

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

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

**Sancta Maria College**  
**Louisburgh, County Mayo**  
**Roll number: 64660F**

**Date of inspection: 15 November 2012**



**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**

<b>Date(s) of inspection</b>	15 November 2012
<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**

- Overall, the quality of teaching was good in the lessons observed.
- The quality of learning in the lessons observed ranged from fair to good.
- There was consistent use of the target language by the teachers in all lessons.
- There is good whole-school provision and support for French.
- The current presence of a French language assistant affords good opportunities for team teaching and active learning.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Lessons should be structured to ensure that specific objectives are achieved both in terms of coverage of lesson content and of student learning.
  - Teachers should facilitate greater student-teacher and student-to-student interaction in French.
  - In lessons where students indicate disengagement, the teacher's attention should focus upon re-engaging them by using specific student-centred strategies.
  - All teachers should ensure that the type of homework set will enable students to master the language-learning requirements of the syllabus in an incremental way.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sancta Maria College is a voluntary secondary co-educational school with 325 students. It serves the community of Louisburgh and the surrounding area. It has a broad socio-economic catchment. The study of French is mandatory in junior cycle and optional in senior cycle.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- A number of good teaching approaches were observed with many of them resulting in an appropriate balance between teacher instruction and student activity. However, the quality of students' learning varied. Where it was fair, there was scope for development in relation to how learning outcomes were derived, communicated and achieved, and to the assessment practices in place.
- French was used as the language of instruction in all of the lessons observed. This good practice should be further extended by encouraging student interaction in the target language. To this end, teachers should give students the necessary expressions for simple classroom interaction in French.
- Learning outcomes were communicated to the students at the beginning of each lesson. This good practice helps to engage students and supports good lesson structure. However, learning outcomes should be revisited at the end of each lesson to determine if the objectives have been achieved and to assess student progress. There was one lesson where the lesson content appeared to replicate work already contained in the students' copybooks. While the consolidation of previous work is important, it should be brief and carried out in such a way as to feed into and progress new learning.
- A topic approach facilitated the integration of the different language skills and there were some good examples of grammar revision integrated effectively into the body of the lesson. Question and answer sessions enabled teachers to engage the students, assess comprehension and promote oral interaction.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was used effectively to provide visual supports to enhance learning and for student tasks. PowerPoint was used in one lesson to project a multiple-choice exercise for revision purposes. However, there was evidence to indicate that students had not sufficiently mastered their initial learning. In such instances, revision work should be integrated into the lesson prior to assigning the task. In another lesson, a matching exercise was used to get students to work out the sequence of a letter. To enhance the benefits of this good and engaging exercise, it is recommended that the finalised text be projected onto the screen, thereby enabling students to engage with it as a complete text.
- Pair and group tasks were effective, in many instances, in promoting active learning and oral skills development. In some lessons, a shorter time-frame for the completion of tasks would have been more appropriate. Students, particularly at senior cycle, should also be actively encouraged to integrate key expressions into their oral interactions in order to develop greater fluency and spontaneity. The current presence of a French language assistant should be of help in this regard.
- All students were well-behaved. Many indicated good willingness and competence in their interactions with the inspector. There were others however, who had difficulty understanding the inspector's questions in simple French and were unable to answer questions based on the work of the lesson. In addition, some students remained disengaged throughout the lesson. Greater attention to student-centred strategies such as

assessing comprehension, explaining, directing questions at all students and circulating throughout the classroom is recommended when this occurs.

- Homework was assigned in all the lessons observed and the copybooks inspected provided evidence that work was corrected. However, greater attention to the type of homework assigned would have been more beneficial to students' learning in some instances. An inspection of copybooks indicated that some class groups were not afforded adequate opportunities to improve their writing skills. It is important that homework is set which gives students regular practice in manipulating language in order to enable them master the language learning requirements of the syllabus in an incremental way.
- Some teachers maintained very good records of homework assignments and examination results. This practice should be extended throughout the subject department in order to better assess student progress and thereby provide better advice for students in relation to the uptake of levels in the certificate examinations.

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

- There is good whole-school support and provision in the allocation of time, timetabling and the provision of resources including ICT.
- Senior management is supportive of ongoing professional development for teachers. Teachers should inform themselves of scholarships, in-service courses and subject association initiatives aimed at disseminating good practice in the teaching and learning of French and consider availing of some that are appropriate to their needs.
- A very attractive language learning environment has been created in the classrooms which are teacher-based. This should be further developed with additional charts of classroom language and key expressions. Consideration should also be given to revising the seating arrangements in the bigger classrooms to facilitate group work.
- The school currently benefits from the presence of a French language assistant and good team work was observed in lessons where the assistant was integrated into team teaching. It is recommended that the assistantship scheme also be used to help build up a bank of supplementary audio materials and up-to-date expressions, and to develop links with a French school for the purpose of intercultural dialogue.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- Departmental structures are in place to support collaborative subject planning. The position of subject co-ordinator is rotated, meetings are held and minutes recorded. It is recommended that the agenda for meetings be extended to include discussions relating to teaching and learning, the sharing of good practice, student progress and outcomes in addition to issues of a more practical nature.
- A subject plan for French has been developed, setting out the learning objectives and schemes of work for each year group. Documentation relevant to the teaching and learning of French is also included in the plan. Teachers should build on the good work achieved to date by identifying in more detail, the proposed learning outcomes, the methodologies to support them, the resources and the assessment protocols to be used. This would enable them to better evaluate their own practices, identify areas for development and inform future planning.

- The Transition Year (TY) plan should be reviewed to ensure that the school-developed curriculum is in accordance with the principles of an effective TY programme. As part of the review teachers should consider additional initiatives that would support active and independent language learning, but that would not overlap with or be replicated by the fifth year programme
- 

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, 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.