

An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Subject Inspection of French
REPORT

Abbey Vocational School
Donegal
Roll number: 71180F

Date of inspection: 18 September 2012



A N R O I N N | D E P A R T M E N T O F
O I D E A C H A I S | E D U C A T I O N
A G U S S C I L E A N N A | A N D S K I L L S

**REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN FRENCH**

INFORMATION ON THE INSPECTION

Dates of inspection	17 and 18 September 2012
Inspection activities undertaken <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of relevant documents• Discussion with principal and teachers• Interaction with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Observation of teaching and learning during six class periods• Examination of students' work• Feedback to principal and teachers

MAIN FINDINGS

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was good or very good.
- French was used as the language of instruction in all of the lessons observed.
- Lessons were well structured and, in most instances, promoted an integrated approach to the development of all the language skills.
- A range of methodologies was observed in all lessons resulting, in most instances, in a good balance between teacher instruction and student activity.
- There is good whole school support for French in the allocation of time and the provision of resources.
- Good work has been completed in subject planning in recent years.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should establish the learning outcomes at the beginning of each lesson, communicate them to the students and revisit them at the end to ensure that they have been achieved.
 - Teachers should incorporate tasks into their lessons that will support greater student interaction with their peers in French in addition to affording them more opportunities for active and independent learning.
 - School management and the teachers of French should explore ways to increase the uptake of languages, particularly among boys.
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INTRODUCTION

Abbey Vocational School is a co-educational vocational school with 733 students. It is the sole provider of post-primary education for students living in Donegal town and its immediate hinterland. It offers a range of curricular programmes to meet the educational needs of the diverse student cohort.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- The target language was used consistently by the teachers in all of the lessons observed. This is commended, particularly in lessons where students were new to the language. There were also many instances of good attention to spelling in French and to the practice of correct pronunciation.
- Students in some lessons made commendable efforts to interact in French. This good practice should be extended to all lessons and students should be further encouraged and supported to interact spontaneously in French at a level appropriate to their stage of learning.
- The lesson plan was written up on the board in French in most of the lessons observed. To further this good practice it is recommended that the lesson plan be reframed and communicated as a learning outcome where students are made aware of what is expected of them in terms of their language skills acquisition. Teachers should also finish the lesson or each phase of the lesson by revisiting the learning outcomes.
- Lessons were well structured and paced. All teachers used a range of methodologies ensuring an appropriate balance between teacher instruction and student activities. In some lessons, the methodologies used actively supported an integrated approach to developing all the language skills. However, further development of the integrated approach is recommended in instances where grammar was taught as a discrete skill.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) was effectively exploited in some lessons. PowerPoint presentations were used by some teachers to provide visual supports while the use of a video clip in one lesson served to actively engage the students with the topic, in addition to providing an effective listening text. Good practice was also noted in the use of a song in one lesson and games in another to consolidate learning in an enjoyable way
- Pair work was observed in most lessons. It was most effective in instances where there was a clear need for interaction and where there was a follow up activity to ensure that students had fully engaged with the tasks assigned. It is recommended that all lessons include at least one task that promotes student interaction with their peers in French in addition to promoting active and independent learning.
- Good practice was noted in some lessons where microphones were used to record students' oral interventions. This approach should enable students to build up their confidence and enhance their outcomes in their end-of-year oral examinations. The recordings should also serve as a useful mode for teachers to formatively assess students' oral skills progress.
- In-class discussion in one lesson yielded good evidence that students are encouraged to reflect on their own work and to assess if instructions are followed. This very good practice should be further extended to include a review of work for the purpose of error recognition and correction.

- A positive learning environment prevailed and students applied themselves to the work of the lesson. However, there were some students who remained passive throughout. To address this, teachers should direct more questions at students who do not volunteer answers and create further opportunities in lessons for individual student tasks and group work activities.
- Although early on in the year, an inspection of students' copybooks indicated that homework has been assigned and corrected, in some instances with helpful formative comments. This good practice should be extended to all class groups. When assigning homework, teachers should also ensure that where appropriate, students are given tasks that will afford them opportunities to manipulate language.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

- There is good whole-school provision and support for French in the allocation of time and the provision of resources. It is recommended that school management should explore ways, whereby French could be timetabled in single periods at junior cycle.
- The study of languages is optional from first year. This should be kept under review as the school has a particular responsibility to ensure that students and their parents fully comprehend the implications of not studying a language for students' future educational choices. School management and subject teachers should also investigate and implement a range of strategies aimed at increasing the uptake of languages, particularly among boys.
- Classrooms are teacher based and this has facilitated the creation of an effective language learning environment in all of the rooms visited. In some instances however, the displays of classroom language needed to be more visible. As the year progresses, teachers should post up expressions for the week or topic in addition to samples of students work. Students themselves could be encouraged to create relevant charts and posters to support their learning over time.
- Teachers currently engage in ongoing professional development by attending meetings organised by the French Teachers' Association (FTA). They should also consider opportunities such as the range of scholarships available for teachers of French and partnership programmes with a French school to further support linguistic upskilling and intercultural dialogue.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

- Considerable work has been carried out in subject planning for French. Subject plans for each year group have been developed to include learning objectives, general methodologies, resources and assessment protocols. To further build on this good work and to support effective self-evaluation within the French department, teachers should, over time, document the outcomes, methodologies, resources and assessment practices to be used specifically for each topic.
- While literacy and numeracy were promoted in lessons through the print-rich environment and the use of dictionaries, teachers should plan collaboratively to ensure that the strategies adopted contribute to a whole school initiative.

- The analysis of examination results and the recent updating of some subject plans indicate that the French Department has actively engaged with the self-evaluation process. Reflections arising from the outcome of lessons should also be used to contribute to ongoing discussion and development within the subject department.
 - There was good individual preparation for all the lessons observed.
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The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the 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.