusion of the use of songs and visual material. Where appropriate, lesson content was differentiated. The merits of various methods of differentiating were discussed.

- The target language was used in all lessons observed although it was clear that in some lessons effectiveness of communication was impeded by insufficient levels of teacher proficiency. The importance of general use of the target language for both instructional use and as the medium of transactional communication in the classroom was discussed as this should help to avoid any unnecessary reliance on translation.

- Attention was paid to the integration of the various language learning skills and to the importance of supporting student oral participation in lessons. Student oral participation was encouraged by practices such as oral starts to lessons, the encouragement of student questioning of one another and the use of pair work. It was suggested that greater use be made of authentic listening material particularly in order to support initial language acquisition in junior classes. Lesson observation provided some good examples of the use of probing questions and the encouragement of the giving of full answers. These practices are encouraged.

- It was clear that students’ language awareness was being developed. Students demonstrated good levels of recall and teachers used recall very effectively to reinforce prior learning. There were some examples of very effective practice to support the development of linguistic and grammatical accuracy. One lesson provided a very skilful example of an inductive approach to the teaching of grammar.

- The quality of student-teacher rapport was evident in all lessons observed. Lessons were sensitively and well-managed and generally very well-paced. Students were clearly motivated and enthusiastic.

- Homework is assigned and corrected. Examination of student copies provided some examples of effective feedback to support student improvement.

- ICT was used to support lesson delivery and student learning in all lessons observed. Use of the data projector and whiteboard also provided integrated support for the development of student literacy with, for example, the incorporation of a sub-titled clip and the script of a listening comprehension. Students were encouraged to develop skills such as note-making to support their own learning. It was also very positive to see some students being assigned a self-editing task as part of their homework.
**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- French is a key part of extensive provision for the teaching and learning of modern languages in the school. The school has a long tradition of provision in this area and teachers have gained considerable experience.

- Uptake of French is good and uptake of higher level in certificate examinations is very good. Student choice is supported through the operation of a taster programme in first year. Many French classes enjoy the advantage of small numbers. Time allocated to the subject is appropriate.

- Teachers are not classroom-based which means it is not really possible for them to create stimulating learning environments which could be exploited to support both language acquisition and the development of cultural awareness.

- The time and effort required of teachers to organise and participate in co-curricular and extracurricular activities such as European Language Week; an annual French Quiz; a weekly Seomra Caidrimh and a trip to France is recognised and acknowledged. Consideration should also be given to the benefits of establishing a link with a French school.

- The school has a system of continuous assessment. There is some assessment of student oral competence as part of this system. It is recommended that, gradually, arrangements be made to formally assess the oral competence of all students.

- The French department has a tradition of participation in teacher professional development activities. This should be maintained with teachers focusing on areas of personal need as appropriate. It is suggested that the school consider applying for the services of a language assistant as soon as is practicable. Teachers of French are also referred to Circular 0028/10 which outlines the terms of the French/Irish Teacher Professional Visits scheme which might offer a further professional development opportunity.

- Considerable investment has been made in ICT related infrastructure. It is advised that the department discuss and plan to enhance library-based resources for the subject.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Members of the French department have devised year plans for the subject. It is suggested that when next revising these plans the department should discuss and agree a common template to be used by all.

- All lessons observed had been carefully planned and prepared; relevant materials had been sourced or individually prepared by the teacher.

- A language department structure has been put in place. To date, the focus has been on the operation of the French department as part of a larger modern languages department. Whilst this is good practice, it was clear that stronger leadership and better collaboration and communication within the French department itself would enhance practice and provision. This evaluation provides an opportunity to devise a time-bound plan for the overall development of provision.

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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