

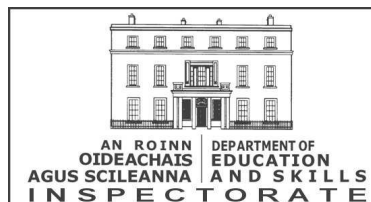
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of German
REPORT**

**Ard Scoil na nDéise
Dungarvan, County Waterford
Roll number: 64900W**

Date of inspection: 19 November 2010



REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GERMAN

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Ard Scoil na nDéise, Dungarvan. 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 and subject teachers. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix to this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Modern languages form a central strand in the school's curriculum in Ard Scoil na nDéise. School management is commended for ensuring that each student has access to the study of a modern language up to Leaving Certificate. Students are admirably supported in their language learning and only a small minority of students do not continue with their study of a modern language. Languages form part of the core curriculum, and, prior to entry in first year, students choose between German and French. The commitment of teachers and school management to promote uptake of German from year to year is acknowledged. Class formation is on the basis of mixed-ability in both junior and senior cycle.

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 class contact with the target language for the students of German. There are four periods allocated to German in junior cycle, three in Transition Year (TY), five periods in fifth year and, commendably, six in sixth year to augment senior cycle provision. At the time of the evaluation, school management had also accommodated concurrent timetabling of parallel class groups on two occasions during the week. This facilitated dedicated work with a single ability grouping and could also facilitate sharing of teachers and expertise. TY is optional and German is provided for students over the full year to ensure continuity and to build on the students' linguistic skills systematically.

The school has well established links with Germany and German students study in the school for a term or year at senior cycle. Both school management and language teachers alike acknowledge the positive impact of the native speaker, and representative of the target language community, in the school and classroom. It not only enhances the language learning experience of the students but also provides an international and European dimension to the school environment. German is provided for in terms of human resources, with two teachers currently on the staff; both, however, are on a part-time basis. Both teachers of German are appropriately qualified, and one is a native speaker of German. The value of the native speaker was appreciated and exploited well in the school. A good level of linguistic and cultural competence was observed in the course of the

inspection, as well as an awareness of how students learn. The teachers catered for the diversity of learners' needs in their class groups through the provision of differentiated work sheets and tasks. This is good practice.

The teachers are members of their subject association and attend seminars, when available. They also liaise with local cluster groups for German. At the time of the evaluation, the teachers articulated the need for training in the use of ICT in the modern language classroom, in readiness for the implementation of the plan for ICT infrastructure in the school. Currently, a data projector and laptop are available for each base classroom. Other resources available to the German teachers include CD players, data projectors, access to the computer room, language laboratory and teaching materials.

The co-curricular programme offered to students of German includes such activities as the celebration of German feasts including Christmas baking, French and German breakfasts, attendance at the screening of German films suitable for young learners, and the promotion of participation in language exchanges during TY. An educational trip to Germany is organised occasionally. The co-curricular provision enhances and enriches the language learning experience for students of German and is praiseworthy.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The mission statement of the school is the attainment of academic excellence through a high standard of teaching and learning; education of the whole person; and fostering a sense of community. The aims of the German plan resonate well with the school aims and, for this reason, the plan should provide a more explicit link to the school's overall philosophy and mission. The German aims of fostering a love of the language, oral fluency and optimum attainment are praiseworthy. The inclusion of developing student awareness of cultural difference and diversity is also in line with syllabus guidelines. The German plan also includes syllabus documents as reference, and this is good practice.

The plan for German is reviewed on an annual basis. It has been developed collaboratively and subject department meetings are held once a term. Records of department meetings were examined at the time of the evaluation. These demonstrated regular review of year group plans. The teachers meet informally almost on a daily basis, and review student progress and sharing of resources. This is good practice. The schemes of work and long-term planning documents made available at the time of the inspection contained many of the required elements for good planning: outlining themes and topics to be covered; planning for the systematic integration of grammatical structures; preparation for examination-related tasks; acquisition and reinforcement of vocabulary; deployment of a range of resources; and sources of appropriate material.

The schemes of work for each year group were presented in sequence in terms of themes, resources to be used and assessment modes to be deployed. The themes coincided with units in the text book and the plan stated in broad terms what the students would be able to do at the end of each year. This is good practice. Expressing the learning outcomes in more detail would augment the good work completed to date. Linguistic structures, topics areas of vocabulary and types of pieces of writing were all recorded for each year group. The plan for third year introduced the preparation of examination strategies.

The TY plan places an emphasis on maximum use of the target language. Appropriate topics and themes are included, such as German films, German music and German festivals. Also included

was the opportunity for students to write about their experience of work bringing in a vocational dimension to their learning. The learning objectives to be achieved by the end of TY included developing oral skills, grammatical accuracy and cultural awareness. These should be articulated in terms of short-term targets which would provide students with a checklist for their progress in the different aspects of their language learning. Such an approach would also promote learner autonomy and self-directed learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning observed was in the main good. The most important resource for any language classroom is the teacher who can effectively model the target language community and culture. The use of idiomatic natural German helped to create and sustain the authentic German environment. Consequently, many students were capable and accurate in their use of language. Grammatical items were also explained in German. In the lessons observed, there was good consistent use of the target language and only on one occasion did this practice falter. Where words were explained in English, students subsequently answered in English and repeated the words in English. The use of flash cards would have avoided the need for translation, and retained German as the main language of instruction in the classroom. On other occasions, teachers used synonyms in broadening vocabulary of students and when explaining individual vocabulary items. Any new vocabulary was recorded on the board and students recorded it in their notebooks.

Teachers used an integrated approach in line with syllabus recommendations and a number of activities were organised throughout lessons. Time was used well. For example, while students were learning and preparing vocabulary prior to the listening exercise, the teacher circulated checking homework. Learning was well directed by the teachers and lessons were characterised by clarity of direction and a pace which demonstrated a judicious balance between challenge and support. Examination strategies were integrated across the lessons but these did not dominate. For example, one lesson closed with practising of oral work for the oral examination. It was good to see that the questions to the listening text were to be answered in German, maintaining the authentic German learning environment created. Students listened intently and learned to listen selectively for key words and essential messages.

In each lesson, some element of language awareness was introduced and focused on the introduction or recapitulation of a grammatical structure. For example, students were provided with verbs to use in a sentence to do with the environment and each student attempted to use the verb correctly in a simple sentence. There was judicious use of a translation exercise. On another occasion, an additional grammatical element was introduced by the teacher when she knew that the students could cope with it. This demonstrated good judgment, as students can mix up items such as tenses, if introduced too quickly or too soon. In another lesson, there was an appropriate focus on revision of word-order and verb position in the sentence. The students also used German and were positively affirmed for their achievements. Students learned a lot of new vocabulary and structures in German in lessons and were given opportunities to apply what they had learnt. While acknowledging the need to scaffold learners, opportunities to generate spontaneous language should be given to learners on a daily basis. Where this was observed, students spoke very natural German and were accurate and showed themselves able for the tasks assigned

A range of activities served to further reinforce the learning. Students worked well together when working in pairs and asked help of the teacher, if required. Instructions for activities and tasks were explained in clear simple German. The objective of the lesson was shared in English with a

junior cycle group observed. Students were well able to answer, so it is suggested that perhaps more of the introduction to the lesson could have been conducted in German. The sharing of lesson objectives with students should be extended to all lessons. When engaged in listening activities, students listened intently and learned to listen selectively for key words and essential messages. Students were attentive and participated well.

Classrooms are student based due to the layout of the school accommodation. Nevertheless, in the classrooms visited, an authentic German environment had been created with useful posters, charts, wall maps of Germany and student work. German posters and maps are readily available from the Goethe Institut Dublin.

There was very good classroom atmosphere and rapport in all lessons observed. When accommodating the learners' needs at both higher and ordinary level, teachers had prepared differentiated work sheets. The teachers were systematic and thorough in their approach.

ASSESSMENT

The school does not have an assessment policy. However, it has a well-worked-out homework policy and students are supported well from first year onwards in how to approach study and present homework. Supervised study is also provided by the school. Outlining the purpose of homework and study in planning documentation encourages student application and self-directed study.

A range of procedures for monitoring and reporting on student progress is used in Ard Scoil na nDéise. Regular in-class tests and in-school examinations are conducted and examples of in-class examinations were seen at the time of the evaluation. Information on student progress is provided to parents through school reports and parent-teacher meetings. Formative assessment of students' written work forms part of the teachers' ongoing assessment of student learning in the language. Student work had been corrected and annotated with teacher comments. At senior level, there was evidence of corrected work being rewritten and errors corrected by the students. This is very good. Examination of copybooks showed a range of appropriate themes had been covered; the type of writing exercises ranged from short simple sentences to practice of grammatical items in isolation and also integrated within themes, and longer pieces of writing. The students demonstrated accurate mastery of the written German structures.

Analysis of student certificate examinations has been conducted in the past by the guidance counsellor. It is recommended that this practice be revitalised and school management should conduct an analysis of uptake of levels in the subject and of attainment at both levels. This should be communicated to the subject teachers to inform the review of subject planning and implementation.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in 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.

- The aims of the German plan resonate well with the school aims, and the aims of fostering a love of the language, oral fluency and optimum attainment are praiseworthy.
- The quality of teaching and learning observed was in the main good. In the lessons observed, there was good consistent use of the target language.
- Teachers used an integrated approach in line with syllabus recommendations and a number of activities were organised throughout lessons.
- In each lesson, some element of language awareness was introduced and focused on the introduction or recapitulation of a grammatical structure.
- When engaged in listening activities, students listened intently and learned to listen selectively for key words and essential messages.
- The school has a well-worked-out homework policy and students are supported well from first year onwards in how to approach study and present homework.

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

- It is recommended that learning outcomes articulated as short-term targets be included in the German plan. This would provide students with a checklist for their progress in the different aspects of their language learning.
- When introducing new areas of vocabulary, the use of flash cards is recommended to avoid the need for translation, particularly at junior cycle.
- It is recommended that opportunities to generate spontaneous language be provided to learners on a daily basis.
- It is recommended that school management conduct an analysis of uptake of levels in the subject and of attainment at both levels.

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.

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

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

Analysis of uptake of levels in the subject was done for 2010 and is being done for 2011.