

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of French  
REPORT**

**Rockwell College  
Cashel, County Tipperary  
Roll number: 65300D**

**Date of inspection: 26 November 2009**



**REPORT  
ON  
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH**

---

**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Rockwell College, Cashel. 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 two days 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**

Rockwell College is a co-educational voluntary secondary school with 533 students. The study of a modern European language is mandatory to Leaving Certificate and students can choose French, German or Spanish. School management is commended for affording students a range of languages from which they can choose. Incoming first-year students are also offered a taster programme to help them make informed subject choices and this is also commended.

There is good whole school provision and support for French in the allocation of time and the timetabling for most year groups is also in line with good practice. It is recommended however, that French in first year be timetabled in single rather than double periods to ensure ongoing contact with the target language. All classes are of mixed-ability groupings. While this is very good practice in junior cycle, it is recommended that school management explore ways whereby French at senior cycle could be timetabled to facilitate discrete higher and ordinary level groupings. Additional supports are currently offered for students with special educational needs (SEN) or who are experiencing difficulty with the language and this is commended.

There are five teachers of French all of whom are graduates in the subject. Some have benefited from the national in-service programmes for teachers of French held in recent years, and one teacher has attended the national seminar on 'Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the language class' organised by the French Teachers' Association (FTA). In order to maintain high standards of linguistic competence and to keep fully abreast of new developments in the teaching and learning of French, teachers should keep themselves informed of and apply for the range of scholarships and exchange programmes provided annually by the Department of Education and Science and the French Cultural Services, and the Comenius in-service training

grants co-ordinated by *Léargas*. School management should also apply for the language assistantship programme which affords both teachers and students with opportunities for language development and cultural awareness.

Classrooms are teacher based and many of the rooms visited had displays of maps, posters, student projects and verb charts to support students in their learning. To extend the benefits of this good practice, teachers should also post up a range of classroom language and key expressions for the work in hand which students can assimilate over time. This work could be completed by students themselves as part of their learning.

There is good whole-school provision for resources. There is an annual budget for the French department based on requests from the subject co-ordinator and individual teachers. All teachers have their own CD recorders and access to televisions and DVD players. Materials include magazines, CDs, DVDs and films with supporting worksheets. There are three computer rooms in the school and all classrooms are wired for internet access. In addition a number of laptops and portable data projectors have been made available to support the use of ICT in the classroom. While the use of ICT to download materials from the internet is acknowledged and commended, teachers should extend its use into teaching and learning in the classroom, beginning with simple PowerPoint presentations, many of which can be downloaded from the internet, and for the speedy correction of some homework exercises.

Co-curricular activities currently include the organisation of school tours and exchanges to France. This is commended as a means of broadening students' cultural awareness. However, it is recommended that the range of co-curricular activities be extended to afford students who are unable to travel to France, opportunities for cultural enrichment and enjoyable language learning experiences. Consideration should be given to organising a French breakfast or café similar to the initiative currently organised by Transition year (TY) students, drama, table quizzes, board games or other such events. Such events could be organised by TY students as part of their language learning activities. Consideration should also be given to the promotion of e-twinning or e-pals with a school in France for the purpose of exchanging authentic documents and intercultural dialogue.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Whole school planning is ongoing in Rockwell College and the members of the French department have embraced subject planning as part of this process. There is a subject co-ordinator for French, a position which is currently a special-duties post. In the interests of affording all members of the French department the opportunity to develop subject specific expertise and to take ownership of the subject planning process, it is recommended that the position of subject co-ordinator become voluntary and rotate. Subject planning meetings are facilitated each term and minutes are kept of all meetings. This is good practice. Teachers also meet informally on a regular basis to deal with issues that arise during the course of the year. This is also commended. In addition, the subject plan outlines the main recommendations from a previous subject inspection report and the proposals to address these issues. This is commended as there was evidence of progress in these areas during the course of the current evaluation.

The subject plan for French sets out the aims and objectives and the organisational and operating context for the teaching and learning of the subject. The curriculum content for each year group is documented in terms of the topic and grammar to be covered in each term. It is recommended that this be further progressed into a more generic plan to include desired learning outcomes for

each year group documented in terms of ‘can do’ statements. This approach which focuses on the development of transferable skills will benefit both teachers and students as it allows for greater variety in the choice of topics and makes students aware of how their learning in one context can transfer to other situations. Teachers should also include the linguistic strategies and proposed methodologies to support achievement of such outcomes. This will enable them to better evaluate their own work.

The TY plan was also reviewed. However, there was insufficient detail to indicate that the proposals for teaching and learning in TY are in accordance with the curriculum principles for Transition Year as set out in the document *Transition Year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools* (Department of Education and Science: 1995). When planning the TY programme for French, the members of the French department should refer to these TY guidelines which are available on the Second Level Support Service website ([www.slss.ie](http://www.slss.ie)). As part of that programme they should incorporate methodologies such as activity-based learning, negotiated learning, team teaching and group work that will encourage greater responsibility among students for their own learning.

There was evidence of careful preparation for the lessons observed with the advance readiness of technical equipment and, where used, supplementary materials.

#### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Evaluation activities involved the observation of six lessons with a class group in addition to one lesson offering additional support to an individual student. The lessons observed included three at junior cycle, one TY lesson and three at senior cycle. Interaction with the students and a review of their copybooks was also facilitated. All teachers were competent in their approach. However, there were some lessons where the use of more varied and active methodologies would have enhanced the teaching and learning of French.

There was good use of the target language by the teachers in all of the lessons observed. This is commended as it reflects the implementation of one of the main recommendations contained in a previous inspection report. There were some lessons, however, where the target language was used by the teacher but then translated into English, resulting in students not being challenged to understand in French. While the need to support students in their learning is acknowledged, it is important to reduce this dependence on translation by seeking alternative strategies such as visual aids, gesture and other such supports. There were some lessons where students were also observed to make good efforts to interact with the teacher in French. This is commended. To extend students’ capacity to interact in the target language, teachers should give them the linguistic strategies to ask questions, make requests and express difficulties in simple French.

There was good attention to spelling and pronunciation in some of the lessons observed. This is commended as the ability to spell in French and correct pronunciation and intonation are essential components of successful language learning. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all lessons through the use of short regular pronunciation drills.

A thematic approach, as observed in many lessons, facilitated the integration of the different language skills and there were some commendable examples of the effective integration of grammar into the body of the lesson. However, there was a need in some instances to attribute greater importance to oral and aural skills development.

There was good use of the board in many lessons to support the work in hand and some effective strategies were observed in one lesson to help some of the less able students to improve their

comprehension skills. The use of a crossword to revise work previously learned and the use of song in another lesson are also commended.

While all lessons were well structured in terms of time management, there was need in many instances to ensure a better balance between teacher instruction and student activity. Pair work as observed in some lessons did support active learning. Furthermore, the manner in which the students reported back in the third person at the end of the task is commended as it extended the students' language usage. However, a number of the lessons observed were teacher directed with limited opportunity for active student engagement and initiative. It is therefore recommended that all teachers work towards actively engaging students by using strategies such as brainstorming and including at least one pair or group activity in each lesson. Students should also be made more aware of their responsibilities in the teaching and learning process. To this end teachers should share the lesson plan in terms of what the students must, should or could know by the end of the lesson. Attention to the differentiated needs of the students and more collaboration with the resource teacher in relation to students with SEN is also recommended.

There was good classroom management throughout and most students applied themselves to the work of the lesson. There were some very good responses from a number of students indicating active engagement with the topic being studied and a good understanding of the work in hand. Interaction with the inspector also revealed these students to be confident and competent learners of the language. However, it was also noted that a number of students remained passive in some of the lessons observed. When engaging in question and answer sessions, it is important that teachers target all students, not just those indicating greatest willingness to communicate. Furthermore, greater use of more varied methodologies should better respond to the needs, abilities and interests of all students.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Student progress is monitored using a range of assessment protocols. These include question and answer sessions in class homework assignments, tests and examinations. A review of students' copybooks indicated that homework is assigned and corrected and, where appropriate, a mark or comment included. This is good practice. Where the inclusion of a mark or comment is not necessary teachers should sign or date corrections to differentiate between work corrected by the teacher and work corrected by students.

Students sit formal examinations at Christmas and in the summer. Certificate examination students sit mock examinations in the second term. Common assessments are given where possible. This is good practice. An aural component is included in all formal tests for third, fifth and sixth year students. First-year students have an aural examination as part of their summer tests. It is recommended that the assessment of students' aural skills be included as a component in all formal examinations. Senior-cycle students have an oral assessment and teachers are currently planning to introduce an oral assessment for first-year students. This is commended and it is suggested that it should be progressed to the introduction of informal oral assessments for all students. Meetings are held with the different year groups at the end of each month to discuss students' overall progress and to help students take on greater responsibility for their own progress. This is commended. Report cards are issued every six weeks when parents are informed of students' general application and progress. Consideration should be given to using the proposed informal oral assessments as a basis for some of these reports. Parents also receive more detailed reports following formal examinations and there is further contact with parents at the annual parent teacher meetings held for each year group. Senior management also discusses

the outcomes of the certificate examinations with the different subject departments to ensure that high standards are maintained and that areas of concern can be dealt with.

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

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole school provision and support for French for all students including extra provision for students with special educational needs and those experiencing difficulty.
- Good progress has been made in subject planning for French.
- There was good use of the target language by the teachers in all of the lessons observed.
- There were some good examples of the effective integration of grammar into the work of the lesson.
- A number of methodologies were observed and many were used to good effect.
- Some good whole-school practices are in place to monitor students' progress.

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

- Teachers should build on the work completed to date in subject planning by developing desired learning outcomes for each year group in terms of what the students will be able to do as a result of their learning. The TY plan also needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is in line with the TY principles in relation to teaching and learning.
- Students should be given the necessary linguistic strategies to support greater student interaction in the target language.
- The use of more varied methodologies including ICT is recommended to ensure full student engagement and a better balance between teacher instruction and student activity.
- Teachers should extend the good practice of oral assessments for all year groups.

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 November 2010.*

# Appendix

## School response to the report

### Submitted by the Board of Management

#### **Area 1: Observations on the content of the inspection report**

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

##### **Follow up actions planned or undertaken -**

First years are now timetabled for single classes, i.e four classes per week.

Applied for and got a language assistant for the year 2010/11. He is now working in the College and will continue up to June 2011.

Currently posting up a wider range of classroom vocabulary to enhance linguistic strategies.

Extending the use of ICT in the teaching of the target language.

Oral assessments are being extended to include 1<sup>st</sup> years, 2<sup>nd</sup> years, 3<sup>rd</sup> year and T.Y.

Pair work is being used more frequently.

The subject plan is being reviewed to include desired learning outcomes for each year group.  
Reviewing the T.Y plan to include setting up an internet contact with French schools.