

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna**  
**Department of Education and Skills**

**Subject Inspection of French**  
**REPORT**

**Coláiste Mhuire,**  
**Askeaton, County Limerick**  
**Roll number: 71700F**

**Date of inspection: 22 September 2011**



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**

<b>Date of inspection</b>	22 September 2011
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and teachers</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during three class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and teachers</li></ul>

**MAIN FINDINGS**

- The quality of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed.
- The target language was used effectively in all lessons.
- There is very good provision for foreign languages in the school.
- The French department is well resourced and has access to a range of information and communication technology (ICT).
- There was clear evidence of good individual planning for the lessons observed, including the preparation of detailed lesson plans and appropriate resources.

**MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS**

- A greater focus on improving students' pronunciation is recommended.
  - Attention should be paid to ensuring a satisfactory balance between teacher input and time for student activity during lessons.
  - Increased use of differentiation is recommended as a way of further supporting and enhancing students' learning.
  - A more even distribution of class periods for French during the school week is recommended, particularly for class groups in junior cycle.
-

## **INTRODUCTION**

Coláiste Mhuire is a co-educational school under the auspices of the County Limerick Vocational Education Committee (VEC) serving the educational needs of students from Askeaton and the surrounding areas. It has a current enrolment of 510 students. The school offers a range of programmes including an optional Transition Year (TY) programme.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

- The standard of teaching and learning was good in the lessons observed.
- The lessons observed were well prepared, and resources such as visual stimuli and PowerPoint presentations had been carefully chosen to support the selected topic.
- There was good use of the target language by the teachers. It was very positive that the acquisition of the relevant phrases for classroom communication by students was highlighted by the teachers in lessons. With junior cycle students, visual stimuli such as flashcards were used to good effect in teaching these expressions.
- As students' pronunciation was sometimes poor, more time should be spent by the teachers on teaching and practising the correct pronunciation of new words before students are introduced to the written form of the word. This would improve the standard of pronunciation and would boost students' confidence in speaking French.
- In some lessons, activities such as games as well as opportunities for pair and group work were an integral part of the lesson structure. Such activities were of benefit in helping to motivate students and to consolidate their learning. It was obvious that the students enjoyed the chance to work together and they were then well-prepared to complete follow-up activities such as written exercises and assigned homework.
- With regard to lesson management, a better balance is sometimes needed between the time given to teacher input and adequate time for students' active participation in the lesson. The imbalance was in part related to the emphasis at times on noting down new vocabulary. While teaching new vocabulary is an essential part of the language classroom, it is recommended that more time should be devoted to active practice of the vocabulary by the students during the lesson. The provision of a handout or more extensive use of the relevant sections of the textbook would reduce the time spent on copying words and would allow more opportunities for students to practise and to learn the new material.
- As students are taught in mixed-ability class groupings, it is recommended that the teachers explore ways of further supporting student learning in the classroom through increased use of differentiation.

## **SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

- Provision for modern foreign languages is very good. Although study of a language is optional, French and German are offered to Leaving Certificate level while Spanish and Italian can be taken at *ab initio* level. Given this strong profile, it is suggested that the language departments collaborate on ways of promoting languages through the celebration of events such as the European Day of Languages.
- Students in first year choose their option subjects following a five-week sampling session. As French is set in option bands that include practical subjects, timetabling for

the language at all levels includes one double period as well as single periods. As regular class contact is regarded as the most favourable for language-learning, particularly in the initial years, it is recommended that the allocated periods be evenly distributed throughout the week particularly in junior cycle.

- An analysis of student attainment in the certificate examinations is carried out by the teachers each year. It is very positive that the results of this analysis are used for the purposes of evaluation and review as well as to inform teaching.
- The resources available to support the teaching of languages are very good and include a language laboratory as well as a data projector and teacher laptop. The teachers have access to the school's e-learning platform, and can share folders on the school server.
- Good co-curricular and extracurricular planning is in place with a tradition of collaboration between the teachers of French and teachers in other subject areas. The school has strong connections with a school in France and it is hoped to further optimise those links through the establishment of a student exchange.
- The French department has recently undergone significant changes in personnel. The commitment of the teachers to establishing a positive relationship with the students and to ensuring a sense of continuity in language-learning for them is acknowledged. Structures such as the VEC induction programme for new staff, the school-based mentoring programme and the support of colleagues are important at such times of transition. Further co-operation as well as the sharing of expertise and resources among the teachers is encouraged in order to establish a strong subject department.
- The teachers of French are committed to their on-going professional development. School management and County Limerick VEC are supportive of the teachers' involvement and their attendance at professional development events is facilitated, where possible.

#### **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- A subject plan is in place which is reviewed annually by the teachers. It is positive that a new action plan for French has been prepared which outlines the aims of the department. The goals include the further development of ICT for teaching and learning, in particular the use of the school's e-learning platform to capitalise on students' interest in ICT.
- There was clear evidence of good individual planning for the lessons observed, including detailed notes and the preparation of good quality resources.
- In the context of ongoing subject department planning, the teachers' intention to introduce an oral assessment for junior cycle French is a welcome initiative as it will contribute to increasing students' fluency and confidence in using the language.

---

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 of the school 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.

*Published, June 2012*

# **Appendix**

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO THE REPORT**

**Submitted by the Board of Management**

## **Area 1 Observations on the content of the inspection report**

The Board of Management of Coláiste Mhuire welcomes the findings of the Inspector's report affirming good practice in the teaching of French in the school. The suggestion of the celebration of events such as European day of Languages echoes what is very much part and parcel of the school's approach to the delivery of modern foreign languages.

The report also commends the teachers for their commitment to their work, their planning and preparation and their high quality teaching. It praises the variety of resources including ICT which is used effectively in the classroom to enhance teaching and learning. In addition to quality teaching & learning within the classroom, the French department takes an integrated curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular approach to the teaching of languages including:

- Quizzes in TY French class and LCVP Italian class.
- Student involvement in a French calendar-design competition, run by Léargas.
- The use of DVDs from Léargas, Languages Initiative and other language websites.
- Student participation in a French themed cookery demonstration (crêpes, etc).
- European Languages Day posters displayed in the language classrooms and on the corridors to increase awareness of the event across the general student population.
- French Theatre for Schools performed plays for students.
- The school hosted a visit of Argentine students and their teachers.
- First years took part in an online quiz on 'la Francophonie'.
- Cross-curricular project presentations with the three language classes combined.

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

Suggestions and recommendations have been noted and are currently being addressed as a means of building on existing strengths. The French department places a very strong emphasis on the development of pronunciation and it is an integral part of the approach to the teaching of the language. Correct pronunciation is modelled and student's grasp of same is tested and regularly monitored and fine tuned as appropriate. To this end, this year's 1<sup>st</sup> year summer assessment includes a mini-oral.

The Board would like to thank the Inspector for the professional and courteous manner in which the inspection process was conducted and for the constructive feedback given to school management and the teachers.