Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Mount Mercy College
Model Farm Road, Cork
Roll number: 62661U

Date of inspection: 7 October 2011
REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

<table>
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<th>Dates of inspection</th>
<th>5, 6 and 7 October 2011</th>
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| Inspection activities undertaken | • Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods
• Examination of students’ work
• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and teachers

• Review of relevant documents
• Discussion with principal, deputy principal and teachers
• Interaction with students

MAIN FINDINGS

• The quality of teaching and learning was commendable in most lessons observed with some excellent practice evident.

• Most lessons were conducted in the target language.

• Student participation was best enabled where lessons were not overly teacher centred.

• Student learning is well supported by the emphasis placed on grammatical and linguistic accuracy, by regular assignment and correction of homework and regular assessment of student progress.

• The school is very committed to the provision of languages as part of the curriculum.

• Levels of achievement in certificate examinations are notably good.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

• Use of the target language is encouraged in all lessons both as the medium of instruction and for the purposes of transactional communication.

• Teachers of French are advised to make greater use of authentic listening material in junior classes, to ensure that learning goals are specified, to continue to integrate the use of information and communication technology (ICT) and to incorporate active learning methodologies.

• Common assessments should be introduced for all junior classes.

• Classroom provision should be enhanced by the establishment of a French room, the building of library-based resources and the creation of a link with a French school.
INTRODUCTION
Mount Mercy College is a girls’ voluntary secondary school with a current enrolment of 732. The school offers Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY) and Leaving Certificate. French is one of three modern languages provided as part of the curriculum.

TEACHING AND LEARNING
- Lesson content selected was syllabus appropriate. Where most successfully exploited, it was linked to the lives of the students, allowed for the integration of the various language skills and for the development of cultural awareness.
- The extent to which the target language was used varied. In some lessons, French was skilfully used both as the medium of instruction and for the purposes of transactional communication. There were some very good examples of how language acquisition and production can be supported by strategies such as oral starts to lessons, the use of probing questions, mind maps and the giving of alternatives and explanations in French. It was clear however that, at times, an unnecessary dependence on translation was being created. It is advised that any such dependence be avoided.
- The importance of the integrated use of authentic auditory material to support language acquisition in junior classes in particular was discussed. This aids intonation and pronunciation and supports the acquisition of reproducible linguistic structures. It was also advised that the approach taken to listening comprehension should support the development of global listening skills.
- It was evident that the students are developing very good levels of language awareness. This finding was supported by the very clear levels of student recall. It was very positive to note that students are being taught, and use, grammatical terminology. Students are encouraged to make notes to support their own language acquisition. This also provides good support for the development of student literacy.
- Although there were a number of examples of the use of strategies such as pair work and dialogues, quite a number of lessons observed were largely teacher centred. The creation of more opportunities for student oral participation, and greater use of active learning methodologies would reduce somewhat any over-reliance on the teacher.
- There was some evidence of the integration of ICT with the use of images to provide a visual stimulus for language production and the use of clips to support the development of cultural awareness. An opportunity now exists to extend practice in this area
- All lessons were well managed in a supportive and encouraging atmosphere.
- Much attention is paid to the assignment and monitoring of homework. An examination of student work confirmed that students get much practice at written composition. The careful attention paid to the monitoring of such written work is acknowledged and commended.
- Students are assessed regularly and students’ oral competence is also assessed in senior classes. It is advised that the French department plan overtime to extend the assessment of students’ oral competence to other year groups.
**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- There is very good whole-school support for language learning in Mount Mercy College. Three modern languages are offered as part of the curriculum and students may study two. Uptake of French is generally good.

- Timetabled provision for the subject is good in all years. The allocation of single class periods permits regular contact with the language.

- Recent additions to the ICT infra-structure in the school should allow for the enhancement of teaching and learning. Departmental collaboration should support the extension of the exploitation of this new resource.

- School management supports and encourages participation in teacher professional development. The school has had the services of a French language assistant in recent years. Members of the French department have a tradition of personal and professional commitment to continuing professional development (CPD). It is recommended that this commitment be maintained, and with a personal focus as appropriate.

- A system for the acquisition of resources is in place. An opportunity exists to plan for the acquisition of further library-based resources.

- Some co-curricular and extra-curricular activities such as French week are made available to students. It is recommended that the French department explore the possibility of the creation of a link with a French school as this would provide opportunities for ongoing communication in the target language.

- Students are assigned to base classrooms currently. It is advised that teachers of French explore how best to use the environment of existing base classrooms to support language learning and that school management also explore the possibility of the assigning of one room as a base classroom for the teaching and learning of French. This would allow the creation of a supportive subject-specific learning environment.

**PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- All lessons observed had been carefully planned and prepared. It was suggested that learning goals specific to the lesson be identified and communicated in lessons generally.

- A departmental structure is in place. The position of subject co-ordinator carries specific duties and is rotated among members of the French department. Meetings are held and records retained. It is suggested that the French department develop a focus on teaching and learning at meetings thus supporting the sharing of good practice, change and evolution.

- To date considerable work has been done on planning. Department files include a subject and year plans, teaching materials, lists of resources and comparative examination related data. It is suggested that the French department agree a textbook for junior cycle classes and plan to introduce common assessments to complement the implementation of a common syllabus and agreed year plans. It is also advised that the planning template be discussed and, that when being revised, it should allow for a focus on issues such as methodologies and skills development as well as programme content. The planning template available to schools is the most appropriate for use in TY.

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 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.

Published, March 2012