Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Causeway Comprehensive School
County Kerry
Roll number: 70540E

Date of inspection: 17 May 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

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MAIN FINDINGS

• Good quality teaching was observed with some examples of very good practice.
• Classroom practice was characterised by the effective use of well-prepared resources, clear teaching of grammar and opportunities for independent learning.
• The teacher-student rapport is very positive.
• Subject planning, including evaluation, is well-advanced.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• An increased focus on supporting learning during class-time is required.
• Resources for French should be upgraded in order to facilitate the incorporation of new technologies in the teaching of the subject.
• Future subject planning should prioritise the setting of some short-term targets such as the improvement of pronunciation.
INTRODUCTION

Causeway Comprehensive School is a co-educational school with an enrolment of 581 students. It serves a largely rural student population in North Kerry and is involved in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) action plan. The school provides a number of curricular programmes, including an optional Transition Year (TY).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The standard of teaching was good in the lessons observed with some examples of very good practice. The choice of topics was suited to the level of the students and to the time of year.
- Grammar was well-taught. Students demonstrated a good understanding of grammatical structures and knowledge of prior learning.
- It was very positive that opportunities for independent learning were factored into lesson planning. The strategies were particularly successful when careful whole-class preparation preceded an activity such as pair work. In addition to fostering independent learning, pair or group work could also contribute to the development of students’ oral or written skills through the presentation of findings at the end of the activity. This would help to consolidate students’ learning and would allow for a better balance between teacher talk and student input. These or similar strategies to support students’ learning in class are recommended.
- Resources such as flash cards, worksheets and listening texts were used effectively to test students’ knowledge. Further exploitation of these materials, to teach global listening skills and as the basis for oral and written work, is recommended as a way of supporting students in their learning.
- The use of the target language for communication purposes by the teachers was good in most lessons. However, the provision of a direct translation into English should be avoided as it both slows the pace of the lesson and does away with the need for students to listen attentively to the target language. In order to encourage students to make more use of French during the lessons, questions should be phrased in a way that will encourage students to respond in the target language.
- As students’ pronunciation and intonation was often poor, the improvement of pronunciation should be prioritised. The inclusion of an assessment of oral skills in junior cycle would emphasise the importance of correct pronunciation and would encourage communication in the language.
- While homework was assigned and corrected, there should be more monitoring of students’ learning during the lesson. This could be achieved through checking with the students regarding any difficulties encountered during an exercise. This would identify specific learning needs arising from an activity or text and would help students to engage in self-evaluation.
- Students’ behaviour was good in all the lessons observed. A high level of engagement and enjoyment was evident in those lessons where the teachers created a positive and affirming learning environment through their choice of activities. The enthusiasm generated by the teacher was also a key factor in encouraging students’ participation.
SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- French is a core subject in junior cycle and an optional subject in senior cycle. Depending on students’ choices, French may be offered in mixed-ability classroom settings in both junior and senior cycle.
- Timetabling provision for the subject is satisfactory with all single class periods in junior cycle. Double periods are limited to senior cycle only.
- Good extracurricular and co-curricular supports for French include cinema visits and a letter-writing programme in conjunction with a school in France. Kerry Education Service (KES) funds an annual student scholarship for attendance at a French language course. Additional supports have also been accessed through the DEIS action plan.
- The whole-school assessment policy includes a comprehensive homework policy, assessment guidelines and study procedures targeted at both students and parents.
- At present there are six teachers of French. In order to facilitate the monitoring of students’ progress as they transfer from junior cycle to senior cycle, a small core team of teachers, to take classes at both levels, should be maintained. This continuity would help to ensure a strong and dynamic subject department.
- A system of both designated teacher rooms and base classrooms for students is in place. While the provision of two designated teacher rooms allows for the display of language posters, the fixed-seating arrangement within the main French classroom does not facilitate the monitoring of students’ work by the teacher, and limits the scope for the use of some teaching methodologies. A more conventional seating arrangement would facilitate small group work and active methodologies. This should be addressed.
- Resources for the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into the teaching and learning of French are currently limited. A computer room is available on a booking basis but the subject would benefit from the provision of a data projector in at least one of the language rooms. This should become a subject department priority.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Good progress has been made in the development of a comprehensive subject plan for French. Schemes of work and the good practice of including goals for the subject form part of the plan. In order to further promote teacher collaborative planning, the department should look at identifying some short-term and medium-term targets as part of their yearly planning for French. This would allow for specific learning goals to be addressed such as pronunciation and oral proficiency.
- It is positive that, as part of their ongoing evaluation of the subject, the teachers have identified student motivation as a key factor in improving attainment and performance. Future planning should focus on ways of increasing students’ motivation and interest in the language, through increased use of active learning methodologies, and by highlighting cultural awareness as a means of enhancing the learning experience.
- There was good individual planning and preparation for the lessons observed. Appropriate resources such as worksheets were carefully adapted and differentiated in order to address the ability level and learning needs of students.
• An analysis of results in the certificate examinations is carried out each year by senior management. Feedback on the results is given to the teachers, parents and KES, and the data is used to assist in the formation of class groups and in the provision of learning support. It is suggested that the data should also be used to inform strategic planning within the subject department. An analysis of the results in French could be used both to track trends in the uptake of the language among the student cohort as well as the corresponding uptake of levels in the certificate examinations.

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.