

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Oatlands College
Stillorgan, County Dublin
Roll number: 60050E

Date of inspection: March 2013



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

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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| Date(s) of inspection | 11 and 12 March 2013 |
| Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers |

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in most lessons.
- French as the language of instruction and communication was used to varying degrees by the teachers in the lessons observed.
- Best practice was noted when an integrated approach to skills development was used, when differentiation supported the mixed-ability student cohort and, when student tasks promoted active learning.
- There is good whole-school provision and support for French.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- All teachers should choose methodologies that support greater use of French as the language of instruction and communication.
 - An integrated approach to language skills development should be adopted in all lessons.
 - Assessment practices should include opportunities for students to develop their writing skills in an incremental manner.
 - Subject planning should be further progressed to include the sharing of good practice and the further development of schemes of work in line with best practice.
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INTRODUCTION

Oatlands College is a voluntary secondary school with 542 male students. It has a broad socio-economic catchment, serving students from the south County Dublin area. The study of modern European languages is mandatory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to good; elements of good or very good practice was noted in the majority of lessons, while in others there was scope for development in the teaching approaches adopted.
- French was used consistently by the teachers in some of the lessons observed, while in others, it was used to a more limited extent. In one lesson, translation was the sole methodology used which led to students not being sufficiently challenged in terms of their linguistic development. All teachers should build up the use of French as the language of both instruction and communication. Classroom instructions should be given in French and students should be challenged to understand as much as possible. Where scaffolding is needed, alternative strategies such as visual supports or setting new vocabulary in context should be considered before resorting to translation.
- Most lessons were well structured and paced. Lesson plans were established in terms of the content to be covered or, in some instances, the learning outcomes. The good practice of communicating learning outcomes should be extended throughout, thereby making students aware of their responsibilities in the learning process. The outcomes should also be reviewed at the end of the lesson, to ascertain if they have been achieved and to assess students' progress.
- Good practice was noted in some lessons where different language skills were taught in an integrated way. This approach should be adopted throughout and due attention given to the development of oral and writing skills. The teaching of grammar was observed in all lessons and, in many instances, was taught in isolation and through English. It is recommended that the teaching of grammar be integrated into general skills development, where a grammar rule is identified within the context of a listening or reading text, is explained and is then practised through oral and writing skills usage.
- Question and answer sessions were used in all lessons. To maximise the benefits of this methodology, teachers should use a range of global and directed questions in addition to getting students to ask questions of each other. This will extend students' language competence in addition to ensuring full student participation in the lesson.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used in many lessons to support learning, mainly through the use of PowerPoint presentations. In order to enhance the quality and enjoyment of language learning, teachers should consider more varied and creative uses of ICT such as video-clips, songs and games. They should also consider downloading up-to-date authentic reading and audio materials sourced from the internet or relevant French media.
- There was a very good example of differentiation in one lesson where students were given the opportunity to complete a task at different levels. The number of students who responded to this challenge was also noteworthy. All teachers should look at ways of providing differentiated tasks to meet the needs of the varied student cohort.

- Games were used in some lessons to consolidate learning. This afforded students pleasurable language learning opportunities and, in one instance, supported numeracy development in French. Pair work was observed in many lessons and students actively engaged with the tasks assigned. In some instances students were asked to report back on the work of their partner. This is good practice in ensuring active student participation and extending learning.
- Students were very well behaved and applied themselves to the work of the lesson. In interactions with the inspector, some students responded very well to questions indicating good levels of confidence and willingness to interact. Other students were more reticent. In these instances, the above-mentioned recommendations should help build up students' confidence and competence in using French to communicate.
- Some students had mind maps in their copybooks to support their writing skills development. This good practice should be extended as appropriate. Homework was assigned and corrected in most instances. However, there was very little evidence of homework necessitating the manipulation of language. Writing skills should to be developed incrementally from first year and assessed through the use of tasks such as postcard or simple letter writing.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school provision and support of the French in the allocation of time and timetabling and in the provision of resources including teacher-based classrooms.
- All the classrooms visited had some displays of French posters. These displays should be further extended to include charts of classroom language and expressions for the week or the topic which would allow for students to assimilate learning over time. This would also provide a visual support for literacy in the classroom.
- It is essential for all teachers to maintain and develop their linguistic and pedagogical skills. To this end, teachers should consider availing of the range of scholarships and in-service training available to teachers of French for the purpose of upskilling linguistically and accessing new ideas and training in methodologies.
- Plans to develop links with a French school are welcomed as this will support intercultural dialogue. These links could be enhanced through the creative use of ICT.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Formal subject planning is facilitated and minutes of meetings are recorded. However, the minutes would benefit from greater detail being provided. On one occasion, reference was made to good ideas which should be shared. However, details of these ideas were not recorded. With the advent of school self-evaluation, it is recommended that subject planning meetings include discussion of teaching and learning including progress reports on the implementation of recommendations, and the sharing of good practice.
- Good progress has been achieved in the development of the subject plan and schemes of work since the last inspection. Learning objectives were outlined as over-arching statements followed by detail of the topics or chapters to be covered, the resources and assessment practices to be used. Teachers should continue to develop their schemes of work by including the proposed methodologies and by ensuring that the learning

outcomes focus on an integrated approach to language skills development rather than on the teaching of discrete language skills.

- The Transition Year (TY) plan should be reviewed to ensure that the content and methodologies support clear language learning outcomes, appropriate to an effective TY programme

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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report.

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

- Minutes of subject department meetings now contain greater depth and more detailed records.
- The TY plan is under review.
- Links with a French school are being advanced.
- Increased access to the internet for materials has been implemented.