

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Coláiste Éamann Rís
Callan, County Kilkenny
Roll number: 61510R

Date of inspection: 18 January 2010



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

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Éamann Rís, Callan, conducted as part of a whole school evaluation. 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 one day 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Coláiste Éamann Rís is a voluntary secondary school with 200 male students. All students study French in first year. It is offered as an optional subject in second and third year. French is mandatory for all students in Transition Year (TY). This means that the TY class comprises students who have taken French to Junior Certificate as well as students who have only completed one year of French. Senior management should explore ways in which the TY group may be divided as the needs of the different groups of students differ significantly. French as a mainstream subject is offered to senior cycle students who have studied the subject to Junior Certificate. A module of conversational French is offered to students not studying French in fulfilment of the language requirement for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

There is good whole-school provision in the allocation of time and in timetabling, giving students regular contact with the target language.

There are three teachers of French, all of whom are graduates in the subject. Those who are more established in their careers have benefited from the national in-service programmes held for teachers of French in recent years and one teacher attended an in-service training week held in Dublin City University (DCU) a number of years ago. Engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) is essential in order to improve or maintain standards of either linguistic or pedagogical expertise. To this end teachers are encouraged to avail of all opportunities for CPD including the fortnightly scholarships offered by the Department of Education and Skills and the French Cultural Services, and programmes coordinated by *Léargas*. They should also consider active participation in the French Teachers' Association (FTA) and attendance at language-related courses on methodology in local education centres.

Classrooms are teacher based and the rooms visited were visually stimulating with displays of maps, posters, some classroom language, vocabulary and grammar charts. Furthermore, much of the work displayed had been completed by the students. This is commended as working in a print-

rich environment promotes cultural awareness and enables students to assimilate some of their learning over time. It is also very affirming for students to see their work displayed in the classroom. To further this good practice, teachers should post up the classroom language needed by students for communication purposes during lessons.

Teachers have their own CD players and access to televisions and DVD players. An annual budget is provided for the purchase of materials. All classrooms are wired for internet access and some data projectors are available for use. The computer room can also be accessed by arrangement. Teachers have also received some in-service training in the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers reported using the computer room with LCVP students and they also download resources from the internet. This is commended. Given the wealth of resources available on the internet, teachers should consider investing incrementally the monies from the annual subject budget in the purchase of a data projector for use by all members of the French department. This would enable teachers to embrace ICT using simple PowerPoint presentations, many of which can be easily downloaded from the internet, for the purpose of providing visual supports, promoting cultural awareness and the assisting with the speedy correction of some exercises.

A number of co-curricular activities are in place to support students in their work and enhance the enjoyment of language learning. These include visits from French theatre for schools groups, a French breakfast and a Christmas card competition for junior cycle students. A number of visits to France have taken place as part of the school's annual tour abroad. The organisation of co-curricular activities by the members of the French department is commended. To extend the benefits of co-curricular activities for students, teachers should consider initiating links with a French school for the purpose of promoting cultural awareness and facilitating the exchange of authentic documents. The benefits of such links could be further extended through encouraging e-pals once ICT becomes more established in the school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Subject planning has been embraced by the members of the French department in Coláiste Éamann Rís. There is a subject co-ordinator and regular subject planning meetings take place minutes of which are recorded. This is good practice.

A review of the subject planning documentation indicated that teachers have embraced the planning process and are making good progress. The subject plan for French sets out the aims and objectives, the school context, the available resources and proposed methodologies. The curriculum content is planned in terms of the topics, skills or chapters to be covered. Teachers are commended for the work completed to date in subject planning. In order to further advance subject planning and to ensure that it responds to the requirements of the syllabus rather than the content of the textbook, teachers should over time develop their plans in terms of the learning outcomes to be achieved in each year group. The linguistic strategies to support these outcomes should also be included. This approach which places the emphasis on teaching transferable skills will allow for greater variety in the choice of topics and texts.

When preparing the annual TY plan teachers need to be cognisant of the guidelines relating to the proposed methodologies which underpin the principles of TY. To this end teachers should consider introducing elements of learner autonomy. For example, students could be allowed to negotiate the choice of text or topic to be studied. Students could also be encouraged to develop some co-curricular activities arising from their learning. These could include quizzes, board

games, a French breakfast or *goûter* for the other year groups. In the current situation students who have completed juniorcycle French could organise activities for those who are relatively new to the subject.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Evaluation activities included the observation of four lessons, one in junior cycle, one TY lesson and two in senior cycle. The opportunity to interact with the students and to review their copybooks was also facilitated. There was some variation in the standard of teaching and learning in the lessons observed. However, much good practice was noted and indeed there were some instances where very effective strategies were used to support teaching and learning.

Lessons were well structured and appropriately paced. In some instances a brief outline of the lesson plan was communicated to the students at the beginning. The sharing of a lesson plan with students is good practice as it engages them from the outset. However, to optimise the benefits of this good practice, teachers should communicate the plan in terms of the proposed learning outcomes as this will make students aware of teaching and learning as a shared responsibility.

The target language was used consistently by the teachers in all of the lessons observed. This is commended. There was also one instance where a student very effectively communicated how to form a particular tense in French. This commendable practice of encouraging student interaction in the target language should be extended by giving them the necessary linguistic strategies to ask questions, make requests or express difficulties in simple French.

There were some very good examples of an integrated approach where previous learning was channelled into the work in hand and where due importance was given to the development of the different language skills. In lessons where grammar was taught as a discrete skill a more integrated approach using reading and listening texts to set the context is recommended as it will support students' understanding of the work in hand.

Question-and-answer sessions were effectively used to test comprehension and to elicit information in all of the lessons observed. In some lessons posters with the key expressions for the topic of the lesson were displayed on the board. This approach proved very effective not only in supporting student learning but also in the fact that they could be posted up on the walls at the end of the lesson allowing students assimilate the new learning over time.

Pair-work activities were used in many of the lessons observed. This is commended as it engages the students in active learning as well as promoting oral skills development. Teachers should extend this good practice to all lessons. To ensure full engagement by students and to extend their language skills, students should be encouraged to report back on the answers given by their partner during the activity. The use of group work to support students preparing for their oral examination is also recommended as it affords all students increased opportunities to speak and such work can be completed in a time effective manner.

Elements of cultural awareness were seamlessly integrated into the work of some lessons. This is very good practice as knowledge of France, French life and culture is an important component of language learning in addition to enhancing the enjoyment of the lesson.

Some challenges presented in a TY lesson where the differing needs of the two discrete groups of learners necessitated working with each group separately. While the efforts to respond to the

needs of all students are acknowledged, this approach reduced the amount of instruction time available to all students and resulted in some students disengaging when given work to complete on their own. To overcome these difficulties and, at the same time, to uphold the principles of TY consideration should be given to studying topics and texts of relevance to all students using a differentiated approach through the use of graded questions, tasks and supporting worksheets. Students who have previously studied French could also create consolidation activities such as quizzes, board games or PowerPoint presentations for their fellow classmates arising from their own learning. It is also recommended that the practice of differentiation aimed at challenging the students of higher abilities, while supporting those experiencing difficulty, should be extended to all lessons.

There was good classroom management throughout and teachers and students worked in a climate of mutual respect. Most students applied themselves to the work in hand and their answers indicated good understanding of the lesson content. In lessons where a small number of students remained more passive and disengaged some of the above-mentioned recommendations should address these difficulties. Interaction with the inspector revealed many students to be enthusiastic and confident learners of the language.

ASSESSMENT

A range of assessment modes including question and answer sessions, homework assignments, class tests and formal examinations are used to monitor students' progress. A review of students' copybooks indicated that homework is assigned and corrected. However, since teachers are working to encourage students to think in French it is recommended that alternatives to translation exercises be given for homework. Students are also commended for the neatness of the work in their copybooks as it will facilitate ease of referral when necessary. However, it was noted that many students are not using their journals to record their homework. To overcome this, teachers should consider including the recording of homework into students' journals in French as part of the learning outcomes for each lesson.

Students are given regular class tests and they sit formal examinations at Christmas and in the summer. Certificate-examination students sit mock examinations in the second term. Common assessments are given where appropriate and an aural component is included in all formal assessments. This is good practice. Senior cycle students are given an oral assessment and teachers work together to give students the experience of being interviewed by a teacher other than their own. Teachers are commended for their collaboration in this regard. It is recommended that the good practice of giving oral assessments be extended to all year groups.

Contact with parents is maintained through the use of the student journal, school reports and the annual parent-teacher meetings held for each year group. A review of the state examination results indicates that the uptake of levels and outcomes are appropriate to the student cohort.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole school provision in the allocation of time and in timetabling
- Good progress has been made in subject planning for French.
- The target language was consistently used by the teachers in all of the lessons observed.

- A variety of methodologies was observed and some were used to very good effect.
- There was good classroom management throughout.

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

- Senior management should explore ways whereby the current difficulties relating to class formation in TY can be addressed.
- Teachers should further build on the good work in subject planning by reframing their aims and objectives for each year group in terms of desired learning outcomes and the linguistic strategies needed to support them. An annual TY plan needs to be developed to take into account the principles underpinning teaching and learning for a TY programme.
- Students should be encouraged to interact in French by giving them the necessary expressions to ask questions, express difficulties and make requests in the target language.
- Where relevant a more integrated approach to the teaching of the different language skills should be adopted. Teachers should also use differentiated worksheets and tasks to support the diverse needs and abilities of the student cohort.

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.

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