

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

St Declan's Community College
Kilmacthomas, County Waterford
Roll number: 72230W

Date of inspection: 24 November 2014



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	24 November 2014
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 four class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, but there was scope for development in certain aspects of practice.
- Lessons were well structured and a topic approach facilitated the integration of the different language skills.
- A range of methodologies was observed, some of which were more effective than others in promoting active student engagement and the use of French as the language of communication.
- All teachers endeavoured to balance the instructional phase of lessons with student activity through the use of pair and group tasks.
- There is good whole school provision and support for French.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should extend their use of the target language for instructional purposes and create more targeted opportunities for students to interact in French with both their teachers and their peers.
 - Teachers should use strategies that extend language learning beyond vocabulary acquisition and translation and that challenge all students to reach their full potential.
 - As part of subject planning for improvement, teachers should develop the practice of providing students with ongoing formative feedback; they should also introduce an oral assessment for all students.
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INTRODUCTION

St Declan's Community College is a co-educational post-primary school with 674 students under the auspices of Waterford and Wexford Education Training Board. It offers Junior Certificate, Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), a compulsory Transition Year (TY) programme, Leaving Certificate (established) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme. The study of a modern European language is mandatory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The overall quality of teaching and learning was good, but there was scope for development in certain aspects of practice.
- French was consistently used by the teacher in some lessons, while in others the teacher reverted to using more English as the lesson progressed. Greater use of the target language is recommended in order to ensure that the higher-ability students are appropriately challenged. Where there are difficulties in comprehension, alternative strategies to translation should be adopted.
- Student interaction in the target language should be progressed by giving them the necessary expressions to ask questions, express difficulty or make requests in simple French. They should also be afforded opportunities in every lesson to communicate more spontaneously in French with the teacher and with their peers.
- All lessons were well structured. The proposed lesson content was communicated to the students at the beginning of each lesson. To optimise the benefits of this practice, teachers should articulate their lesson plans in terms of learning outcomes, thereby making students aware of what they are expected to have learnt by the end of the lesson. These outcomes should be revisited at the end of the lesson to assess students' learning and progress.
- A topic approach facilitated the integration of the different language skills. While due attention was given to the receptive skills of listening and understanding, teachers should further progress students' oral and writing skills.
- A range of methodologies was observed and all teachers endeavoured to maintain an appropriate balance between instruction and activity. Some of these methodologies however, were more effective than others in promoting active student engagement and the use of French as the language of communication.
- PowerPoint presentations were used in all lessons to present new information and provide visual supports. Teachers should extend their use of information and communication technology (ICT) to include audio and up-to-date reading texts, songs and video clips that will support learning in addition to cultural awareness.
- Supplementary worksheets were distributed in all lessons to support the work in hand. Teachers should maximise the benefits of this good practice by differentiating the content in accordance with the varying needs of the student cohort.
- Pair and group work tasks were assigned in all lessons to promote oral skills development. In some instances however, the work was not sufficiently challenging for the students and there was one lesson where the students disengaged from the assigned task. All pair or group work activities should be short, focused, necessitate interaction and be differentiated as appropriate.

- In one lesson, a follow-on activity arising from a group task involved students reporting back on the oral contributions of their partners. While the nature of the initial activity limited its benefits in this instance, the practice is commended as it has the potential to extend students linguistic structures in addition to ensuring that group work is effectively carried out.
- In lessons where there was a strong focus on specific vocabulary acquisition, teachers should extend students' learning by building up families of words to include verbs, adjectives and adverbs that can be used with every new noun learned. In this way, students will be enabled to see relationships between words and to progress their learning across contexts, thereby supporting both oral and writing skills development. The use of brainstorming as a strategy is recommended for these purposes.
- Translation was used as a teaching strategy in most lessons, where student tasks involved matching words and phrases to their English equivalents. Teachers should endeavour to reduce the dependency on translation by seeking alternative strategies such as setting the words or phrases into relevant contexts to indicate comprehension.
- Homework was given and corrected and, in some instances, an affirmative comment was included. Teachers should further develop the practice of written formative feedback in order to enable students to progress their learning in an informative and supportive manner.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole school provision and support for French in allocation of time, timetabling and provision of resources. It was noted however, that a considerable number of students are not studying a modern European language in senior cycle. School management needs to ensure that these students and their parents fully comprehend the implications for their future educational choices of not having studied a modern European language to Leaving Certificate.
- An attractive language learning environment was observed in all the classrooms visited. As the year progresses, teachers should update it by posting up key expressions for the week or for the topic and create opportunities for students to use these expressions both orally and in their written work.
- Teachers should consider availing of the professional development opportunities available for teachers of French to upskill both linguistically and pedagogically. They should also consider initiatives such as eTwinning for the purpose of promoting intercultural dialogue and exchange with a French school.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The teachers of French work together as a subject department. The minutes of meetings indicate that the issues discussed are primarily of an organisational nature. School management should facilitate all language departments to work together for the purpose of discussing and progressing subject planning for improvement in the teaching and learning of languages.

- Analysis and discussion of students' progress, uptake of levels and outcomes in the certificate examinations should be central to subject planning for improvement. The practice of formative feedback and the introduction of an oral assessment for each year group should also be implemented as part of the improvement agenda.
- Good schemes of work have been prepared for each year group. However, it is recommended that they be subdivided into medium- or short-term plans to ensure consistency in the pace of progress and delivery of the curriculum content.

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.