

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

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

**Belvedere College**  
**Great Denmark Street, Dublin 1**  
**Roll number: 60520P**

**Date of inspection: 28 April 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	27 and 28 April 2016
<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 eight class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good with a number of very good to excellent practices observed in some lessons.
- Consistent use of French as the language of instruction was observed in some lessons; in others the target language was interspersed with English.
- A range of effective methodologies, supporting different aspects of the curriculum, was observed across lessons.
- A number of the lessons observed focused more on the structural than on the communicative aspects of language acquisition.
- Whole-school provision and support for French are very good.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The target language should be used consistently as the language of instruction and students should be afforded greater opportunities to interact in French in both structured and unstructured settings.
  - Teachers should adopt an integrated approach to teaching the different language skills in all lessons.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

Belvedere College is a fee-charging voluntary secondary school with 1005 students. It offers the Junior Certificate (JC), Transition Year (TY) and the established Leaving Certificate (LC). The study of French is mandatory in junior cycle and TY. Students in these year groups also have the option to study German or Spanish as an additional language.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good. Very good to excellent practices were observed in some lessons, while in others there was scope for development in the use of French as the language of the classroom.
- French was used consistently by the teachers in some lessons, while in others it was interspersed with English. This should be addressed as there was no evidence that students had any significant difficulty understanding what was said when the target language was used; rather the sense of urgency to complete the planned work was the rationale underpinning the use of English.
- Students in some lessons need to be given more opportunity to interact with their peers both in structured and in more spontaneous interactions. Very good practice in this regard was noted in one lesson where the teacher interacted informally in French with students at the beginning. This good practice should be extended to all lessons and further enhanced with students asking and answering questions of each other.
- Lessons were well structured and paced, moving quickly from a brief overview of prior learning into the work for the day. The good practice, noted in some instances, of focusing on learning intentions when communicating the lesson plan should be extended to all lessons. These intentions should be revisited at the end of the lesson to assess student progress.
- There was good focus in a number of lessons on vocabulary acquisition and how it could be manipulated to extend learning, moving from words to sentences to paragraphs through increasing the detail of description or giving reasons for one's answer.
- In one lesson, the good practice of teaching students connective words and phrases enabled them to move from sentences to paragraphs, to develop ideas or to present contradicting ideas. However, learning would have been further enhanced had listening or reading texts containing these keywords and expressions been used, where students could identify and understand them within the context of the text. This would have avoided the need for the grammar-translation approach used as the lesson progressed.
- While there was good evidence in some instances of an integrated approach to teaching the different language skills, including knowledge of grammar, the different skills were taught in isolation in many lessons. For example, due attention was attributed to developing students' aural skills in only a very small minority of lessons. In lessons where the focus was primarily on the teaching of grammar, the rules were, in most instances, explained in isolation and often in English.
- It is recommended that the different language skills be taught in an integrated manner, where the understanding acquired from listening and reading texts supports the advancement of students' oral and writing skills. Furthermore, the good practice noted in one lesson, where the grammar points to be studied were identified within the context of a reading text, should be extended to all lessons.

- Digital presentations were used effectively for vocabulary acquisition. It was also noted that information and communication technology (ICT) serves as an effective resource for homework. However, on the day of the inspection, there was limited evidence of more creative ICT resources such as film clips and news items being used to support learning. Greater use of such resources is encouraged to enhance the students' learning experiences.
- Song was used to consolidate and promote the enjoyment of learning in one lesson. While this is commended, learning could have been further enhanced had the song been introduced earlier in the lesson and used as a text to promote aural skills development.
- Pair or group work was observed in most lessons and students applied themselves well to the tasks assigned. Best practice was noted where the tasks had clarity of purpose, clear instructions were given and the work was completed within a short timeframe. The inclusion of a plenary session where students reported back on the work of partners or where there was a plenary correction of errors was also good practice. Greater use of pair work for oral skills development is recommended.
- There was good evidence of student engagement and learning in most lessons and their willingness to respond to questions indicated an openness to further challenge regarding communication in the target language.
- An examination of copy books indicated very good attention to corrections and the inclusion of formative comments and a summative mark in many instances. In some instances, greater feedback on students' strengths as well as areas for development should be considered.

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

- There is very good whole-school provision and support for French in the allocation of time, timetabling arrangements and the provision of resources. Where classrooms are teacher based, attractive language learning environments have been developed to support linguistic and cultural awareness.
- There has been good engagement with continuing professional development (CPD) for general teaching and learning at whole-school level. Teachers should also consider availing of the broad range of CPD opportunities provided for teachers of French by the Department of Education and Skills, the French Cultural Services and other related bodies, for the purpose of linguistic and pedagogical upskilling.
- The range of co-curricular activities offered to students of French has enabled many of them to experience significant success in their language learning endeavours. This is commended.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Considerable work has been completed in subject planning. Learning outcomes have been identified and the detail of how the different topics should be taught is also included. However, in order to make the current schemes of work more user-friendly, it is recommended that the template be simplified and tabulated in terms of topic, learning outcome, methodologies and assessment protocols for each year group.

- The co-ordination of the work of the French Department is undertaken currently as a post of responsibility. Notwithstanding the very good work carried out by the incumbent of this post, subject co-ordination should be rotated among all members of the French department in order to maximise collaborative subject planning and the greater sharing of ideas and expertise.
- The Transition Year (TY) plan is insufficiently detailed in terms of how the programme is delivered. It is recommended that it be reviewed and planned to take more into account the principles underpinning an effective TY programme and the constraints arising from the nature of TY programmes. Teachers could consider the development of a number of modules in line with teachers' particular interests and areas of expertise which could be delivered in rotation or as stand-alone lessons as appropriate.

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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 of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.