

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Loreto Community School
Milford, County Donegal
Roll number: 91500J

Date of inspection: 1 October 2015



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

Dates of inspection	30 September and 1 October
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 six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- Competent teaching was observed in all lessons; very good practices were noted in some lessons while there was scope for development in others.
- The target language was used consistently by the teachers in all of the lessons observed.
- A range of methodologies was observed, some of which were used to very good effect.
- Students were very receptive to learning, but did not actively engage in oral communication in French.
- The study of French is well supported in the allocation of time, timetabling, resources and commitment to teacher professional development.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Students should be given the linguistic strategies to enable them to interact in the target language and opportunities should be afforded to them in every lesson to put their newly acquired skills into practice.
 - Teachers should adopt methodologies that promote more active student engagement, and challenge the higher-achieving students appropriately.
 - The subject planning agenda should include greater discussion of teaching and learning, and strategies should be developed to support the appropriate uptake of levels in the Certificate examinations and to further improve student attainment.
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INTRODUCTION

Loreto Community School is a co-educational post-primary school with 786 students. It offers the Junior Certificate, Transition Year, the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied. The study of a modern foreign language is mandatory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Competent teaching was observed in all lessons and many examples of very good practice were noted. There were some lessons, however, where there was scope for development in engaging the students as active learners of the language and in meeting their differentiated needs.
- The target language was used consistently by the teachers in all of the lessons observed. To maximise this good practice, all students should be equipped with the necessary expressions to interact during lessons in simple French. Greater opportunities should also be afforded to them to progress from the rote-learned classroom expressions to more spontaneous use of the target language.
- The lesson plan was established at the beginning of all lessons. It is recommended that the plan be communicated in terms of what the students should know or be able to do by the end of the lesson. This will support good lesson structure and time management. Teachers should also revisit these outcomes as the lesson progresses to assess student learning.
- A range of strategies was observed, some of which were used to better effect than others. A brainstorming activity observed at the beginning of one lesson engaged the students and enabled them to exploit their previous learning to support their current work. Such strategies should be extended to all lessons.
- Good practice was observed in one lesson where a listening activity was used as a text to support students' comprehension and productive skills rather than as a more limited aural comprehension test. Greater use of listening texts for the purpose of promoting productive language skills is recommended in all lessons.
- A survey was used in another lesson to promote oral skills development and independent learning; this is good practice. However, student learning in this instance would have been enhanced had they been given the expressions to ask the necessary questions in French in advance.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was well used in some lessons to support learning and cultural awareness. However, when sourcing video-clips for cultural awareness, teachers should endeavour to find texts appropriate to the students' level of language competence. More creative use of ICT is recommended in some lessons.
- Some of the activities observed endeavoured to enhance the enjoyment of language learning. The use of French tongue twisters in one lesson supported pronunciation in a fun manner. A board game was used in another lesson for the purpose of consolidating learning. In this instance, however, the activity did not sufficiently challenge the higher-achieving students. In such instances, tasks need to be differentiated in order to meet the needs of all students.

- There was a strong focus in some lessons on vocabulary acquisition rather than on using vocabulary for communicative purposes. Teachers should choose methodologies that progress students' language skills from words to sentences to paragraphs.
- Numeracy was skilfully integrated into some lessons where students had to work out prices and percentages in line with the lesson topic.
- There were a number of lessons where students were receptive, but not active. While pair or group work was observed, it did not generally result in students communicating orally in French. Furthermore, many of the students were shy about answering questions asked by the teacher and the inspector. All teachers should incorporate into their lessons at least one activity that obliges students to participate orally.
- Homework was given in all the lessons observed. In one instance, the teacher provided a framework from which students were to create their own sentences. This good practice should be considered for all groups and developed in line with students' linguistic development.
- Elements of formative assessment were noted in some of the copy books inspected. In one instance, the outcomes of student learning were illustrated in the form of a pyramid. These good practices should be shared with all teachers, further developed and implemented as the year progresses.
- The introduction of the Junior Certificate oral examination is welcomed.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is very good whole-school provision and support for French in the allocation of time, timetabling and the provision of resources.
- The classrooms visited had displays of French-related posters. Where teachers did not have a base room they displayed French posters on the corridor. As the year progresses, teachers should extend their language learning environment with charts of classroom language and key expressions for the topics being studied.
- Teacher attendance at a range of in-service courses reflects good commitment to ongoing professional development. Many teachers have attended training related to examination corrections, while some have also attended professional development courses for the purpose of linguistic and pedagogical upskilling. It is recommended that the good practice of attending courses specifically for linguistic and pedagogical upskilling be extended throughout the French Department.
- The school should consider applying for a language assistant and engaging in projects such as e-twinning for the purposes of intercultural dialogue.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Subject department meetings are held and minutes recorded. These minutes indicate that discussion at meetings is mainly of an organisational nature. Notwithstanding the need for such discussion, it is recommended that teaching and learning be included on the agenda for all future planning meetings.
- Discussion of teaching and learning should involve identifying the areas of greatest challenge and sharing ideas and strategies that can bring about improvement. For

example, teachers should discuss ways of encouraging greater student engagement in the target language. They should also analyse examination results, comparing them with in-school trends as well as national norms and develop strategies to improve the uptake of levels and student outcomes.

- Schemes of work have been developed in terms of subject content, grammar and learning. This framework should be further advanced by including the methodologies, resources and the assessment protocol to be used for each year group and to provide greater clarity in terms of learning outcomes for students.
- The Transition Year plan should be reviewed to ensure that it is in accordance with the Departmental guidelines on the provision of a quality programme. Greater emphasis should be placed on promoting active and independent learning. If completing student projects, they should be written up in simple French. Negotiated remediation should also be considered in accordance with students' perceived areas of difficulty.

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.

Appendix

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT

Submitted by the Board of Management

Part A: Observations on the content of the inspection report

The Board of Management welcomes the very positive findings of the report. In particular, the Board is pleased that the inspector recognised

- competent teaching in all lessons,
- the consistent use of the target language in all of the lessons observed,
- the wide range of methodologies and strategies used,
- teacher attendance at in-service courses,
- the focus on classroom displays,
- the planning and preparation in place, and
- the sound application of ICT.

It is also satisfying that the inspector found the teaching enhanced student enjoyment of the language and that homework and assessment supported student learning in a word rich environment. The Board will support the French department in extending the best practices observed and in promoting increased student oral engagement.

Part B: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

A Teaching and Learning Committee has been established in the school since September. This committee is actively working to support subject departments in a discussion of teaching and learning. This committee further supports teachers to explore methodologies that provide student engagement. It is envisaged that the focus on teaching and learning will lead to increased peer observation, a practice that has begun in the school already, contributing to the sharing of best practice. We are confident this initiative will see improved programme planning across the curriculum.