

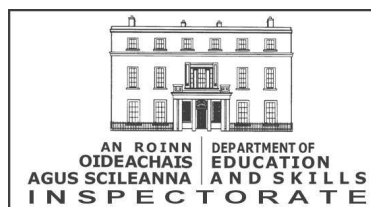
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of German
REPORT**

**Presentation College,
Bray, County Wicklow
Roll number: 61800D**

Date of inspection: 31 January 2011



REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GERMAN

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Presentation College Bray. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in German 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, deputy principal and subject teacher

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Presentation College Bray offers a range of subjects and programmes to its students. Languages form a central strand of the school's curriculum and, on entry to the school, all first-year students choose either French or German. Students continue with learning their chosen language to Leaving Certificate. The opportunity for students to learn a further modern language, Spanish, in Transition Year is praiseworthy. First year enrolment numbers in Presentation College Bray are increasing annually. The uptake of German remains at a consistent twenty-five students. However, both school management and the German teachers were conscious of the need for the promotion of German to ensure continued student numbers. Some strategies to maintain and increase uptake in German were discussed at the time of the evaluation.

The allocation of time to the teaching and learning of German is good and the distribution of those units of time across the week is appropriate and ensures optimal regular class contact with the target language for the students of German. There are four lesson periods allocated to German in first year, four periods allocated to German in second and third year, three periods in TY, and five periods in fifth and sixth year.

Class formation is on the basis of mixed ability and students with special educational needs (SEN) are accommodated within the German class groupings. The teachers demonstrated an awareness of students' needs, and differentiated teaching strategies were deployed to accommodate different learning needs of students. This is commendable.

The most important resource for any classroom is the teacher who can effectively model the target language community. This was the case in Presentation College Bray. The German teachers are appropriately qualified in the language and visit the target language countries to maintain linguistic skills and competence, helping to ensure both fluency and accuracy at all times. Participating regularly in available continuing professional development (CPD) ensures parallel development of pedagogical competence.

A German world was effectively created and sustained through very good and consistent use of the target language and through attractive displays of posters and charts of such useful items as classroom language. Some good resources from different media were integrated into classroom teaching and learning, and authentic sources of materials are used as often as possible. The addition of the planned multi-media room will facilitate the further integration of ICT into the German classroom.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The quality of subject planning is good. Subject planning meetings are facilitated by school management once a term throughout the year. Time is also allocated weekly to facilitate regular meetings of the German teachers. This results in a collegial and collaborative approach to planning. Pedagogical items discussed at planning meetings indicate the quality of professional engagement among the German teachers. Such themes as self-evaluation, effective teaching methodologies, student self-assessment, mixed-ability teaching and sources of useful authentic materials have been discussed. The position of co-ordinator for German is rotated among the German teachers which is good practice. The co-ordinator takes responsibility for the planning of the department, whereby schemes of work for each year group and course content are updated and reviewed from year to year. The co-ordinator also keeps records of meetings, of decisions regarding text books and the acquisition of new materials. The German teachers are encouraged to concentrate in the future on planning for the use of the interactive whiteboard and to prepare for the electronic creation and sharing of resources.

The German plan is appropriately and accurately based on the syllabus documents for junior and senior cycle German. The plan is a cohesive document, outlining comprehensive schemes of works for each year group and clearly stating learning outcomes in terms of can-do statements. These learning outcomes are expressed as outcomes for all students, for most students and for some students, reflecting the commendable approach the German department takes to differentiating learning across a range of ability. These can-do statements could be readily expanded to provide self-assessment checklists for students, and the German department is encouraged to undertake this in the context of promoting student independent learning. The plan also contains syllabus documents, examination materials, student lists and lists of available resources.

The objectives for German include praiseworthy aims such as encouraging enjoyment of language learning, the use of the target language, and integrating cultural awareness and providing insights into the culture of Germany. These are examples of best practice in language teaching. It is suggested as a preamble to the German plan that these aims be linked to the objectives articulated in the school's mission statement.

The inclusion of teaching strategies is also a positive feature of the German plan which places an equal emphasis on teaching and learning. It was good to see the emphasis placed by the German teachers on developing active learning and active listening in their students as well as developing discovery and co-operative learning among students. There was clear evidence of both aims and methodologies being implemented in practice in the lessons observed. The range of teaching methodologies recorded could usefully be augmented with those referred to in this report. This would provide an accurate reflection of the quality of the learning experiences provided for learners.

There is a self-contained TY plan for German, describing themes which are in line with the philosophy of TY. Some of the themes include preparing for practical work experience in the target language, and exploring the literature, film and music of the German language and culture. Communicative skills in the language and language awareness are also developed. One of the aims is to encourage independent study and as part of their course, TY students are required to complete a project, design a poster of their project and devise an oral presentation of their project, exemplifying the integration of skills.

Detailed individual lesson plans were provided on the day of the inspection. These plans incorporated lesson objectives for the target group, methodologies, lesson content, homework and opportunities for student activity. Worksheets and materials had also been prepared in advance of all lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching of German is good. In the German lessons observed, the teachers made good use of the target language, even in the context of examination preparation where for assessment purposes the language of testing is English. All aspects of lessons were explained in German and there was very little English to be heard. Effective vocabulary acquisition work was observed. The teachers explained new vocabulary with natural idiomatic German, using synonyms to explain new vocabulary and reminding students of similar vocabulary already covered. Sometimes, the teacher explained using gesture and mime which worked and held students' attention. In a junior lesson, the use of flash cards was also effective in motivating and engaging all students to participate. Frequently, lessons opened with recording in German of the day and date on the board provided by the students, as well as roll call and checking of home work, routine tasks which were completed entirely in German.

The teachers shared the learning objectives with students which is good practice. Lesson objectives could also be recorded on the board for students to check for themselves at the end of the lesson. This would be in line with the stated objective of promoting independent learning. Where the structure of the lesson is clearly outlined to students and the teacher introduces the theme for the lesson or series of lessons, this ensures clarity of direction for the students, so important at every stage of learning. This was for the most part successfully achieved by the German teachers. There was a good structure to the lessons observed showing effective integration of skills and engagement of students at every stage.

An integrated approach was adopted by teachers in line with syllabus recommendations. Lessons opened with an oral recapitulation of the previous lesson's learning on the part of the teacher and the checking of homework assigned. Individual students called upon to respond to questions demonstrated sound knowledge and were quite accurate in their use of German. It was impressive to observe the students answering in full sentences and also with good pronunciation. On the occasions where it is easy to provide one or two word answers, it is important for teachers to demand full sentences from students. Students were attentive, understood well and worked assiduously noting new vocabulary and structures. The students of German heard and also used a lot of German.

The development of language awareness and the practice of grammatical structures was a praiseworthy feature of all lessons, where teachers deployed simple exercises and examples to consolidate learning and integrated differentiated approaches where necessary and desirable. Grammatical items were well explained and there was a clear development of student awareness

of language structures. Grammatically structures were also reinforced systematically in preparation for student tasks. Teachers ensured that initial student tasks or introductory exercises were simple and within each student's capability, well pitched at their level and interest which is motivating for the students. Lesson content was appropriate, authentic and fun. For example, the theme of health was very relevant to the group in question and links to other subjects and also to school life in Germany were skilfully created. The theme of music chosen for the transition year group observed was suited both to the year group and to the year. The TY students had attended a recent German exhibition of modern German music. It is both enterprising and laudable that attendance by students at such occasions is facilitated by teachers and school management. Students were given the opportunity to record their personal response to the songs which was effective. The lesson with the senior group was appropriately focussed on examination preparation.

Some very good examples of pair and group work were observed. Pair work was well structured and students prepared themselves quickly and engaged well. Students immediately applied themselves to the task, worked well together and checked unknown items in the dictionary, which is a good practice to develop. Teachers circulated checking and helping individually. On one occasion, cards were distributed with different tasks which added an element of choice and variety. On another occasion, the work sheets distributed also supported students in completion of the task assigned and in their learning. This resulted in good understanding on the part of students. It is recommended that the pair and group work be further augmented by providing students with opportunities in each lesson to generate spontaneous oral language which helps embed structures and linguistic skills and makes the most of the valuable time available.

All lessons were characterised by very good rapport and relationships between teachers and students. Teachers supported those students who found some aspects of learning difficult with well-designed work sheets or reminded students of familiar vocabulary relevant to the task. Students responded by making an effort. There was also good affirmation of student achievement and students were praised for their efforts. While at times students were quiet, they were attentive and made an effort to complete tasks and to participate in an engaged way in their lessons. Students were diligent in note taking.

ASSESSMENT

Ongoing formative assessment is a feature of the German teachers' work in the classroom. As observed, the assigning and correction of home work was an integral component of all lessons. In the sample of copy books examined at the time of the evaluation, there was evidence of regular correction of home work, as well as students checking their own work as part of classroom correction. Work sheets distributed for homework were clear, well thought out and helpful, with a relevant focus. The approach adopted by the German teachers in relation to assessment for learning (AfL) was to provide positive feedback to students on their strengths and guidance as to where and how students can improve. In this context, only comments appeared in copy books while the actual mark attained was recorded in the teacher's journal. Students' oral contribution in class was noted as part of assessment and there was good affirmation of student contributions and efforts in class.

There is an assessment policy in place which was being reviewed at the time of the evaluation. An analysis of certificate examination results is undertaken annually by the board of management to identify patterns of uptake of higher and ordinary level and attainment at both levels. This analysis is communicated and discussed with the German department. This is very good practice

and central to the promotion of the subject, as uptake at higher level is high and attainment at both levels is good.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The quality of teaching of German is good.
- There was very good use of German as the main language of instruction and communication in all lessons.
- The quality of German planning is good. The plan is a cohesive document, outlining comprehensive schemes of work for each year group and clearly stating learning outcomes in terms of can-do statements.
- Effective vocabulary acquisition work was observed. The teachers explained new vocabulary with natural idiomatic German.
- Students used a lot of German. It was impressive to observe the students answering in full sentences and also with good pronunciation.
- The development of language awareness and the practice of grammatical structures was a praiseworthy feature of all lessons
- There were some very good examples of pair and group work observed. Pair work was well structured and students prepared themselves quickly and engaged well.
- The approach adopted by the German teachers in relation to assessment for learning (AfL) was to provide positive feedback to students on their strengths and providing guidance as to where and how students can improve.

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

- It is recommended that the pair and group work be further augmented by providing students with opportunities in each lesson to generate spontaneous oral language.
- It is recommended that the range of strategies to maintain and increase uptake in German be explored.
- The German teachers are encouraged to concentrate in the future on planning for the use of the interactive whiteboard and to prepare for the electronic creation and sharing of resources.

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