

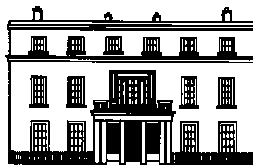
**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of French  
REPORT**

**Sandford Park School  
Ranelagh, Dublin 6  
Roll number: 60640C**

**Date of inspection: 1 February 2010**



**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 Sandford Park School, Ranelagh. 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 one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. 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 subject teachers. 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**

Sandford Park is a voluntary secondary school with 247 male students. French is part of the core curriculum for all students to Leaving Certificate. Spanish is offered in first year and can be continued, with French, as an option from second year. Classes are of mixed-ability in junior cycle and in Transition year (TY). Concurrent timetabling in senior cycle facilitates good practice in setting classes into higher and ordinary-level class groupings.

There is good whole school provision and support for French in the allocation of time and timetabling. Lessons are timetabled in single periods, facilitating regular contact with the target language. This is good practice. There is also very good whole school provision for the delivery of additional support for French to certificate examination students who have special educational needs (SEN).

There are currently four teachers of French in the school, each of whom is a graduate in the subject. All teachers are given the opportunity to teach to all levels and this is good practice. The teachers who are established in their careers have benefited from a range of in-service courses for the teaching and learning of French, both in Ireland and in France. Teachers are also members of the French Teachers' Association (FTA). School management supports professional development by paying the annual membership of the subject associations and by providing some financial assistance for attendance at various seminars. Both school management and the members of the French department are highly commended for their commitment to ongoing professional development.

Classrooms are teacher based and the rooms visited had attractive displays of maps, posters, postcards, charts of classroom language and relevant grammar points. This is good practice as a print-rich environment supports both language learning and cultural awareness.

There is good whole school provision of resources. Senior management provides resources on request from the subject co-ordinator or from individual teachers. The school librarian, who has a background in French, also uses some of the library budget to provide resources for French. Teachers have their own CD players and have access to televisions, video recorders and DVD players. Materials include books, cassettes, CDs, DVDs and magazines. A folder for materials for teachers is kept in the school library and a shared folder for resources is available to all teachers of French on the school's intranet. There is very good access to information and communication technology (ICT) in the school to support teaching and learning. All classrooms have either a smart board or a computer and data projector. The school also has an ICT room which is available on a booking basis. Students have access to computers in the school library and there is a dedicated staff resource centre equipped with computers and internet access. There was evidence during the course of the evaluation that ICT has been actively embraced by teachers to support them in their work in the classroom.

A broad range of co-curricular activities is in place in Sandford Park School. A European language day is organised each year. Displays to celebrate this day are prepared by students and French style food is served in the canteen. French songs are sung at school assemblies. Examination preparation for the Leaving Certificate oral examination in French is organised within the context of a French breakfast club each week during the second term. Teachers regularly give students information on and encourage them to participate in the range of French-related activities taking part in Dublin. They also provide additional support for their students after school prior to the state examinations. Teachers are commended for their commitment to affording students additional language learning experiences. There are currently no links with a French school but a school trip to Paris has been organised for students in the current school year. It is recommended that consideration be given to developing contacts with a French school for the purpose of promoting intercultural exchange and dialogue through e-mail or class projects.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Sandford Park School has embraced subject planning as part of the whole school planning process. There is a subject co-ordinator for French and the timetabling of teachers facilitates the possibility of weekly meetings of the French department for the purpose of subject planning and review. Minutes are kept of all meetings held. This is good practice.

A review of planning documentation submitted on the day of the evaluation indicated that subject planning for French is well advanced and that the work completed to date is of a high standard. There is a modern languages policy which establishes the importance of learning modern languages as part of the students' overall education, as outlined in the school's mission statement. The policy also sets out the school's position on teacher professional development, curriculum content, resources for language teaching, strategies for teaching and learning and assessment protocols. The subject plan for French sets out the following: the aims and objectives for the teaching and learning of French, the context in which the teaching of French takes place, the resources available, assessment and reporting procedures and planning for students with SEN and students from culturally diverse societies. Of particular note is the inclusion in the plan of a section on the assessment of teachers' own teaching practice. This is very good practice. The curriculum content for each year group is set out in terms of language content, themes and vocabulary, student outcomes, grammatical structures, assessment and homework. This is commended. To further build on this very good work, teachers should have the desired learning outcomes for each year group as their primary focus, and should choose topics and linguistic strategies which will support these outcomes. This change of focus will allow teachers greater

freedom in choosing topics which will best respond to the needs and interests of the student cohort in a given year.

A Transition Year plan was also submitted in advance of the evaluation. There was a strong focus in the TY plan on material to be covered as part of the senior-cycle curriculum for French. It is acknowledged that any work covered in Transition Year should contribute to students' progress in senior cycle. However, teachers should adopt more innovative approaches which will afford TY students opportunities to become more autonomous, adept and creative in their learning of languages. The members of the French department should refer to the document *Transition Year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools* (Department of Education and Science: 1995) to ensure that the school's programme reflects the curriculum principles underpinning an effective Transition Year programme.

There was careful planning and preparation for the lessons observed. Evidence for this included the advance readiness of technical equipment and supporting materials.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Evaluation activities involved the observation of four lessons: two in junior cycle, one TY lesson and one in senior cycle. Interaction between the inspector and the students was facilitated. Students' copybooks were also reviewed. High standards of linguistic competency were noted and teaching and learning ranged from satisfactory to very good.

Lessons were well structured and the content was appropriate to the needs and abilities of the students. The lesson plan was shared with the students in all instances. To optimise this good practice, teachers should consider reframing the plan in terms of the proposed learning outcomes for the lesson. This approach would dovetail into the long-term planning in terms of student outcomes and would engage the students from the outset as partners in the teaching and learning process.

The target language was used consistently by the teachers in all of the lessons observed. This is good practice. Students in some lessons also made notable efforts to interact in French. To further build on this good practice, teachers should give students the necessary linguistic strategies to enable them extend their use of French as the language of instruction and communication in the classroom. While expressions to support classroom interaction in French were posted on the walls of many classrooms, this good practice could be extended to enable students assimilate them over time.

The different language skills were developed to varying degrees in the lessons observed. An integrated approach was observed in some lessons and there were good examples of grammar being effectively taught within this context. There were some lessons however, where greater attention was needed in relation to developing students' oral skills as part of an integrated approach. In these instances teachers should use a listening or a written text as a stimulus from which students can work together on oral tasks.

Pair work was observed in many lessons. This is good practice as it supports oral skills development in addition to engaging all students in active learning. Individual student-based tasks were observed in other lessons. While the use of such tasks is good in maintaining the balance between teacher instruction and student activity, it is recommended that pair or group activities be the preferred option in lessons as many of the individual tasks could be effectively completed as

homework activities. There was one instance where too much time was given for the completion of an individual task resulting in some students being finished ahead of others. It is recommended that all student-based tasks be kept short and focused and in the event of some students finishing ahead of others supplementary exercises should be prepared in order to maintain meaningful student engagement.

ICT was effectively used in many lessons to support the work in hand and this is commended. In one lesson however the use of ICT is recommended as it would have supported student comprehension and integrated elements of cultural awareness.

A French song was used in an integrated way in one lesson to support learning. Of particular note was the use of a supporting worksheet for students who needed it. This differentiated approach, which is commended, should be extended to all lessons where the student cohort is a mixed ability grouping.

There was good classroom management in the lessons observed and students were well behaved throughout. Their responses indicated a good understanding of the work in hand and they applied themselves well to the tasks assigned. In the lesson where the worksheet was offered to all students' to support their different needs, many chose not to avail of it. This indicated that these students allowed themselves to be challenged by the task in hand. This is good practice. In another lesson students stood up and made short confident presentations about themselves to the class as part of work on oral skills development. Many students also revealed themselves to be confident and competent language learners in their interactions with the inspector.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Sandford Park School has a formal homework and assessment policy in place and student progress is monitored in a variety of ways. These include question and answers in class, homework assignments and corrections, class tests and formal examinations. A review of students' copybooks indicated that homework is given and corrected with some very helpful comments included in some instances. The use of a comment is very good practice as it affirms and informs student progress. In order to differentiate between work corrected by teachers and work corrected by students it is recommended that teachers sign and date their corrections.

Students have mid-term tests and Easter tests and formal examinations at Christmas and at the end of the school year. Certificate examination students sit mock examinations in the second term. An aural component is included in all formal examinations. A number of very good oral assessment practices are in place, including formal oral examinations at the end of junior cycle.

Contact with parents is maintained on a regular basis. Parents receive three detailed reports on their sons' progress, at Christmas, Easter and at the end of the school year. A shorter report focusing on student application and effort is issued in October. Parent-teacher meetings are also held for each year group. An additional parent-teacher meeting is held for certificate examination students following their mock examinations and Leaving Certificate students attend with their parents. These are good practices.

A review of student outcomes in the state examinations reveals appropriate uptake of levels and good student outcomes. However, teachers should remain vigilant to ensure that students continue to maintain the high outcomes achieved in recent years.

## **SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is very good whole school support and provision for French in the allocation of time, timetabling and the provision of resources. There is also very good support for certificate examination students with SEN.
- Subject planning for French is well advanced and the work completed to date is of a very high standard.
- French was used as the language of instruction in all of the lessons observed.
- An integrated approach supporting the development of the different language skills was observed in many lessons.
- A range of methodologies including ICT was observed and many were used to very good effect.
- A number of very good formal assessment practices are in place to support oral skills development.

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

- To further enhance the very good work completed to date in subject planning, teachers should have, as their primary focus, the desired learning outcomes for each year group and should choose the topics and linguistic strategies to be taught as a means of supporting these outcomes. The TY plan should be reviewed to ensure that it is fully in accordance with Departmental guidelines.
- Where relevant, teachers should attribute due importance to oral skills' development as part of the integrated approach to language learning.
- Greater use of pair or group work is recommended in some lessons as a means of promoting active student engagement and learning.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teachers of French and with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings and recommendations of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

*Published April 2011.*

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

### **Submitted by the Board of Management**

**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 French Department has noted the recommendations and is currently acting on them.