An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Scoil Mhuire
Carrick-on-Suir, County Tipperary
Roll number: 65280A

Date of inspection: 5 May 2011
REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date(s) of inspection</th>
<th>4 and 5 May 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inspection activities undertaken</strong></td>
<td><strong>Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Review of relevant documents</td>
<td>• Examination of students’ work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussion with principal and teachers</td>
<td>• Feedback to principal and teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interaction with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with some examples of excellent practice.
- There was good use of the target language by the teachers in all of the lessons observed.
- An integrated approach supported the development of all the language skills and, in some instances, this fed skilfully into examination preparation.
- There was very good use of information and communication technology (ICT) and supplementary materials to support student learning.
- Commitment to the teaching of French is evident in student access to the study of languages, the attractive learning environments created and good subject planning and preparation.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should include at least one pair or group activity in every lesson.
- The TY plan should be further developed to include methodologies that respond to the TY principles of active and experiential learning.
INTRODUCTION

Scoil Mhuire is a voluntary secondary school with a population of 449 female students. It serves the students of Carrick-on-Suir and its hinterland. The student cohort is drawn from all socio-economic backgrounds.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Overall, the standard of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good. In some lessons, examples of excellent practice were observed.

- The target language was used throughout by the teachers in all of the lessons observed. Some students also made good efforts to interact in French. This should be further encouraged by giving students the necessary linguistic strategies for classroom interaction in French. There was appropriate emphasis on correct spelling and pronunciation of French.

- Teachers began by outlining the lesson plan or by writing up the different phases of the lesson as they were completed. This made students aware of the lesson progression and its expected outcomes. It also supported good lesson structure and pace throughout.

- A variety of resources including ICT was used. PowerPoint presentations enhanced the work of many lessons in addition to promoting cultural awareness. A video clip, in one instance, served to promote the vocabulary and key expressions necessary for oral and written language-skills development. Very good use was made of flashcards to expand vocabulary. Teachers should consider displaying these flashcards on the walls for the duration of the topic in order to consolidate learning. In one lesson, students kept verb boxes to which they added new verbs learnt in class. The lesson began with students working in pairs doing a quick revision of verbs selected randomly from the boxes. This innovative practice is commended.

- The integrated approach observed in all lessons facilitated good development of the different language skills, including grammar. Of particular note was one senior cycle lesson, where the teacher using this integrated approach skilfully fed the work of the lesson into examination preparation. In this way, the examination question was used to assess the learning outcome for the lesson rather than dictate it.

- The use of pair or group work, as observed in some lessons, supported active learning and oral skills development. The inclusion of at least one group task in all lessons is recommended. These tasks should be kept short and focused and students should be asked to report back on the contributions from their partners. This ensures that the work is completed and that students extend their skills moving from speaking in the first person to the third person.

- There was very good classroom management throughout and students engaged well with all lessons. Their responses indicated good understanding of the work and a willingness and ability to communicate in French. The good attention to pronunciation, observed in some lessons, also resulted in greater student confidence when reading aloud in French.

- Homework was given and corrected in all instances. In some lessons the level of supportive and informative detail in teacher corrections was of a very high standard. In situations which don’t require a comment, teachers should sign and date their corrections to indicate the difference between teacher and student corrections.
• Good assessment practices are in place. Class tests are given regularly and students sit common examinations at Christmas and in the summer. An aural component is incorporated into all formal examinations and students are given an oral assessment at the end of the year. Student outcomes in the state examinations are good.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

• There is good whole-school provision and support for modern languages. Students can choose French or German on entry into first year. It is also possible to study the two languages to Leaving Certificate. However, modern languages are optional subjects in Scoil Mhuire. School management should keep this under review as they have a responsibility to ensure that students and their parents fully comprehend the implications for their future educational choices of not having studied a modern European language.

• A number of teachers have attended in-service language courses and this is good practice. In addition to pursuing their own professional development, teachers offer a variety of co-curricular activities, thereby enhancing the enjoyment of learning French as well as promoting cultural awareness.

• An attractive and stimulating language learning environment was evident in all of the classrooms visited. However, some posters need to be enlarged for ease of visibility. There is good access to resources and teachers have built up a range of supplementary materials for use in lessons. All classrooms are ICT enabled and there was evidence to indicate that the use of technology is well embedded into classroom practice.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

• Systems are in place to support subject planning. There is a subject co-ordinator for French, a position that is voluntary and rotated. However, teachers generally work as a team and in collaboration with the other modern language departments. This good practice facilitates the sharing of ideas and ensures greater consistency in the teaching and learning of modern languages.

• Formal subject meetings take place each term and minutes are kept of the proceedings. Teachers also meet informally on a regular basis. A brief record should be kept of any key decisions taken at these meetings.

• Good work has been completed in developing a subject plan for French. The planning document outlines the French department’s aims and objectives and the school’s organisational and operating context. The inclusion of the syllabus in the plan is good practice to remind teachers of the importance of working to the syllabus rather than the textbook. Comprehensive schemes of work have been developed for each year group, many tabulated in terms of outcomes, resources, methodologies and assessment. It is recommended that, as part of future planning, teachers should document in the long-term plan the global learning outcomes for each year group in terms of ‘can do’ statements.

• The content of the Transition Year (TY) plan indicates some good choices of topics to be covered. However, the plan should be further developed. Methodologies which will encourage learning by doing are recommended; getting TY students to organise co-curricular activities as an outcome of their learning, or creating and delivering PowerPoint presentations in French.
There was very good individual preparation for the lessons observed. There was advance readiness of technical equipment and all teachers had prepared supplementary materials to support the work of the lesson.

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 was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; a response was not received from the board.