An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

St Colman’s College
Fermoy, County Cork
Roll number: 62260C

Date of inspection: 30 September 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>29 and 30 September 2011</th>
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<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
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<td>• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers</td>
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MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was generally good with some very good practices evident.

• The target language was used in all lessons.

• Small class numbers and practices such as the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) and the use of active learning methodologies promote student oral participation.

• Levels of achievement at higher level, and of higher grades in particular, are disappointing in that they have not always met the standards possible.

• A committed school management team supports the subject department to enhance subject provision.

• There was evidence of growing departmental collaboration.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Significant emphasis should be put on the use of authentic listening material and the teaching and acquisition of linguistic structures particularly in junior classes.

• The subject department should monitor and analyse student achievement and ensure that high expectations are set and that all are challenged appropriately.

• Ongoing departmental collaboration should focus on the sharing of good practice.

• The French department should devise a time-bound plan for the development of subject provision.
INTRODUCTION
St. Colman’s is an all-boys’ voluntary secondary school with an enrolment of 428. French is one of two modern languages offered, and is optional in junior and senior cycles and in Transition Year (TY).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

• The quality of teaching and learning was generally good and there was some evidence of the inclusion of very good practices to support language learning.

• Lesson content was syllabus informed, and examination relevant where appropriate. Content was most valuably exploited where it was related to the lives of students and to prior learning. The importance of clarifying learning goals and of the sharing of these goals with students was discussed.

• There was much evidence of the use of the target language. Usage was promoted by the practices such as the display of expressions commonly used for classroom communication, oral starts to lessons and the giving of explanations in French. However, there was also some evidence of a reliance on translation. A number of practices were advocated to support students’ acquisition of the target language. For example, the placing of a greater emphasis on the acquisition of reproducible structures as opposed to the learning of lists of vocabulary, and greater use of authentic listening material.

• Whilst some lessons were quite teacher-centred, thereby limiting the requirement and the impetus for student oral production and participation, others succeeded in achieving a greater level of student participation and support for oral production by the employment of strategies such as pair and group work and other cooperative learning approaches and the use of games and music.

• Student engagement was also promoted where the use of a range of resources supported the teacher to move beyond the textbook. In some instances, recently installed ICT equipment was also effectively exploited to motivate students and encourage their participation.

• Lessons provided evidence of the integration of the various skills. Discussion with teachers focused in particular on the importance of actively and progressively developing students’ listening and reading comprehension skills and on the importance of endeavouring to support written production by the use of collaborative composition in French which avoids a translation-based approach.

• All lessons were well managed. Any variation in the quality of classroom management appeared to be a reflection of existing student-teacher rapport and quality of communication.

• Student learning was supported by the general encouragement of the asking of questions and of note-making and by the preparation of homework exercises. It was very positive to see that the adoption of assessment for learning (AFL) techniques with some classes was supporting direct student engagement in learning. Best practices in note-making and in questioning were discussed.
• Choice of lesson content allowed, where relevant, for support for the development of student numeracy. Student literacy was well supported where language was visually reinforced through the use of ICT, prepared resources, printed classroom displays and a manual whiteboard and by the inclusion of an element of peer correction.

• Attention was paid to the assignment and correction of homework in classes observed. The importance of the regular assignment of written work and the value of formative feedback were discussed. Student progress is assessed regularly. However, there is scope to formalise both the assessment and reporting of students’ oral competence.

• Senior management reviews and analyses achievement in certificate examinations. It was advised that such analyses should also be undertaken at departmental level. The French department should also ensure that high expectations are set and that all are challenged to achieve appropriately.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

• French is a core part of curricular provision in the school. Languages are mandatory at junior cycle and optional at senior cycle. Student choice at junior cycle is supported by the provision of a short taster programmes in both French and German. Uptake is generally strong and consistent.

• The subject enjoys a very good timetable allocation. Time allocated to Leaving Certificate French classes has been increased in recent years. Classes are generally of a very manageable size allowing good potential for student oral participation.

• Teacher-based classrooms allow for the creation of stimulating learning environments which can be exploited to support both language acquisition and the development of cultural awareness.

• There is some provision for co-curricular and extracurricular activities in French. It was advised that the French department consider establishing a link with a French school. Such a link would provide an opportunity for electronic communication in the first instance, and would contribute to student motivation and to the building of the profile of the subject in the school. Overtime, the French department should also build its stock of subject-related resources.

• Teachers are interested in professional development. Given the importance of basic teacher linguistic competence, and of the development and maintenance of this competence, they are encouraged to consider the benefits to be gained from Department schemes such as the French/Irish Teacher Professional Visits scheme, and the summer scholarship scheme. Teachers are also encouraged to avail of any events or courses which would support them in enhancing their repertoire of strategies for the teaching and learning of languages.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

• It was clear that departmental collaboration has grown. It was most encouraging to learn of the involvement of the teachers of second years in a project focused on classroom practice. Teachers of French should also work on the sharing of good practice considering too the benefits of peer observation where relevant.
• The French department has done considerable work on planning. It was advised that the matters of progression and challenge in learning be closely considered in any further work on the subject plan. It was also suggested that a general work plan be shared with students.

• It was recommended that the French department should devise a time-bound plan for the development of subject provision generally. It would be very beneficial if this plan could be informed by collaborative teacher reflection and self-evaluation.

• All lessons observed had been planned and prepared some on the basis of detailed individual lesson plans. Many had included attention to the preparation and sourcing of resources.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy 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; a response was not received from the board.