

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of French
REPORT**

**Newpark Comprehensive School
Blackrock, County Dublin
Roll number: 81001I**

Date of inspection: 16 October 2009



**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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Newpark Comprehensive School, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in French and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers and examined students' work. 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 deputy principal. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Newpark Comprehensive School is a co-educational school with 831 students. The study of a modern European language forms part of the core curriculum at both junior and senior cycle and students choose between French and German. The school also has a European section, where students are afforded the opportunity to study French at a more in-depth level and sit examinations that offer certification from the French ministry of education in French language studies. This option is made available to students who are native speakers of French, who have family members who are native speakers or who indicate an aptitude for language learning.

Classes are organised in mixed-ability groupings in junior cycle and in Transition Year (TY), and, where possible, are divided into higher and ordinary level groupings at senior cycle. This is good practice. There is good provision for French in terms of the allocation of time and timetabling. Classes are timetabled in single periods for most year groups to ensure regular contact with the target language. This practice is commended.

There are eight teachers of French. Each teacher is a graduate in French and all are given the opportunity to teach to all levels. This is good practice. Some have benefited from a range of in-service programmes for teachers of French both in Ireland and in France. Some have also been involved in pilot projects aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning of modern languages. The school supports ongoing professional development by releasing teachers for available in-service and by paying the group membership of the French Teachers Association (FTA). In order to maintain their linguistic and pedagogical skills, all teachers of French should keep themselves informed of the language-related scholarships and grants currently made available through the Department of Education and Skills and the French Cultural Services, and through *Léargas*. Teachers who have not as yet benefited from the above-mentioned courses and projects should also investigate courses in local education centres on areas such as differentiation and co-operative learning, to support the teaching and learning of French in a mixed-ability setting. The school has also organised whole-school professional development in areas including assessment

for learning (AfL) and computer skills. The commitment to ongoing professional development is highly commended.

Most teachers have their own base classrooms. Some of these rooms were visually stimulating with displays of maps, posters, classroom language and samples of students' work. The creation of a print-rich environment is commended as it exposes the students to many aspects of French life and culture in addition to providing affirmation for students' work. All teachers should work towards the creation of a language-learning environment which will afford students the opportunity to learn key expressions, grammar points and classroom language over time. Some of the relevant display materials could be prepared by the students as part of their learning activities.

There is very good whole-school provision for resources. The French department is allocated a generous budget each year for the acquisition of resources, which include CD and DVD players. There is a French resource room with a computer and printer and a wide range of books, CDs, DVDs, cassette and video tapes. A filing cabinet is used to store all shared materials such as worksheets, marking schemes and other relevant documentation. The provision and organisation of such significant resources is highly commended. The computer in the French resource room is for the purpose of downloading materials from the internet and for lesson preparation.

Access to the school's computer room for teaching and learning is on a rotational basis and a number of mobile data projectors are available on a booking basis. The evidence accrued during the course of the evaluation indicated that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support teaching and learning of French in the classroom is still relatively limited. It is recommended that the teachers of French liaise with the teachers of ICT in order to develop greater confidence and expertise in the use of ICT in the classroom. Such developments would be of assistance in accessing resources to support the comprehension of new material, the teaching of grammar, the integration of cultural awareness and the speedy correction of homework. Students could also be encouraged to create their own PowerPoint presentations to support oral-skills development or general revision.

Teachers facilitate a commendable range of co-curricular activities to support the teaching and learning of French. These include visits from 'French theatre for schools' groups, outings to the cinema to see French films, and participation in projects and competitions organised by the French Cultural Services. The school also hosts an annual French Week offering activities such as French breakfasts, cafés, poster displays and quizzes. A report on the activities of the week is then included in the school newsletter, thereby enhancing the profile of French in the wider school community. An annual exchange is organised with a school in Lyon for second-year students. While those from the European section have priority, students in mainstream French are also offered the opportunity to participate in this exchange. To support students who are unable to travel to France, teachers should consider promoting e-twinning or e-pals with the same or another French school for the purpose of promoting cultural awareness and intercultural dialogue. Teachers are highly commended for their commitment to co-curricular activities as the provision of enjoyable activities can significantly enhance the learning experience for all students of French.

Newpark is currently benefiting from both the French language assistantship scheme and the Jules Verne programme, both of which support the teaching and learning of French in the school. School management reported that these programmes are working well and afford a very positive experience to all involved.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

A review of the subject planning documentation for French indicates a long tradition of high quality planning for the teaching and learning of French. School management facilitates formal meetings for subject planning each term. There is a co-ordinator for French. This position is currently a post of responsibility. This somewhat limits the opportunities for other teachers to engage in the management of the subject planning process and to develop subject-specific expertise. It is recommended that the position of subject co-ordinator as a post of responsibility be reviewed. Consideration could then be given to establishing a voluntary rotating position of subject co-ordinator for French within a modern European languages department. This would afford all teachers the opportunity to share the workload and to take ownership of the subject-planning process.

The subject plan for French sets out the school context, accounts for the allocation of budgets and expenditure on resources, refers to the creation of a language learning environment and outlines the supports offered to new teachers of French as part of their induction process. Schemes of work for each year group were clearly laid out in terms of the topics to be studied, when they would be studied, the resources to be used, the grammar and learning outcomes to be achieved and the proposed methodologies to support these outcomes. This is highly commended. As part of ongoing subject planning the teachers of French should build on the very good work achieved to date by establishing a series of global learning outcomes for each year group and identifying ways in which they can review the effectiveness of their methodologies in advancing the teaching and learning of French. They should also consider using ICT to record plans and sharing them with all teachers of French, thereby making the plans easy to update. This will ensure that the high quality planning completed by the members of the French department constantly informs their practice.

A TY plan for the teaching and learning of French was also submitted. This plan allows for a curriculum where teachers can offer modules that respond to their own areas of interest and expertise in addition to delivering a varied programme to the students. In one module students are offered the choice of film to be studied, thereby affording them an introduction to learner autonomy. This is good practice. However, a review of the plan indicates a need for more detail on the proposed collaboration between teachers in relation to completing the overall programme of work for TY students and the manner in which the different modules dovetail to ensure clear and coherent progression in teaching and learning. Furthermore, when planning the TY programme, it is important to keep in mind that the desired innovation and stimulation central to a quality TY programme relates as much to the variety and quality of the methodologies used as to its proposed content.

There was careful preparation for all the lessons observed with the advance readiness of technical equipment and supplementary materials and worksheets.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Inspection activities included the observation of nine lessons, five at junior cycle, one in TY and three at senior cycle. The opportunity to interact with the students and to review their copybooks was also facilitated. Teachers demonstrated good knowledge of the French language and culture and all lessons were competently taught. However, there is scope to develop approaches that will further challenge students and create a more stimulating and dynamic learning environment. This will also ensure a greater link between the high quality planning and classroom practice.

Most lessons were well structured, appropriately paced and the content responded to the needs and abilities of the students. Teachers began their lessons by explaining what they proposed to do. In one instance, the teacher wrote up an outline of the lesson on the board and made students aware of what was completed by ticking it off. This is commended. Very good practice was also observed in some lessons where the teacher communicated the proposed learning outcomes of the lesson. It is recommended that this good practice of sharing the proposed learning outcomes be extended to all lessons as it makes students more aware of their roles and responsibilities in the teaching and learning process.

The target language was well used throughout by the teacher in many of the lessons observed. There were some lessons however, where the teachers began in French but reverted to English as the lesson progressed. This resulted in some students not being challenged to understand or to interact in French. Where this occurs, teachers need to become more conscious of maintaining the use of the target language throughout the lesson. While the need to support students of all abilities in the language-learning process is acknowledged, teachers should explain first in French and, if further explanation is necessary, alternatives to translation should be used where possible. For example, there was one commendable instance where students who were unable to give the time in French were given a clock to indicate what they wanted to say without having to express it in English. Greater use of French as the language of general classroom interaction will challenge those students who are more linguistically proficient while those experiencing difficulty can be encouraged to communicate their difficulties in simple French. To this end, all students should be given the necessary expressions to ask questions, make requests and express difficulties in the target language. This will help build up students' confidence in addition to supporting oral and aural skills development.

An integrated approach to the development of the different language skills was observed in most lessons. This is good practice. There were also some good examples of the effective integration of grammar into the body of the lesson. This is also commended. However, there was a need in some instances to follow through with the development of written expression skills rather than focus solely on vocabulary acquisition. Pair or group work was observed in most lessons where the purpose was to actively engage the students in oral-skills development within a specific timeframe. This is commended.

Visual supports, including flashcards and material objects, were effectively used to support the introduction of new vocabulary and to remind students of some key expressions. This is commended. It is suggested however, that the flashcards containing key expressions should be enlarged to ensure that those sitting at the back can read them clearly. Supplementary texts and worksheets were also used in many lessons to support learning. In one instance, the teacher collated and laminated work already completed by students as part of the topic being studied and this work was then used as a resource for the student-based task during the lesson observed. This is also commended.

ICT was effectively used in one lesson to introduce a new topic and the supporting worksheet ensured active engagement with the work of the lesson. The use of ICT is commended as it enhances cultural awareness in addition to facilitating comprehension. It is important however, when using ICT, to factor in time for consolidating new learning at the end of the lesson.

In most instances, students engaged with the work of the lesson and applied themselves to the tasks assigned. There was one instance however, where some students needed more guidance from the teacher in working through the assigned task. In another lesson the use of introductory activities such as brainstorming would have enhanced learning and teaching as such activities

would have resulted in students using their previous learning to support more active engagement with the work in hand. Furthermore, given the mixed-ability nature of the different class groupings, all teachers should use differentiated worksheets and tasks in order to maximise the learning opportunities for students of all abilities.

There was good classroom management in most of the lessons observed. However, there were some instances where the more vocal and demanding students held the attention of the teacher and this resulted in some of the quieter students disengaging from active participation in the lesson. This needs to be addressed through improved classroom management strategies and through the targeting of questions towards quieter students and through differentiation. Interaction with the inspector and participation in the lesson indicated that while many students were confident and competent learners of the language there were some who needed to be further challenged in their active participation and their engagement with the learning process.

ASSESSMENT

Students' progress is monitored in a variety of ways. These include question-and-answer sessions, the setting and correction of homework, class tests and end-of-term examinations. Homework was assigned in all of the lessons evaluated. Good practice in the correction of homework was noted where constructive comments were included. However, it was very difficult to identify homework assignments in some of the students' copybooks. Furthermore it was noted that many students did not record their homework assignments in their journals. To support good practice in the assignment and correction of homework, teachers should spot-check to ensure that students are noting their homework assignments and all corrections should be signed or dated and where appropriate, a comment included. Students should also be encouraged to organise their copybooks and folders in such a way as to facilitate ease of referral at a later date.

All students have class-based tests at mid-term and more formalised class tests at Christmas. Students due to take certificate examinations sit trial examinations early in the second term. All other students have formal tests in the summer. Aural and oral tests are also administered to students in each year group as part of assessment practices. This is highly commended.

Contact with parents is maintained through the student journal, the annual parent-teacher meetings held for each year group and school reports. A review of the certificate examination results indicates that student outcomes are generally good and appropriate to the student cohort. However, it is recommended that students' progress in senior cycle should be correlated with their results at Junior Certificate to ensure that they are maintaining or improving on their achievements and reaching their full potential.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole-school provision and support for French in the allocation of time, timetabling and the provisions of resources.
- A range of commendable co-curricular activities are organised to enhance the teaching and learning of French.
- Subject planning for the teaching and learning of French is very good.
- An integrated approach facilitating the development of the different language skills was observed in most lessons.

- There was good use of pair work in all lessons observed.
- There are good assessment practices in place for the assessment of oral and aural skills development.

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

- The TY plan for French should provide greater detail on the manner in which teachers plan together to ensure clear and coherent progression in teaching and learning.
- The dependency on translation in some classes should be reduced and the use of French as the language of instruction and interaction should be extended.
- Teachers should ensure that the methodologies used better reflect the link between subject planning and classroom practice.
- Teachers should use differentiated tasks and worksheets to support the mixed-ability nature of the class groupings.
- Greater use of ICT is recommended to support teaching and learning.
- Classroom management strategies should be reviewed in some instances to ensure full participation in the lesson by all students.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal and deputy 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 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board and the French Department wish to thank the Inspectorate for their consideration and professionalism in the carrying out of their evaluation.

It notes the joint union directive in operation at the time of the evaluation directing staff not to attend pre or post evaluation meetings or scheduled meetings during the time of the evaluation. The Board welcome the inspection and are pleased to note that a very large number of items already being carried out within the French Department, are found to be commendable, highly commendable, very good or good practice.

This large number of positives is welcomed though this may not be fully reflected in the main findings and recommendations.

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

1. While there is collaboration between the teachers of TY, meetings to further facilitate a coherent progression from one module to the next, have and are being, undertaken.
2. All the French teachers are striving to further extend French as the language of instruction and interaction.
3. The French planning folders are being revisited and the schemes of work are being reviewed to reflect the link between planning and practice.
4. The French teachers have all attended in-service relating to differentiation and held a Departmental meeting to apply this to the learning of French.
5. The French Department have recently purchased a data projector for communal use within the Dept. Several teachers have undertaken further computer training and others intend to take part in data projector usage sessions.

6. With regard to classroom management the Department have attended a planning day dealing with this topic.

7. There are 8 teachers teaching French with degrees in French. The ninth teacher is involved in cross-curricular teaching of Home Economics through the medium of French in the European Section.