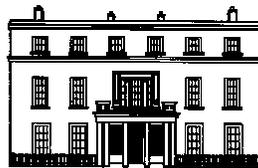


**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of French**  
**REPORT**

**Firhouse Community College**  
**Firhouse, Dublin 24**  
**Roll number: 70140L**

**Date of inspection: 23 September 2013**



**AN ROINN | DEPARTMENT OF**  
**OIDEACHAIS | EDUCATION**  
**AGUS SCILEANNA | AND SKILLS**

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

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	20 and 23 September 2013
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during seven class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the majority of the lessons observed.
- French was used as the language of instruction in a number of the lessons observed however, its use in the other lessons was very limited.
- Good practice was noted where teachers adopted an integrated approach to the teaching of the different language skills.
- A good balance was maintained between teacher instruction and student activity in the majority of lessons.
- There is good whole-school provision for French.
- Good progress has been made in subject planning.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The use of French for the purpose of instruction and general classroom interaction should be extended to all lessons.
  - A more integrated approach and greater attention to oral skills development should be extended to all lessons.
  - The Transition Year (TY) plan should be reviewed to ensure that its primary objective is to further develop students' communicative confidence and competence in French.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Firhouse Community College is a co-educational secondary school with 710 students. The study of a modern European language is compulsory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to good. There was considerable scope for development in some lessons regarding the use of the target language and methodologies to develop all the language skills and promote active student learning.
- French was spoken consistently by the teachers in some of the lessons observed, but was used to a very limited extent in other lessons. As the use of the target language is universally considered to be the most effective approach to the teaching a language, all teachers should use strategies that support the ongoing use of French in the classroom. All classroom instructions and explanations should be communicated in French as it is essential to challenge the higher-achieving students. Where there are comprehension difficulties, students should be supported through the use of visuals, writing vocabulary on the board or setting the context rather than automatic translation into English.
- Students should also be encouraged to interact in simple French by providing them with the relevant expressions for asking questions, making requests or expressing difficulties and through the use of regular pronunciation drills. Good practice was noted in lessons where there was a focus on improving spelling in French.
- Good practice was noted in instances where the lesson plan was communicated to the students at the outset. To extend the benefits of such practice, teachers should communicate their lesson plans in terms of the intended learning outcomes. This should support effective lesson structure and time management, while at the same time make students more aware of their responsibilities in the learning process. The lesson plan was revisited in one instance and this very good practice of assessing student progress should be extended to all lessons.
- The language skills were taught in an integrated manner in a number of the lessons observed. This is good practice. There were some lessons, however, where a grammar-translation approach was the dominant methodology. All teachers should adopt or further develop the thematic approach and due attention should be paid to all the language skills in order to optimise knowledge and skills transfer.
- Question and answer sessions were observed in all lessons. In some instances a greater balance between global and directed questions is recommended. To this end, some of the assessment for learning (AfL) strategies should be considered to ensure greater student participation in the lesson. Students should also be given opportunities to ask questions in French of both their teachers and their peers.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was well exploited in some instances. Teachers should extend their use of ICT to support learning. In instances where video-clips are used and where the dialogue may prove challenging, teachers could distribute a transcript or partial transcript to support students' understanding. Work on a transcript could form part of a preparatory phase to further student engagement with video-clips in French. The use of games and song as observed in one instance enhanced both learning and the enjoyment of the lesson.

- Pair-work, as observed in many lessons, promoted a good balance between teacher instruction and student learning. At least one short, focused pair or group task should be incorporated into every lesson to support oral skills development and active learning. Students should also be encouraged to report back on the work of their partners as this will enable them to extend their language skills. There was one lesson however, where the teacher focused on the completion of several tasks rather than on instruction complemented by student activity.
- In one lesson students were given individual exercises to complete. In this instance it would have been more beneficial to assign such exercises for homework and devote the time to oral skills development arising from the work being done in class.
- Students were well-behaved and applied themselves to the work of the lesson. Some responded well to interactions with the inspector. Others, however, were more reticent. In order to build up students' confidence and competence, teachers should ensure that every student is afforded opportunities to make some oral contribution in every lesson. It is also recommended that an oral assessment be included in end of year examinations for all year groups.
- Homework was assigned in all lessons. There was evidence of corrections with formative comments in many copybooks and this is good practice. In some instances there was a need for greater clarity as to whether homework is monitored for completion or correction.

#### **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- There is good whole-school provision for French in the allocation of time and in the provision of resources including ICT.
- The provision of teacher-based or language-based classrooms supports the creation of a language learning environment to support student learning. As the year progresses teachers should extend their displays of classroom language and key expressions and afford students opportunities to use them.
- As part of ongoing professional development, teachers are encouraged to consider the range of scholarships and in-service programmes available for the purpose of linguistic and pedagogical upskilling.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A subject plan for French is in place and schemes of work have been developed for each year group. There are currently some variations in the templates used for different class groups. To build on the good work completed to date, teachers should devise a common template combining the different elements contained in the existing templates. This would support teachers in their daily work and in evaluating student learning and their own practice.
- The Transition Year plan has adopted a modular approach, where teachers teach the same module to the different class groups. This enables teachers to choose topics of linguistic or cultural relevance in line with their areas of interest and expertise. However, it was not clear in the plan whether the modules are taught through French or English. All TY

activities for French should support the development or consolidation of students' language skills and the building up of their communicative confidence. It is also recommended that the grammar module be taught within the context of students overall language skills development.

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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, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

# **Appendix**

## **School response to the report**

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

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

The Board welcomes the subject 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**

The Board of Management at its meeting of 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014 are committed to addressing the recommendations in the report and are aware that plans are already in place to do so.