An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Coláiste Íde agus Iosef
Abbeyfeale, County Limerick
Roll number: 76093M

Date of inspection: 27 January 2015

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS AGUS SCILEANNA | DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	**26 and 27 January 2015**
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and teachers • Interaction with students	• Observation of teaching and learning during eight class periods • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed ranged from good to very good with some elements of a very high quality.
- Lessons were well prepared and supported by a range of resources.
- Very good practice was seen in the creative use of film and song to encourage student engagement and participation.
- Subject provision and whole-school support for French is very good.
- Very good extracurricular support for the language has been developed.
- Good progress has been achieved in subject planning including the introduction of common examinations in junior cycle.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- A strategy for making French the language of the classroom and for encouraging student communication in the language, should be adopted.
- In order to promote increased student ownership of learning, it is recommended that there be greater use of the principles and practices of assessment for learning (AfL).
- The learning possibilities offered by songs and aural material should be further exploited for the teaching of global listening skills.
- Subject department planning should prioritise the introduction of an annual assessment of aural and oral proficiency for all year groups.

INTRODUCTION

Coláiste Íde agus Iosef, Abbeyfeale is a co-educational post-primary school under the trusteeship of the Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board. The school was established in 2011 following the amalgamation of three schools, and has a current enrolment of 641 students. It offers the full range of curricular programmes in junior cycle and senior cycle including an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Eight lessons were observed in the course of the evaluation across a range of year groups and programmes. The quality of teaching and learning ranged from good to very good with some elements of a very high quality.
- Established classroom routines were evident. Lessons were well prepared and learning activities were varied. Carefully chosen worksheets supported the learning activities and were well suited to the abilities of the students.
- The intended learning outcomes were generally shared with students at the start of lessons. This is good practice and should be further developed to include time for the monitoring and assessment of learning during the lesson and also at its conclusion.
- French was used as the language of instruction by teachers in most lessons. Very good practice was evident where students were encouraged to communicate with each other and with the teacher in the target language. Team-teaching was also used very effectively to create opportunities for authentic interaction and communication.
- There was good attention paid to correct pronunciation in some lessons with students encouraged to practise new vocabulary when answering questions or when working in pairs. However, at other times, the questioning techniques employed were more likely to require answers in English. In order to encourage and affirm students' communication in French, a strategy for making French the language of the classroom should be adopted by the teachers of the subject.
- A high level of competence and skill was demonstrated by the creative use of film, song and games to encourage student engagement and participation. Student initiative was facilitated through these independent learning activities and students clearly enjoyed the activities and responded well to the challenges set for them.
- Very good work was also evident where key skills such as language awareness were taught and where students were encouraged to recognise language patterns in spoken and written French. In order to help students to develop their global listening skills, it is recommended that the learning possibilities offered by aural material such as songs and recordings should be exploited.
- There was an appropriate focus on vocabulary, and it was positive that attention was paid to subject-specific language and to key words. Vocabulary was taught in context and supported by exercises which students completed in class, and they were encouraged to note and learn new vocabulary. It is suggested that a strategy such as the *mot du jour* could be introduced to complement the current vocabulary work.
- In order to promote increased student ownership of learning, it is recommended that there be greater use of the principles and practices of assessment for learning (AfL). Such

practices should include the use of more varied questioning techniques as well as time for self and peer assessment of learning at the end of the lesson.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- Provision for modern foreign languages is very strong with both French and German offered in the school. The study of a foreign language is mandatory in both junior and senior cycle. Students study French and German in first year and at the end of that year they select one language for further study. This practice of facilitating an informed student choice is very positive.
- The timetabling allocation for French is three single periods per week in first year. This allocation increases to five single periods in subsequent years. The provision of single periods is commended as it ensures that students have access to a daily language lesson.
- The teachers have designated rooms which are bright, airy and well-resourced and equipped. It was very positive to note the creation of a *coin culturel* or visually stimulating language-learning environment in some classrooms with maps, posters, and samples of students' work on display. Seating arrangements in some instances facilitated teacher mobility as well as student interaction and group work. However, there is scope to develop this supportive and print-rich environment in all of the French classrooms.
- The subject department has developed very good extra-curricular support for French including the celebration of European Day of Languages, visits from a theatre group, the organisation of a French breakfast as well as opportunities to participate in competitions, a language exchange and school tours to France. It is evident that the teachers are committed to the promotion of languages within the school and to providing students with opportunities to broaden their cultural horizons.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- The subject department meets regularly and records are kept of these meetings. One of the teachers acts as subject co-ordinator and this role is rotated amongst the teachers in order to promote collaboration as is good practice.
- Very good progress has been made in subject planning, and a comprehensive and well-organised subject plan has been developed. Resources for French are stored electronically on the school server and resource materials are also available in the school library. It is good to note that the resources include a variety of evaluation templates for use by the subject department.
- A priority for the subject department in the current year has been the introduction of common examinations for first-year and second-year class groups. This target has been achieved. In order to build on this positive initiative, it is recommended that an annual assessment of aural and oral proficiency should now be prioritised for all year groups.
- As the school is a relatively new school, it is suggested that an analysis of students' achievement in languages in the certificate examinations over a number of years should be carried out. The findings would allow for the uptake of higher and ordinary level to be monitored and for factors such as the level of uptake by gender to be noted by the subject department.

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.

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