Subject Inspection of French

REPORT

Coláiste Éamonn Rís
Wexford Town
Roll number: 63640R

Date of inspection: 14 October 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</strong></td>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

- Teaching and learning indicated good practice in many areas with scope for development in others.
- The target language was used by the teachers in all of the lessons observed, but there was ongoing use of translation.
- A range of methodologies was used to support teaching and learning, some of which were more effective than others.
- Good progress has been made in subject planning and a very good bank of resources has been built up.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students’ use of the target language needs to be extended and the current dependency on translation as a methodology should be reduced.
- An integrated approach should be adopted in all lessons with due importance attributed to all of the language skills.
- The use of more active methodologies including pair or group work is recommended in order to ensure greater student engagement.
INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Éamonn Rís is a voluntary secondary school with 571 male students. It serves the town of Wexford and its hinterland.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teachers began by communicating the lesson topic to the students. To maximise this good practice, teachers should articulate the lesson plan in terms of what the students should know by the end of the lesson. This approach makes students more aware of their responsibilities as language learners and is also very helpful for teachers in supporting good lesson structure and management of time.

- The target language was used by the teachers in all of the lessons observed. This is good practice. While different methodologies or approaches were observed, they were all underpinned by the ongoing use of translation. This needs to be addressed. While the need to scaffold students in their learning is acknowledged, the ongoing dependence on translation should be reduced. To this end teachers should build up students’ understanding and use of the target language by giving general instructions in French and providing them with the necessary expressions to be able to ask questions, make requests and expressed difficulties in simple French. This should be introduced in first year and extended over the years. Greater use of the target language by the students will build their confidence and prepare them for the oral component of the Leaving Certificate.

- Brainstorming was effectively used in one lesson to engage the students and make them aware of the value of their previous learning. This good practice should be further exploited to build up families of words which can be used in different contexts.

- ICT was used in some lessons and this is good practice. The use of a PowerPoint presentation in one instance was helpful in supporting learning particularly in a mixed-ability setting. However, the text in the multiple choice questions, projected onto the screen, needed some adjustment to ensure that students’ attention was drawn to the correct answer. In another instance, the benefits of the PowerPoint presentation used would have been further enhanced by a corresponding listening text.

- Question and answer sessions were used in all lessons. In some instances they were used to good effect where the teacher moved away from the textbook and asked the students about their own experiences. However, there were some lessons where questions were directed at the students at the front and in the middle rows, but not at those sitting at the back of the classroom. When engaging in question and answer sessions, teachers should ensure that all students are afforded the opportunity to engage in the lesson. To this end teachers should direct questions at students who do not volunteer answers.

- The use of topics, as observed in lessons, facilitated an integrated approach to the development of all the language skills. However, this was not evident in some of the lessons observed. An integrated approach should be adopted in all lessons and relevant listening and reading texts should be used to promote aural and reading comprehension skills, which in turn can feed into activities which support oral and written skills.

- Good practice was noted in lessons where student tasks were assigned. However, greater opportunities for active student learning are recommended, as there were some lessons where a number of the students, while well-behaved, remained disengaged throughout. All lessons should include at least one pair or group activity where students are obliged to engage orally with their peers in French and to report back on the work carried out.
Teacher corrections in students’ copies included a mark and, in some instances, a comment, thereby affirming student effort. However, there were some instances where teacher records indicated that many of the students had not submitted work. This needs to be addressed in order to be able to track students’ progress. It was also noted that many of the students’ copies were very disorganised. Teachers should show students how to organise their work for ease of reference. An examination of student outcomes in state examinations also indicates the need for greater vigilance to ensure that students take the levels appropriate to their abilities and potential.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The uptake of modern European languages, particularly at senior cycle, is relatively low in Coláiste Éamonn Rís. Given the implications of not having studied a modern European language for students’ future study and career choices, senior management and language teachers should consider a range of strategies to promote the study of European languages.

- There is good whole school provision and support for French in the allocation of time and in the provision of resources. However, in order to afford students ongoing contact with the language, senior management should explore ways whereby French can be timetabled in single periods, particularly in junior cycle.

- Classrooms are teacher-based. There was a good display of language and culture related posters in addition to students’ work in the rooms visited. Teachers should expand the language learning environment as the year progresses to include more classroom language and key expressions for the topics studied.

- Since ongoing linguistic and pedagogical upskilling is essential for successful language teaching, teachers should inform themselves of and apply for the range of scholarships and in-service training programmes currently available for teachers of French.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject plan for French was drawn up using the school development planning initiative (SDPI) template. Work has since progressed to include learning outcomes. Teachers should now document their schemes of work under the headings of topic, learning outcome, methodologies, resources and assessment. This will help them to evaluate the effectiveness of their work and make adjustments as necessary. This work should form part of teachers’ planning meetings, where a greater balance between strategic planning and issues of a practical nature is recommended.

- The Transition Year (TY) plan has some interesting and useful proposals which would ensure meaningful learning experiences for students. However, there is need for further detail in terms of work schemes to indicate how these plans will be effected in practice.

- Good practice was noted in the compilation of a very extensive range of worksheets to support work in the classroom.
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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

Published May 2012