

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**

**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of French  
REPORT**

**St Mary's College  
Rathmines, Dublin 6  
Roll number: 60560E**

**Date of inspection: 21 September 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**

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**INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	21 September 2015
<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 four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from fair to very good.
- There was varied use of the target language by the teachers in the lessons observed.
- Students' use of the target language was actively encouraged and facilitated in a minority of lessons.
- A variety of methodologies was observed, some of which were more effective than others in actively engaging the students.
- There is very good support for French in the allocation of time and timetabling, the provision of resources and commitment to teacher professional development.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- French should be used consistently as the language of instruction and students should be given greater opportunity in all lessons to actively interact in the target language.
  - An integrated approach to the teaching of the different language skills should be adopted in all lessons.
  - The practice of formative assessment should be further progressed and implemented in all lessons.
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## **INTRODUCTION**

St Marys College is a fee-charging voluntary secondary school with 455 male students serving the community of Rathmines and beyond. It offers the Junior Certificate, the established Leaving Certificate and Transition Year (TY). The study of a modern European language is mandatory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from fair to very good in the lessons observed. There was scope for development in some lessons regarding the methodologies used to promote the active learning of all the language skills.
- French was used consistently by the teachers in some of the lessons observed. It was used more intermittently in other lessons and was supported by translation. Notwithstanding the need to scaffold students' learning, greater use of French as the language of instruction is recommended. All classroom instructions should be given in French and, where additional support is needed, alternatives to translation should be prioritised.
- There were some lessons where students were actively encouraged to interact in the target language. This good practice should be extended to all lessons. To this end, all students should be given the relevant expression for asking questions, expressing difficulties and making requests in simple French. They should also be given opportunities in every lesson to communicate orally in French and to progress from rote-learned expressions to more spontaneous interaction.
- The proposed lesson plan was communicated to the students and articulated in terms of what the teacher was going to do. To maximise the good practice of sharing the lesson plan, teachers should communicate the plan in terms of what the students should know or be able to do by the end of the lesson. This should make students more aware of their responsibilities in the learning process and should support better time management in lessons where the pace was slow.
- A variety of methodologies was observed, some of which were used to better effect than others. There was good use of question and answer sessions for the purpose of assessing student comprehension and eliciting responses in the target language.
- There were some lessons where teaching and learning focused primarily on vocabulary acquisition and the teaching of grammar, using a grammar translation methodology. In these instances, a topic approach should be adopted where the receptive skills of listening and reading comprehension support the productive skills of speaking and writing and where grammar is taught in context.
- Elements of information and communication technology (ICT) were used in all lessons to support learning. In one lesson a very good choice of video clip engaged the students with the topic, facilitating good responses and promoting cultural awareness. To further enhance this very good activity a preparatory phase such as a brainstorming activity should be introduced to elicit students' prior knowledge and support their initial comprehension of the text.
- Students were given tasks to complete in all lessons and this is good practice in promoting active learning. In many instances they were encouraged to work in pairs or groups. However, there was insufficient clarity in many instances as to the purpose of the

activity, resulting in students continuing to work individually or interacting in their groups in English.

- When planning pair or group work for the purpose of oral skills development, teachers should ensure that the task incorporates a need for the students to interact in the target language. Students should also report back on the responses of their partners. All lessons should include at least one activity to promote oral skills development.
- Students were receptive to learning, but were not all active participants in lessons. It is recommended that students be given more responsibility for their own learning, encouraging them to proffer their own contributions which can be corrected and progressed rather than remaining reliant on the notes or answers given by the teacher.
- Elements of formative assessment were noted in some of the copy books inspected. This practice should be further developed whereby students are informed of their strengths and areas for improvement and, where appropriate, are afforded the opportunity to redraft their work in light of comments made.
- There is good uptake of higher-level French in the certificate examinations. The school's participation in the optional oral Junior Certificate examination is also commended.

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

- There is very good whole-school provision and support for modern languages. French and German are offered and students have the option to study both languages.
- Classrooms are teacher based and displays of French-related posters and key words were displayed in the rooms visited. As the year progresses teachers should extend their charts of classroom language and key expressions for the topics studied.
- There is strong commitment to ongoing professional development through attendance at in-service programmes provided for teachers of French. To further support them in their work, teachers should consider courses on co-operative learning often available in local education centres.
- While annual trips to France take place, consideration should also be given to initiating projects such as e-twinning for the purpose of promoting intercultural dialogue.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The minutes of formal meetings indicate that subject planning is primarily of an organisational nature. Teachers reported discussing issues of teaching and learning on an ongoing basis. Notwithstanding this good practice, it is recommended that discussions of teaching and learning be included in formal subject planning meetings, where effective practices can be shared and action plans developed to overcome identified areas of difficulty.
- Schemes of work have been developed and articulated in terms of vocabulary, grammar and listening. It is recommended that these schemes be advanced to reflect a more integrated approach to the teaching of the subject, tabulating them in terms of topics, learning outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment protocols.
- The introduction of a French diploma examination for TY students has merit in affording students the opportunity to have some international certification for French. However, it

is important that preparation for this examination does not become the sole focus of the TY programme. It is recommended that the overarching focus for teaching and learning in TY should be the development of oral skills and active and independent learning such as project work to be completed in French and class initiatives which can consolidate student learning.

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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the deputy 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; a response was not received from the board.