An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Holy Child Community School
Sallynoggin, County Dublin
Roll number: 91330K

Date of inspection: 27 January 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 Holy Child Community School, Sallynoggin. 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 two days during which the inspector visited classrooms and observed teaching and learning. The inspector interacted with students and teachers, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teachers. 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. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report, and the response of the board will be found in the appendix of this report.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Holy Child Community School is a co-educational school with 263 students. The study of a modern European language has recently been changed from being an optional subject to becoming part of the core curriculum in junior cycle. This is commended as it reflects the commitment of the school to the study of modern languages. Students can choose between French and Spanish.

There is good whole school provision and support for French in the allocation of time. The timetabling in most instances affords students regular contact with the target language. The Transition Year (TY) programme offered in the current academic year was timetabled as a half year module, which reduced the contact time with the language for students. However, the principal reported that the timetabling of TY in the current year was not in accordance with usual practice and would be rectified in future years.

Classrooms are teacher based and the rooms visited had attractive displays of posters, maps and charts of key grammar points. This is commended. To extend the benefits of this attractive language learning environment teachers should have discrete walls for subject-related posters in situations where more than one subject is taught. It is also recommended that teachers display charts containing classroom language to support the use of French as the language of the classroom.

There is good whole-school provision of resources, which are made available on request to school management. Teachers have designated CD players and televisions in each classroom. Resources include class sets of books, CDs, videos and DVDs games and worksheets. There are two computer rooms available for use in the school and all teachers have computers, data projectors and internet access in their classrooms. There was evidence to indicate that teachers have embraced information and communication technology (ICT) to support their work in the classroom. This is commended.

A range of commendable co-curricular and cross-curricular activities are organised each year in the school. Good links have been developed with a French school and students in TY and fifth year participate in an annual trip to France where they visit their partner school and complete a range of language learning assignments. This is highly commended as it promotes both language learning and cultural awareness in addition to enhancing intercultural dialogue. A number of French scholarships are also offered by the school to students wishing do a language course during the summer holidays. These initiatives are also commended. Other co-curricular activities include French theatre for schools events and an annual auction which is carried out using the medium of all the languages taught in the school. The teachers of French also work with the Home Economics, Music and Art departments to organise French cooking, singing and poster competitions. TY students are afforded the opportunity to go to the cinema to see French films and visit a French café as part of their language learning experiences. Senior management and the members of the French department are commended for their commitment to ensuring that students of French are afforded a range of activities which enhance the enjoyment of language learning.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Holy Child Community School has embraced subject planning as part of the whole school planning initiative. There is a subject co-ordinator for French, a position which is currently a post of responsibility. In order to afford all teachers the opportunity to further their subject specific expertise and to take ownership of the subject planning process, consideration should be given to introducing a voluntary rotating position of subject co-ordinator for French to support the overall co-ordination of modern languages. Regular subject planning meetings are facilitated by senior management and minutes are kept of all meetings. This is good practice.

Subject planning documentation submitted on the day of the inspection indicates that good structures are in place to support effective subject planning. A range of relevant questions has been drawn up to facilitate teachers in the development of a comprehensive policy for the teaching and learning of French. The planning folder for French included documentation relating to students' learning styles, the resources available in the school for the teaching and learning of the subject, the use of the target language in the classroom, the role of the special needs assistant (SNA) in the classroom and an analysis of what is working well and what is not working in relation to the teaching of French. A draft policy for assessment was also included. There were a number of documents outlining the aims and objectives for the teaching and learning of French. To ensure that teachers are complying with the most up-to-date version of their subject plan, it is recommended that all other versions should be archived separately.

In order to progress the long-term subject planning for French, teachers should establish proposed learning outcomes for each year group in terms of what the students will be able to do as an outcome of their learning. These outcomes should focus on the development of transferable skills. Such plans also need to include the linguistic strategies and proposed methodologies to support these outcomes. Planning for a differentiated approach to the teaching and learning of French should also be initiated to support teachers in their efforts to meet the needs of all students. As mentioned earlier, the current half year module for TY is to be changed next year. When planning for the TY programme as a year long programme teachers should ensure that the programme reflects the curriculum principles underpinning an effective Transition Year programme as set out in the document *Transition Year Programmes: Guidelines for Schools* (Department of Education and Skills: 1995).To this end, teachers should plan for innovative approaches such as introducing

elements of learner autonomy, or learning by doing, where students can organise co-curricular activities as an outcome of their learning.

There was evidence of careful preparation for the lessons evaluated with the advance readiness of technical equipment and supplementary resources.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Inspection activities involved the observation of five lessons, two at junior cycle and three at senior cycle. Interaction between the inspector and the students in addition to a review of students' copybooks was also facilitated. Satisfactory teaching and learning was observed in all lessons with some very good practices noted in some instances.

There was varied use of the target language by the teachers in the lessons observed. In some instances French was spoken by the teacher for the entire duration of the lesson and this is commended. While there was some use of the target language in all other lessons, it is recommended that teachers extend its use by giving basic classroom instructions and communicating simple information in French. Students in all lessons should be encouraged to interact in French. To this end they should be given the linguistic strategies to ask simple questions, make requests and express difficulties in the target language. Greater use of French as the language of instruction and communication will improve students' aural and oral skills.

Lessons were well structured and appropriately paced and the content was appropriate to the needs and interests of the students. The lesson plan was communicated to the students in all of the lessons observed. In many instances it was communicated in terms of the proposed learning outcomes for the lesson. This is very good practice as it engages students from the outset as partners in the teaching and learning process. There were also some good examples of the consolidation of previous work feeding into new learning. This is commended.

There was good integration of the different language skills in many of the lessons observed and there were some good examples of the effective integration of grammar into the body of the lesson. Elements of cultural awareness were also well integrated into some lessons and this is good practice. ICT was used in all lessons and some very good practices were observed in some instances. Teachers are commended for embracing ICT as a tool for teaching and learning.

Song was used in one instance to support teaching and learning. The use of song is good practice. In this instance however, it was not clear as to the exact purpose of the activity as the song chosen did not contain many examples of the grammar points identified in the following phase of the lesson. It is important to keep in mind that the song is the medium through which the teacher works to promote learning rather than being an end in itself. The song chosen should thus have sufficient examples of the linguistic elements being taught. To this end teachers should research the different websites on the internet which contain the texts of modern songs suitable for teaching purposes.

Pair work was observed in some lessons and this is commended as it supported active learning promoting oral skills development. The activities were short and focused in line with good practice. A debate was used in one lesson to develop students' oral skills. The use of a debate is good practice for developing students' confidence and competence in communicating in the target language. However, in this instance designated students read out answers from a prepared sheet while others disengaged from the work in hand. To optimise the benefits of using debate to encourage oral skills development it is recommended that a range of preparatory activities be

introduced to support students in their endeavours. Such activities could include calling out a word and getting students to use it in a sentence or making a short statement and asking students to respond. The use of such activities would also support the different needs and abilities of the student cohort.

Some of the lessons observed were teacher directed thereby limiting opportunities for active learning. Teachers should remain cognisant of the need to balance teacher instruction with student activity by ensuring that all lessons include a range of student-based activities including pair and group work tasks.

There was good classroom management throughout and most students engaged with the work of the lesson. Their responses indicated a good understanding of the work in hand and they applied themselves to any task given. Many students revealed good willingness to communicate in French when interacting with the inspector. However, there were some who remained somewhat disengaged and were reticent about communicating in the target language. In these instances a more differentiated approach to the teaching of the subject in addition to engaging them in student-based tasks should address this issue.

ASSESSMENT

A range of assessment protocols including question and answer sessions in class, homework assignments, short tests and formal examinations are used to monitor students' progress. A review of students' copybooks indicated that homework is given and corrected, with informative comments included in some instances. This is good practice. However, students' should be encouraged to organise the work in their copybooks more systematically for ease of reference.

Teachers give end-of-chapter and mid-term tests, and students sit formal examinations at Christmas and in the summer. Certificate examination students sit mock examinations in the second term. An aural component is included in formal tests and sixth year students are given an oral assessment. It is recommended that the practice of giving an informal oral assessment be introduced for all year groups as this would improve students' oral competence and their confidence in interacting in the target language. The marks for this assessment could be included as a separate mark in their school reports. Student ambition and achievement are also fostered through the practice of giving term awards for academic excellence and endeavour.

Student progress is also supported through the individual meetings held with the principal for Leaving Certificate students. In cases where students are deemed to be underperforming, parents are contacted and daily reports are kept of the student's work and progress. School reports are issued three times yearly for Leaving Certificate students and twice yearly for all others. A review of student outcomes in the state examinations indicates that the uptake of levels and the outcomes are appropriate to the student cohort.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole school support and provision for French in the allocation of time, timetabling and the provision of resources.
- There is good provision of ICT facilities and evidence to indicate that ICT has been embraced as a tool for the teaching and learning of French.

- A very good range of co-curricular and cross-curricular activities is in place.
- A variety of methodologies including the use of ICT was observed and many were used to good effect.

As a means of building on these strengths and to address areas for development, the following key recommendations are made:

- A long-term subject plan for French should be progressed by establishing desired learning outcomes for each year group and including in the plan the linguistic strategies and proposed methodologies to support such outcomes.
- The use of French as the language of instruction and communication should be extended.
- Where relevant, greater use should be made of methodologies which promote active student engagement and learning.

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

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Appendix

School response to the report

Submitted by the Board of Management

Area 2: Follow-up actions planned or undertaken since the completion of the inspection activity to implement the findings and recommendations of the inspection

- Further Development of E Learning in French classes
- Long term and short term subject planning being progressed at present.