

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

North Monastery Secondary School
North Monastery Road, Cork
Roll number: 62530F

Date of inspection: 6 May 2011



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

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	5 and 6 May 2011
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 in the lessons observed ranged from very good to requiring considerable improvement.
- There was some evidence of the use of the target language in the lessons observed.
- Whilst teachers were encouraging, the level of student engagement varied considerably from lesson to lesson.
- Junior cycle classes are streamed. The evaluation raised some concerns regarding the impact of streaming on teaching and learning, the related expectations set for students and the levels of achievement attained.
- French is a mandatory subject for all students in the school; however, there is an inequity in the allocation of tuition time to some class groups.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers are advised to actively use, and promote classroom use of, the target language and the assessment of students' oral competence.
 - The French department should analyse students' achievements in the context of national norms, taking into account relevant contextual factors. It should then plan to track levels of attainment and endeavour to raise them.
 - The system of class organisation in French should be reviewed and timetable inequities should be addressed.
 - The department should now devise a time-bound action plan to enhance subject provision.
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INTRODUCTION

North Monastery is an all-boys voluntary secondary school. Current enrolment is 315. The school participates in the School Support Programme of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS), the Department's action plan for educational inclusion. It offers a wide range of programmes including the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY), the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). French is a mandatory core subject.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning varied from very good to raising some concerns.
- Lesson content was generally well chosen, with a focus on examination preparation and support where appropriate. Successful features of content selected included the use of games and a focus on topics relevant to the lives of the students. Where one half of a class group was working in the language laboratory, content had been selected to complement current classwork.
- Classroom and teacher use of the target language was not extensive. In some instances, force of habit had perhaps established the practice of using more English than necessary. Teachers are encouraged to review this practice and to make greater use of the target language for the purposes of transitional communication in the classroom. Where organised, it was evident that pair work encouraged student oral production as did the soliciting of students' opinions. Initial language acquisition was supported by an emphasis on pronunciation and repetition. More in-class opportunities for student oral production should be created. During the evaluation, the benefits of emphasising the teaching of re-producible grammatical structures were discussed with the teachers.
- There was evidence of the use of active learning methodologies such as pair work, group work and games in some of the lessons observed. All supported an engaging pace and it was clear that group work helped to scaffold students' learning.
- Where content chosen allowed it, various language skills were integrated into the lessons. It was suggested that the development of reading and listening skills should emphasise global comprehension and that thought generally should be given to the incremental development of all four skills.
- Classroom management was generally good and positive behaviour was promoted by respectful role models. Levels of student engagement varied; whilst there was evidence of active and enthusiastic engagement in some lessons the obvious level of disengagement in one lesson was of particular concern.
- Teachers were sensitive to the need to scaffold and support student learning. Amongst the effective strategies noted were the use of varied visual supports to reinforce learning; differentiated worksheets and a jigsaw co-operative learning exercise. Effective use was made of the board also and students were supported to recall prior learning and use it to support new understanding. Some students were developing good habits of note-making.
- Homework was assigned in lessons observed; where noted, sensitivity to students' capacity to complete the assignment was a positive feature. Evidence of student completion of work assigned and teacher monitoring of same varied considerably. Given the importance of written production it is essential that all students develop skill in this area supported by regular assignment and teacher monitoring of such work.

- Currently the French department does not review students' results in the certificate examinations and compare them with national norms. It is recommended that teachers analyse levels of student achievement in the context of national norms, taking into account relevant contextual factors. They should also plan to track levels of attainment and endeavour to raise them. Predictive ability testing should be used to set suitably high expectations for all students, and to monitor, track and evaluate progress and outcomes.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- All students are expected to take French. Whilst there was some suggestion that certain students may resent the obligation to study the subject their attitudes are also perhaps negatively impacted upon by rigid streaming and by the possible related expectations set.
- Time allocated to the subject is good but the school should review the inequity in the allocation of time to class groups within particular years.
- The designation of teacher-based classrooms is to the advantage of the subject. There were some good examples of how the classroom can be used to provide a stimulating learning environment.
- The planned acquisition of data projectors and laptops for all classrooms will provide an opportunity for teachers to build resources particularly in the light of the closure of the campus-based language laboratory.
- Where possible, some element of co-curricular support should be provided. This would enhance student motivation and support the development of cultural awareness.
- Teachers have participated in whole-school professional development events. The school might now consider making an application for the services of French language assistant. It would be beneficial also to consider the possibilities offered by French-focused Department schemes such as the French/Irish Teacher Professional Visits scheme and the summer scholarship scheme.
- Students are assessed regularly. However, streaming does not support common assessments, comparison of outcomes or student mobility. Assessment of students' oral competence should gradually become a feature of assessment generally. Communication with parents is good with reports issuing bi-annually. Parent-teacher meetings are organised annually.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department planning has been initiated. There is scope to develop and consolidate the plan, sharing good practice in the process.
 - The lessons observed had been prepared; some had involved the preparation and development of material resources such as labels, pictures, flashcards, cards and differentiated worksheets. Much work had gone into those individual class files presented. The inclusion of teacher reflections in these files was a very positive feature.
 - French teachers should now devise a time-bound action plan for the ongoing development of provision.
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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 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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board considered the report and the following are the main points which emanated from it's deliberations:

- The main findings did not reflect the positive points raised in the body of the report.
- The Board welcomed the highlighting of the sensitive manner by which teachers sought to scaffold and support student learning.
- The Board noted the positive comment re classroom management and the formation of good behaviour through respectful role models.
- The Board studied with interest the comments re varying levels of student engagement. It is our intention to look at interventions to facilitate the small minority of students the report refers to. However, the Board is of the view that this is a common experience in schools with an open enrolment policy and a student cohort from many different nationalities.
- The Board welcomed the offer of resource material and was grateful for receipt of same.

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

- The Library has been refurbished and re-stocked with resources for French and other subjects.
- The Board is conscious of the inequality re streaming. The school has taken initial steps re the First Year Timetable to address the issue.