An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Bishopstown Community School
Bishopstown, Cork
Roll number: 91397T

Date of inspection: 25 March 2010

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Bishopstown Community School. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in French and makes recommendations for the further development of the teaching of this subject in the school. The evaluation was conducted over one day during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and examined students' work. The inspector reviewed school planning documentation and teachers' written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

French is the only modern European language available to students in Bishopstown Community School and access to the subject is open to all. French is a core subject in junior cycle. The option bands for senior cycle year are based on students' preferences and they choose their optional subjects at the end of third year or Transition Year following advice from their teachers and the guidance counsellor. An information evening is held for parents to enable them to help their children to make informed choices.

Students in junior cycle are timetabled for four single periods per week of French. This is in line with syllabus requirements. While the students are taught in mixed-ability groups, all students are encouraged to follow the higher-level French course. Those who opt to take the ordinary-level paper make the decision following consultation with their parents and advice from the teacher. The time allocated to French in senior cycle is very good. In Transition Year (TY), there is a timetabling allocation of three single periods while in fifth year, students have two double and two single periods per week. The LCA class has three single periods per week.

The language teacher is classroom based and the wall space is used productively to display a range of maps, posters and charts including numerous examples of students' work. The film projects done by students in TY serve well to highlight French culture. In addition, the display of key words linked to the films focuses attention on language awareness. This helps to create a colourful and stimulating learning environment. Photographic displays recording the most recent annual *petit déjeuner* held in the school and a visit by a theatre-for-schools group are displayed on the walls near the language room. These photographs of French-related school events promote the language and create an awareness of how it is linked to other subject areas in the school.

The provision of information and communication technology (ICT) is excellent and facilities include two computer rooms which are booked on a weekly basis by the French teacher. Students are provided with a list of relevant web sites which they can access as they wish. They work on interactive exercises that they save to their own French folder. This is a positive approach as it

encourages independent learning. Plans are proceeding for the installation of a number of computers in a room adjoining the language room. This will allow for more immediate access to ICT facilities and will help to further support differentiation in teaching and learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Extensive work has taken place in subject planning and a comprehensive subject file has been prepared which includes annual schemes of work. It is very positive that an emphasis is put on the use of learning outcomes in the yearly plans. Other documents include planning for students with special educational needs, cross-curricular planning and effective teaching methodologies. A plan has also been prepared for those students with English as an additional language (EAL) who are studying French. This links the more general policy on planning for a culturally diverse society to the specific context of the subject department. As French is a single teacher department, it is very positive that the teacher holds regular informal meetings with members of other departments to discuss ideas for cross-curricular co-operation or for the development of ICT facilities for teaching and learning. The good practice of keeping a record of these meetings is noted.

Very good individual planning and preparation was evident in the lessons observed. It is clear that active learning methodologies and strategies to promote learner autonomy are used to inform lesson planning. Work sheets and a range of visual aids such as flash cards and posters are employed to engage students in learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of teaching and learning was very good in the lessons observed. The target language was used for the teaching of class content and for classroom management. Phrases to help students to communicate with the teacher are prominently displayed on the walls and students showed fluency in asking questions and in spelling words in the target language. It was good to note that attention was paid to establishing correct pronunciation and to the development of listening skills. Students were encouraged to ask and to answer questions in French; this is very good practice.

The lessons observed had clear aims and learning outcomes and these were shared with students. Lessons were well structured and resources such as handouts and flashcards were used to enhance learning and to ensure a smooth progression from one activity to the next. The use of colour in the worksheets to highlight the relevant grammatical structures helped to focus students' attention on the key words in the sentences and avoided the need for lengthy explanations. There was a very good balance between grammar work and the key language skills of aural, oral and written work. A range of questioning techniques enabled the teacher to motivate all students and this was particularly effective given the mixed-ability groupings. It was very positive that the variety of activities helped to keep students interested and engaged while allowing opportunities for students to work individually and in pairs. This was especially noticeable in the case of a double lesson period. As this can often be difficult for language learning, the timetabling of the second part of the lesson in the computer room gave the students renewed energy and they worked enthusiastically on their individual language folders during this time. The teacher was able to monitor students' progress and to give assistance where required.

There was a very high level of competence and skill demonstrated by the teacher. In addition the teacher's energy and enthusiasm helped to create a challenging and stimulating lesson environment and the students responded very positively to this approach. It was evident that the students enjoyed their work and that they benefited from the individual attention, encouragement and affirmation that they received from the teacher. The atmosphere in the classroom was relaxed yet purposeful and students were polite and co-operative at all times.

ASSESSMENT

A range of assessment modes is used to monitor students' progress in the subject. Class tests are held regularly at the completion of units of work. Formal house examinations are held at Christmas and in the summer for all classes while students in third year and Leaving Certificate year sit the pre-examinations in February. The results of the formal examinations are posted to parents. Parent-teacher meetings are organised during the year and the school journal is also used as a means of contact between parents and teachers. Record-keeping procedures are well developed and documented. The subject teacher keeps an on-going record of all class work while copies of test results are kept on file by the year head.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The level of provision of resources for French is very good and ICT is well integrated into the teaching of the subject.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- French is used both for teaching lesson content and for communication in the classroom, and students are given frequent opportunities to use the language.

The quality of planning and teaching in this subject is of a high standard and consequently no main recommendations are warranted.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the principal at the conclusion of the evaluation when the draft findings of the evaluation were presented and discussed.

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