

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of French
REPORT**

**Kinsale Community School
County Cork
Roll number: 91499E**

Date of inspection: 3 December 2009



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT
OIDEACHAIS | OF EDUCATION
AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Kinsale Community School. 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. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal. The board of management of the school 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

The study of modern European languages is an important element of the school's curriculum. French and German are provided throughout the school, while Italian and Spanish are offered in senior cycle. A Chinese module has recently been introduced in Transition Year (TY). It is very good practice that students have access to a choice of languages at different times during their second-level education. In first year, all students study French and German as part of a subject-sampling programme. At the end of the year they select their optional subjects with advice provided by the teachers and the guidance counsellors. The option bands are generated from students' preferences. Classes are mixed-ability in first year and banded thereafter in junior cycle. There are procedures in place for identifying students with additional educational needs and for supporting them in their language-learning.

The timetabling allocation for French in junior cycle is very good with four single class periods per week in first year and second year, while students in third year benefit from an additional period. The allocation of single periods in junior cycle is advantageous when students begin to learn a language as it allows for regular class contact. TY is optional in the school and the study of a European language is a core component of the programme. TY students have four class periods of French per week and are taught in mixed-ability classes. Students in senior cycle are advised with regard to their subject options by the teachers and guidance counsellors and an information evening is also held for parents. Students in fifth year and sixth year have five class periods per week.

Extracurricular support for the language is very strong. First-year classes organise a *petit déjeuner* during the year and there is a presentation on French food during the annual open night. *La Semaine Francophone* is celebrated in March. French drama and film form part of the activities offered to students in TY and the students perform an annual play. A scholarship scheme, funded by the local Lions Club, allows the school to offer a bursary for a three-week language course in France to a student each year. Information is also provided to students on language courses in

Ireland and abroad. A school tour is a feature of the TY programme and this is often to Paris. In addition, students in senior cycle are offered an opportunity to spend two weeks in Antibes, in the South of France, as part of a school exchange at the start of the summer holidays. As the organisation of such a visit involves considerable work and commitment, the teachers are to be commended for their efforts on behalf of their students.

It is very positive that the teachers of French have undertaken postgraduate studies and professional-development courses in recent years. They are members of their subject association and their involvement in professional development is supported by management. Resources for teaching and learning are generally very good. The teachers have access to a range of resources including CD players, data projectors, computers and internet access. One of the classrooms is designated as a French room and is used to store the shared resources. Some of the teachers are classroom-based and there are attractive and informative displays on the walls ranging from eye-catching posters produced by the students, to photographs and newspaper articles on current affairs. The inclusion of key words and phrases on the posters helps to highlight their usefulness for language-learning. It is good to note that many of the posters are aimed at increasing the language awareness of senior-cycle students. It is suggested that a map of France be displayed in each classroom as a further aid to developing cultural awareness among students.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

One teacher acts as co-ordinator for the subject and the responsibilities include the organisation and chairing of subject meetings, the distribution of correspondence and representing the French department when necessary. The co-ordinator also has a role to play with regard to supporting new teachers including student teachers. A subject department meeting is held each term and minutes are taken of decisions made. The good practice of reviewing the subject plan takes place at the last meeting of the year. It is also positive that there is regular informal communication between the French and German language departments.

A comprehensive subject file has been prepared as part of school development planning. It is good to note that the documents are designed to relate closely to the school context and take cognisance of students' additional educational needs, including the needs of exceptionally able students. The documents also include planning for a culturally diverse society and research on effective teaching methodologies. Schemes of work for each year group have been prepared and it is suggested that these be further developed to include planned learning outcomes. It is also recommended that the assessment section of the TY plan be reviewed in order to link the modes of assessment more closely with the aims and objectives of the programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

There was good use of the target language by both teachers and students in the lessons observed. French was used for communication and for teaching lesson content. It is very positive that strategies have been put in place to encourage and support students in their use of the language. Posters giving suggestions for classroom questions were displayed and students had copies of the same phrases in their notebooks for ready access. With some junior classes, flash-cards, visual aids and gestures were used effectively by the teachers as a means of avoiding a translation into English, while questions were asked in French in order to encourage students to reply in the target language. In some lessons, the correction of homework involved students asking each other

questions, while the use of drama and role-play further encouraged students to speak the language.

Where reading comprehension was the focus of the lesson, explanations of passages in the text were sometimes given in French and this is good practice. As a means of encouraging students' confidence and self-evaluation, it is suggested that they be given a few minutes to engage with a text in its entirety before proceeding to read it aloud and to translate it in class. This would encourage students to make use of their prior learning and would develop their reading skills. In order to further monitor learning, it is suggested that the teachers should ask students to evaluate the difficulty of a text or exercise so that the sections requiring explanation or translation can be readily identified. This would further reduce the need for translation into English and would encourage more independent learning.

Pair work was a feature of some lessons and was used to very good effect. In one instance, rather than teacher directed questions, the students asked each other questions in pairs as part of a presentation before the whole class. In another instance, the students performed a role-play that they had prepared. The use of props added greatly to the overall effect. It was evident from the level of participation and learning that the students enjoyed the activities and they were affirmed in their efforts by the teachers. The teachers are encouraged to further develop their use of these strategies as an active learning approach can be particularly successful when used in a mixed-ability setting.

The white board was used effectively in some lessons for highlighting new vocabulary. However, in a small number of lessons, copying new words became a laborious and time-consuming task for some less-able students. Providing students with a copy of the vocabulary would have led to a better use of time. It is therefore recommended that, in such situations, due cognisance be taken of students' abilities and a balance be maintained between note-taking and other activities. This would allow for more time to be spent on working with new vocabulary during the lesson through the use of games and other activities.

Best practice was seen where the planned learning outcomes of the lesson were shared with students. This ensured that the purpose of the lesson was clear from the outset. It is suggested that this practice be extended to all classes as it focuses teachers' and students' attention on the key elements of the lesson, in particular, any new learning.

Classroom management was generally very good and the pace and content of the lesson was suited to the level of the students. In many instances, there was good continuity with prior learning. The use of authentic documents such as postcards and newspaper articles on topical issues helped to foster cultural awareness and made the lessons interesting for the students.

The use of pre-listening exercises was an effective introduction to some listening comprehensions and helped students to focus on the task. Asking students for their ideas ensured a high level of participation and helped them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the topic. In order to help students to develop their global listening skills, it is suggested that they could listen to the recording initially, without focusing on the questions, or that the material could be replayed at the end of the lesson so that they can assess their progress.

The quality of teaching and learning in the subject was very good. The teachers had high expectations and were enthusiastic in their approach. The students were motivated and interested and demonstrated a good understanding of their work. The rapport between staff and students was positive and relaxed.

ASSESSMENT

There is regular monitoring of students' progress. The school has a written homework policy and assessment procedures have been prepared for the language. An examination of a sample of the students' copybooks showed that homework is assigned and corrected. The good practice of including a positive comment is also evident. A range of modes of assessment is used including self-assessment, classroom questioning and aural, oral and written assessments. Informal class tests are sometimes held at the end of a unit of study. There are formal house examinations for all students at Christmas and in the summer, and common assessments are used where appropriate. The mock examinations are held in the second term for students in the examination classes. The oral component of the Junior Certificate French examination is taken by all students. This is very positive as it encourages a focus on spoken communication in junior cycle. TY students have written examinations based on work covered during the year. As a further development of the TY programme for French, it is recommended that the modes of assessment be more closely linked to the different elements of the TY plan and that the possibilities offered by portfolio assessment be considered.

Communication with parents is good and they are kept informed by means of the student journal and through regular school reports. Parent-teacher meetings are also held for each year group. An analysis of student attainment in the certificate examinations is carried out by management and the subject teachers, and this is used to further inform teaching and learning.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The study of modern European languages is an important element of the curriculum and this is reflected in the timetabling and resources for French.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the subject is very good.
- A comprehensive subject plan has been prepared.
- There is good use of French for classroom communication and for teaching lesson content.
- A range of effective teaching methodologies is used.
- Students show an understanding of their work and engage well with classroom activities.

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

- It is recommended that care be taken to ensure a balance between note-taking and more active methodologies in certain circumstances.
- The modes of assessment in TY should be reviewed to link more closely with the aims of the programme.

A post-evaluation meeting was held 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 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

We are very happy with the report. We feel that it is a fair and accurate reflection of the French department in Kinsale Community School. It is clear that it is a balanced account of all areas of our department ranging from the language plan to the actual teaching and learning in the classroom.

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

Recommendations re Transition Year and mixed ability teaching are currently under investigation by the department. The positive aspects/comments of the report are being reinforced. We are pleased that the report contains positive evaluations and this has greatly encouraged us.