

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

De La Salle College
Waterford
Roll number: 649500

Date of inspection: 8 November 2011



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**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Date(s) of inspection	7 and 8 November 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 seven class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, but with scope for development in some areas.
- There was varied use of the target language by the teachers in the lessons observed.
- Good practice was noted in the use of an integrated approach, in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and paired tasks.
- Teaching and learning was more effective where active methodologies were used.
- There is good whole-school provision in the allocation of time and resources, but there is scope for improvement in class formation and timetabling.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The use of French should be extended as the language of instruction and communication.
 - Greater use of more active methodologies is recommended.
 - Issues of timetabling and class formation should be addressed to optimise the language learning opportunities for students.
 - Subject plans and schemes of work should be further developed to enable teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of their work and improve planning where required.
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INTRODUCTION

De La Salle College, Waterford is a voluntary secondary school with 1186 male and three female students. It has a broad socio-economic catchment, serving students from the city of Waterford and its hinterland. Four programmes are offered in the school; Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- There was varied use of the target language by the teachers in the lessons observed. In some lessons French was spoken extensively by the teacher, while in a small number of instances it was used to a very limited extent. However, a number of teachers supported the use of French with accompanying translation and some tended to revert back to English as the lesson progressed. Teachers need to remain conscious of the importance of ongoing communication in the target language and should build on this by giving general instructions in French and seeking alternative strategies to translation. Students should also be given the expressions necessary to interact in simple French. This can be done in an incremental way from first year onwards.
- Good practice was noted in some lessons where learning outcomes were established and revisited. This practice should be extended throughout as it supports good lesson structure and overcomes the difficulty noted in one instance where a better balance between homework correction and the progression of new learning was recommended.
- Most lessons involved some integration of the different language skills with one example of grammar very effectively integrated into the body of the lesson. An integrated approach is good practice and should be further developed attributing due attention to the full range of skills. In lessons where there was a strong focus on examination preparation, teachers should consider identifying the themes in the examination questions and use them in an integrated way to support the work of the lesson rather than dictating it.
- Student-based tasks including pair work were assigned in some lessons and were for the most part effective in actively engaging students. All lessons should include at least pair or group activity in order to promote oral skills development and independent learning. Such tasks should be short, focused and interactive in nature.
- Other methodologies were also observed. Question and answer sessions were extensively used in all lessons. However, greater use of directed questions is recommended to engage students who do not volunteer answers. Peer question and answer sessions should also be considered to give students practice in asking questions as well as answering them.
- Where used, ICT was effective in supporting teaching and learning. The use of ICT should be extended for the purpose of initiating aural and oral skills development in addition to providing visual and cultural supports. In other lessons a good choice of worksheets enhanced student progress.
- There was good classroom management throughout. Students were well behaved and applied themselves to their work and in most instances there was good evidence of learning as lessons progressed. Homework was assigned and corrected. Many students indicated good willingness to communicate in their interactions with the inspector. Others however, were more reticent. Greater use of active methodologies such as brainstorming,

group tasks, role-play and student presentations should increase students' confidence in interacting in the target language.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- The study of a modern language is optional in De La Salle College. This places a particular responsibility on school management to ensure that incoming first-year students and their parents fully comprehend the implications of not having studied a modern European language for their future career choices.
- Given the number of students who do not study a language, a review of the teaching of modern languages in the school is recommended. Students' reasons for not studying languages, the status and promotion of modern languages in the school and the delivery of the subject are areas worthy of investigation.
- To ensure an appropriate skills set, all teachers involved in the delivery of French should have it as a registered teaching subject.
- There is appropriate allocation of teaching time for French. However, current arrangements for class formation and timetabling do not optimise language learning opportunities for students. TY students who have never studied French are in the same class as those who have completed Junior Certificate French and who intend continuing it into senior cycle. This needs to be addressed in order to afford these diverse cohorts a meaningful language learning experience in Transition Year. School management should explore ways whereby French in junior cycle can be timetabled in single periods and at regular intervals across the week, while senior cycle students would benefit from the setting of classes into higher and ordinary-level groupings.
- Classrooms are teacher based and good practice was noted where an attractive language learning environment was created with displays of French posters, elements of classroom language and samples of students' work.
- There is good whole-school provision of resources and support for continuing professional development. In order to avail of professional development opportunities, teachers of French should inform themselves of and apply for the range of scholarships and courses available to them for the purposes of linguistic and pedagogical up-skilling.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department structures are in place. There are two coordinators for French, positions that are voluntary and have been held by them for a number of years. In the interests of affording everyone the opportunity to develop subject specific expertise and to share the workload, the position of coordinator should be rotated on a regular basis.
- Meetings are held and minutes are recorded in line with good practice. Discussions centre on organisational issues and matters of concern to teachers. It is recommended that future meetings should focus more on strategic planning for French through the sharing of best practice and evaluating the effectiveness of the methodologies used. To this end, it is recommended that the good work completed to date be further developed to include global learning outcomes for each year group and work schemes setting out the topic, learning outcome, methodologies, resources and assessments to be used.
- The subject plan for TY needs to be further developed in order to more effectively meet the needs of all students.

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.

Published April 2012

Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the very positive report on teaching and learning of French at the school. It reflects the high standards and dedication of the subject department. The report was very fair and balanced and it is a comprehensive overview of the quality of teaching and learning of French at De La Salle College, Waterford. The Board of Management wishes to congratulate the College Headmaster and teaching staff of the French department.

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 Board of Management will continue to provide the necessary support and resources that will facilitate the College Headmaster and Staff in the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the Inspection Report.

All suggestions and recommendations as per report (Page 2) will be implemented as a means of building on existing strengths and to address areas for development.

The Board also wishes to acknowledge the courteous and professional manner in which the Inspector carried out the subject inspection and is of the opinion that the inspection process and outcomes will greatly benefit the school in its SDP.