Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Mary Immaculate Secondary School
Lisdoonvarna, County Clare
Roll number: 62000W

Date of inspection: 12 April 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning is very good.

• Thorough lesson preparation resulted in well-structured lessons with clear aims and objectives.

• Students demonstrate a clear understanding of the work of the lesson; their understanding of grammar structures is good and they are able to apply their learning.

• Although French is the language of instruction in the classroom, students are less inclined to use the target language in their interaction with the teacher.

• An over-emphasis on teacher-directed questioning reduces the opportunities for students to engage in peer learning.

• The timetabling of single-class periods for French is very positive, and the necessary resources are in place to support the use of ICT for teaching and learning.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• In order to promote independent learning, students should be offered increased opportunities to engage in pair and small group work.

• Students in junior cycle should be encouraged to make more use of the target language in classroom interaction. They should be equipped with phrases for classroom communication and should make use of them during the lesson.
INTRODUCTION

Mary Immaculate Secondary School is a co-educational, voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 218 students. Study of a foreign language is mandatory in junior cycle and in senior cycle. It is also a core element in the optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good. Each lesson had clear aims and learning outcomes. The lessons were well-structured and the content was appropriate to the class group and to the time available. The effective time management was due in part to the detailed lesson plans which included suggestions for activities as well as the duration of each activity.

- Learning activities were well managed and incorporated a short revision exercise or game at the beginning of each lesson. This approach helped to engage the students’ attention and interest at the start of the lesson.

- Students demonstrated a good understanding of the lesson topics, and their responses showed an ability to apply their learning. This was particularly evident in relation to grammar where the use of an inductive approach by the teacher resulted in the students demonstrating a very good understanding of grammatical structures and an ability to transfer their knowledge from one area to the next.

- The target language was spoken consistently by the teacher with visual aids and drawings used to support students’ understanding. As students were inclined to ask questions in English rather than in the target language, strategies should be put in place to encourage them to adopt French whenever possible in classroom communication. As part of this strategy, students in junior cycle should be taught the appropriate phrases for use in classroom interaction.

- Students received individual attention and encouragement. They were asked questions by the teacher and there was an emphasis on correct pronunciation when reading aloud. Their written work during the lesson was also monitored, and good use was made of ICT to facilitate the correction of exercises and to illustrate and explain key points.

- In order to encourage students to become independent learners and to reduce the emphasis on teacher-directed questioning, more varied questioning techniques should be introduced and students should be given increased opportunities to engage in pair or small group work.

- Differentiated teaching methods, including a system of graduated questions, were utilised in a sensitive manner to meet the needs of students. There was an awareness of good practice in dealing with different levels of ability and styles of learning in the classroom and this was reflected in the variety of activities proposed during the lessons.

- The classroom atmosphere was relaxed and positive, and students were cooperative and focused on their work.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Access to the study of a language is open to all students. French is one of two modern foreign languages on offer and students select either French or German following a
subject-sampling programme in first year. Timetabling provision for French is very good with all classes allocated either four or five single periods per week. Students are taught in mixed-ability groupings at all levels.

- Good quality co-curricular and extracurricular supports for the subject, such as a celebration of European cooking, French cinema and visits to Paris and Strasbourg, help to enhance the language-learning experience.

- The school has an assessment policy in place. Students’ progress is monitored through regular tests, and reports are issued to parents four times per year. A system of continuous assessment is used for students in TY.

- The classrooms are well-equipped with a range of resources including a data projector and a desktop computer. All rooms have internet access. The provision of an Mp3 player and speakers in each classroom obviates the need for equipment such as CD players to be carried from room to room, and is a useful, additional resource for language teachers.

- The teacher has availed of opportunities for professional development both within the school as well as externally, including attendance at a variety of courses and through involvement in the certificate examinations. The school funds the cost of membership of the French Teachers’ Association. The French department also cooperates with the University of Limerick in the education and training of student teachers.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The teachers of the two modern foreign languages meet at the start of the year to coordinate planning. This collaboration is of benefit given the small number of teachers involved in languages. Ways of further developing these links should be explored. This should include the drafting of an action plan for languages with a focus on a small number of short-term targets, the sharing of good practice, and collaboration on language events such as the celebration of European Day of Languages.

- Good progress has been made in developing a subject plan for French. The plan identifies the learning outcomes for students through the yearly schemes of work, and addresses long-term planning, resources and methodologies.

- Individual planning and preparation was of a high standard with detailed individual lesson plans and a variety of worksheets and teaching materials in use. Records are maintained of students’ progress.

- Homework is assigned and corrected regularly, and a positive comment with detailed suggestions for improvement is included in senior-cycle copies. The students’ journal is also used for noting comments on students’ progress.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal and subject teacher at the conclusion of the evaluation. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

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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 welcomes the very positive report on the quality of teaching and learning of French in Mary Immaculate.