

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Gallen Community School
Ferbane, County Offaly
Roll number: 91515W

Date of inspection: 3 May 2016



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 of inspection	3 May 2016
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 three class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning was good; areas for development include progressing students' oral proficiency and participation in lessons.
- French was consistently used as the language of instruction in some of the lessons observed, while in others the target language was heavily supported by translation into English.
- The use of an integrated approach to develop the different language skills was observed in a minority of lessons.
- A range of methodologies was observed, some of which were more effective than others.
- Management provides good whole-school support for French.
- Considerable work has been achieved in subject planning for French.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- The target language should be used consistently by all teachers in line with the requirements of the syllabus.
- An integrated approach to teaching the different language skills should be adopted by all teachers and for all lessons.
- Teachers should ensure that student use of the target language is progressed by providing opportunities in every lesson for student-teacher and student-student interaction in French and by introducing an oral assessment for each year group.
- Teachers should ensure that all student tasks are sufficiently purposeful to facilitate active and independent learning.

INTRODUCTION

Gallen Community School is a co-educational school with 386 students, serving the town of Ferbane, Co Offaly and its hinterland. It offers Junior Certificate (JC), Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate (LC) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). The study of a modern foreign language is mandatory at both junior and senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, but with scope for development in progressing students' oral proficiency and active participation in lessons.
- French was consistently used by the teachers in some of the lessons observed, while in others there was considerable recourse to English translation. All students should be challenged to their full potential in terms of understanding the target language and, where linguistic scaffolding is needed, strategies alternative to translation should be used.
- Some of the lesson plans shared with students at the beginning of lessons were clearly articulated in terms of what the students should know by the end of the lesson. To further build on this good practice, the learning intentions should be revisited as the lesson progresses or at the end, in order to assess student outcomes.
- Attention to teaching all language skills was observed in a minority of lessons through the use of an integrated approach. Listening and reading texts served to develop students' receptive skills and, in turn, supported the productive skills of speaking and writing. This good practice should be further developed and extended to all lessons.
- Good effort was noted in one lesson to extend the tasks based on an aural text beyond information retrieval questions asked in English. The transcript of the aural text then served as a reading text. However, learning would have been enhanced had tasks such as redrafting the transcript using alternative vocabulary and expressions been given instead of translating the text.
- Many of the lessons observed focused on revision. This was appropriate for the time of year. However, to maximise the benefits of revision lessons, teachers should review prior learning before giving students exercises to complete. These exercises, while based on previous learning, should be set within a new context and the integrated approach used to progress and assess the work completed.
- All teachers endeavoured to balance instruction with student activity in their lessons, through the use of pair work or individual student tasks. However, some of the tasks assigned were by their nature repetitive and did not afford meaningful opportunity for active and independent learning.
- There was insufficient attention in most lessons to building up students' oral confidence and competence. All lessons need to incorporate more opportunities for oral skills development through the use of purposeful pair or group work activities. Students' use of French for such interactions should be built up by giving them the expressions necessary to ask questions, express their challenges, and make requests. Spontaneous interactions should be facilitated through general question and answer sessions or the use of strategies that require unprepared communication with the teacher or with peers.
- There was good attention to the correction of homework and the inclusion of affirmative comments. To further develop this good practice teachers should provide more written

formative feedback to inform students of their strengths and areas for improvement, thereby enabling students to progress their learning.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Whole-school provision and support for French in the allocation of time, timetabling and the provision of resources is good. The current policy of French as a core subject to Leaving Certificate is under review. School management should however keep in mind the implications of not studying any modern European language for students' future career choices. Instead, alternative ways of supporting students who find the study of languages difficult should be investigated.
- The classrooms visited were attractive learning spaces with posters of key grammar points and some posters. The print-rich environment should be further enhanced with charts of classroom language and expressions for the topic of the week. Charts of key points to remember for examinations could also be considered as the year progresses.
- While some professional development has been undertaken by teachers, it is recommended that they now consider availing of the range of summer scholarships, and courses available through the Department of Education and Skills and the French Cultural Services.
- The French Department organises an annual TY visit to France. To maximise this good practice, teachers should encourage students to source information, while abroad, that can be used to extend learning for both those who travelled and for those who have not. The school should also consider applying for a French language assistant under the Department of Education and Skills language assistant scheme.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Considerable work has been completed in subject planning and this is good practice. Of particular note is the setting out of the schemes of work entirely through French. These schemes are clearly laid out in terms of learning outcomes, methodologies, assessment, literacy and numeracy and overall evaluation. This is very good practice.
- The modular approach introduced for TY is good practice as it allows teachers to work to their areas of strength and interest. It is recommended that any module on grammar be developed within the context of remediation of all language skills and that the module content be negotiated with students in terms of their perceived areas of difficulty. Project work should be kept simple, but completed in French. It is also recommended that the TY programme for French place greater focus on oral skills development.
- The minutes of subject department meetings indicate good attention to matters of an organisational nature. It is recommended that meetings involve greater discussion of teaching and learning, identifying areas of challenge and instigating strategies for improvement. As part of the agenda for improving students' oral skills, teachers should introduce an oral examination for all students as part of the regular school assessments.
- An analysis of results in the certificate examinations indicates scope for development in the uptake of higher level and in outcomes. When analysing results, teachers should compare the uptake of levels and outcomes in French with trends in other subject areas within the school and from year to year. Specific action plans should then be developed for the purpose of further raising student attainment in French.

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 accepts the report as the final inspection report available for publication and wished to respond formally to the report. The Board agrees that the response submitted will be included as an appendix to the published report. The board's response is submitted below.

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 and the French Department accept the findings of the inspection and wish to highlight the following:

- Within the context that this Inspection was carried out in May when it is normal practice for revision to be carried out in exam classes we appreciate the recognition of this and that the quality of teaching and learning was good.
- The attention to correction of homework of students and teachers affirmative comments therein is welcome.
- The French classrooms were seen as attractive learning spaces
- The work done in the French Department with subject plans and schemes written entirely through French was highlighted as very good practice.
- There was good whole school support for French.
- The modular approach introduced for TY is noted as good practice also.

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 French Department and school management has taken on board the findings and recommendations of the inspector and will aim to implement the recommendations in the following ways:

- Teachers will continue to share good practice around active learning strategies to ensure students are engaged and develop their confidence in French
- The French teachers will work to increase the time spent on Oral assessment in all classes.
- Teachers will place reminders for students on the walls to ensure they have the necessary language to ask questions, permissions and make various requests in French.
- A concentrated effort will be made by all teachers to continue to use the target language in all classes and scaffold the learning of some students by using simpler translation or visual aids.
- The teachers will strive to ensure an integrated approach is used in classes to ensure all the language skills are taught in each class.
- School management will apply for a French language assistant under the Department of Education and Skills language assistant scheme.