An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Subject Inspection: French
REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name	Sacred Heart Secondary School
Seoladh na scoile/School address	Daingean Road Tullamore Co. Offaly
Uimhir rolla/Roll number	65620V
Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation	11/03/2025
Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report	23/05/2025

What is a subject inspection?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector(s) evaluated learning and teaching in French under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

Included in this subject inspection report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

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.

Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:</td></tr>
<tr><td>Child Protection</td><td>Anti-bullying</td></tr>
<tr><td>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.
2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.
3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</td><td>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013) or Bí Cineálta (2024) and this policy is reviewed annually.
2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.</td></tr>
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The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

Subject inspection

Date of inspection	11/03/2025
Inspection activities undertaken • Review of relevant documents • Discussion with principal and key staff • Interaction with students, including focus groups	• Observation of teaching and learning during 4 lessons • Examination of students' work • Feedback to principal and relevant staff

School context

Sacred Heart Secondary School, Tullamore is an all-girls voluntary secondary school under the trusteeship of the Catholic Education, An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST), with a current enrolment of 581 students. The school offers the Junior Cycle, an optional Transition Year programme (TY), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA), and the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE).

Summary of main findings and recommendations:

Findings

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was very good.
- Respectful and positive teacher-student and student-student interactions were a notable feature of all lessons.
- French was the main language of communication between teachers and students in all lessons observed.
- Whole school support and subject provision for French were very good.
- Planning and preparation for French were very good.

Recommendations

- At Junior Cycle there was a particular focus on the Communicative Competence strand of the Specification for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). There was scope in the majority of lessons, to integrate more fully the other two strands, Language Awareness and Intercultural Awareness.
- In a minority of lessons, there was scope to revisit previously learned vocabulary or grammar in order to support and frame new learning.

Detailed findings and recommendations

1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was very good.
- All teachers, communicated predominantly in French with minimum translation into English. In all lessons it was clear that students benefitted from the rich linguistic environment created by teachers. Students demonstrated very good comprehension of the target language when engaging with their teacher and the inspector in French.
- Overall, there was a very good focus on the development of students' oral skills in all lessons. Students were required to answer the roll in French and students were regularly invited to read French text aloud which they readily volunteered to do. Teachers often deviated from planned teaching into spontaneous conversations in French with students. Teachers consistently questioned students in French which elicited responses in the target language from students. When teaching new language, teachers used choral repetition which was an effective way for students to not only emulate accurate pronunciation from their teacher but also to increase their confidence in speaking French.
- At Junior Cycle there was a notable emphasis on the strand of Communicative Competence in accordance with the Junior Cycle MFL specification. In addition to Communicative Competence, there was scope in the majority of lessons, to draw students' attention to and integrate more fully the other two strands of Language Awareness and Intercultural Awareness.
- All teachers shared learning intentions in written and verbal form with students at the beginning of all lessons. In one lesson, learner outcomes were differentiated and learning intentions were revisited at the end of the lesson. This was very good practice and should be extended to other lessons.
- All teachers were very well prepared for lessons with high quality appropriate materials and resources. The variety of resources used in lessons observed included a very good mix of digital resources or hardcopy resources in the form of handouts. Handouts provided scaffolded support for students as well as extension tasks, ensuring success for all students. In one lesson, very good provision and support for international students was available in a handout that included the translation of important vocabulary and grammar into several languages to meet the needs of the diverse student body. This was highly commendable.
- Materials selected by teachers promoted student collaboration and appealed to students' interests. These resources were not dependent on the textbook but included short videos, interactive games, web-based tools for language learning, and digital presentations. Resources selected by teachers ensured a swift pace of learning where students worked collaboratively, were very engaged and demonstrated enjoyment in their learning.
- In the majority of lessons, content selected by the teacher was appropriate to the learning intention, logical, sequential and provided very good scaffolding for students who were in need of specific support in their learning. In highly effective practice, new learning was introduced and reinforced in a variety of ways that incorporated prior learning. In a minority of lessons, there was scope to revisit previously learned vocabulary or grammar needed to support and frame new learning. It is recommended that, in all lessons, students have opportunities to refresh previously learned vocabulary.
- Students were provided with varied activities and experiences which effectively supported active participation. Active approaches noted in lessons included games that required students to stand up to play 'Simon says' in French, ball throwing and taking turns to write answers on the board. These approaches contributed positively to high levels of student engagement and enjoyment in the learning of French.
- There was highly effective use of digital technology by teachers to support the student learning experience. In the focus group, students commented positively on the school's identity as a 'digital school' and on their ability to communicate in French, research and complete projects using digital technology.

- Self-assessment strategies were a notable feature of all lessons. Teachers regularly encouraged students to self-assess when answers were given to the whole class. Teachers monitored the quality of student self-corrections by circulating the classroom. Students were regularly encouraged to note previously unknown vocabulary which was an effective means for students to develop a sense of ownership of and responsibility for their learning. Assessment of learning often included students naming one thing they learned in class and sometimes naming three things learned in the class on a given day. In the focus group, students commented on their enjoyment of self- and peer-assessment opportunities.
- All classrooms were colourful, print-rich rooms displaying students' work, flags, posters relating to French culture, French language and grammar, in addition to motivational quotes in French.
- Lessons took place within a positive learning environment and the enthusiasm of the teachers for their subject was evident. All teachers regularly circulated the room and provided very good individual support where necessary. Very respectful and positive teacher-student and student-student interactions were a notable feature of all lessons. Student behaviour was very good in the lessons observed. All teachers displayed excellent knowledge and awareness of their students. In the focus group, students commented on their positive relationships with all French teachers.

2. Subject provision and whole school support

- Subject provision and whole school support were very good.
- Three modern languages were on offer at Junior Cycle including French, German and Spanish and choice was based on student preference. Management supported any student wishing to study a second modern foreign language. This was very good practice and aligned with government policy, as outlined in *Languages Connect – Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education*.
- All French teachers were members of the professional association of French teachers in Ireland, which was endorsed and financially supported by management.
- Senior management encouraged and supported various co-curricular and extra-curricular activities initiated by teachers of French to raise the profile and uptake of French. Commendably, the French department had recently established formal links with a school in France and participated in a school exchange between Ireland and France. This was praiseworthy as such a link will provide students with rich learning opportunities to develop their language proficiency and intercultural awareness. Students, on the whole were genuinely enthusiastic about their experience of the exchange and their newfound friendships with students in France.
- There was very good access to and support for teachers' professional learning and teachers, admirably, have availed of a range of professional learning opportunities online and in person in Ireland and France.

3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of subject planning within the French department was very good.
- A shared online platform was used for departmental planning and supported the sharing of an extensive bank of resources within the department and with students.
- The French department met regularly as was evidenced by the minutes of meetings. Minutes generally included a record of discussion concerning organisational and whole-school matters. It is recommended that minutes also document discussions related to teaching and learning.
- Senior cycle planning was very good. Planning at senior cycle was time-bound, included general content, methodologies, assessment practices and literacy and numeracy considerations. This was effective in providing very good structure for teaching and learning and to facilitate departmental review. Planning at junior cycle contained good

detail with scope for further development. To further the good work already undertaken at junior cycle, the French department should now include details of the precise language, methodologies and assessment practices to be used to align with the very good planning noted at senior cycle.

- Given the need to raise the profile of French in the school, it is recommended that the departmental plan include short, medium and long-term goals to maintain and continually improve the uptake of French. These goals should be identified in conjunction with senior management and progress in these areas should be monitored.
- The French department regularly collaborated with the German and Spanish departments under the umbrella of MFL. This was commendable. The teachers reported that this helped facilitate professional dialogue and the sharing of best practice.

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.

An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

For the students of Sacred Heart Secondary School about their learning in French
Date of inspection:
11/03/2025

What kind of inspection did your school have?

A subject inspection was completed in your school. The inspector observed lessons and spoke with the principal and teachers. The inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning in French.

What were the main findings of the inspection?

- Teachers consistently spoke French in lessons.
- Teachers prepared very good resources for the teaching and learning of French.
- Students had many opportunities to speak in French in lessons observed.

What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in French?

- Teachers should include French culture and the world of French speaking countries more into lessons.
- Students should be given opportunities to develop language awareness in lessons.

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.

The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
Excellent	**Provision that is excellent** is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
Very good	**Provision that is very good** is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
Good	**Provision that is good** is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
Requires improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard** is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard	**Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard** is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective