

**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta**

**Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of French  
REPORT**

**Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School  
Rosbercon, New Ross, County Wexford  
Roll number: 636300**

**Date of inspection: 22 January 2007**

**Date of issue of report: 17 January 2008**



**AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS  
AGUS EOLAÍOCHTA | DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATION  
AND SCIENCE**

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

---

**SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT**

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School. 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 one day 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 and subject teachers.

**SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT**

Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School is an all girls' school with an enrolment of 348 students. Students choose between French or German on entry into first year and continue the chosen language through to Leaving Certificate. The inclusion of a modern European language as part of the core curriculum is to be commended.

There is good whole-school support and provision for French in the school. The subject is timetabled for single periods at regular intervals throughout the week. This is commendable practice as it facilitates optimum exposure to the language for students. Classes are mixed ability at junior cycle. Although there is concurrent timetabling at senior cycle which could facilitate the creation of discrete higher and ordinary-level groups, classes are maintained as mixed-ability groupings in response to the large number of students wishing to take higher level for Leaving Certificate. Teachers are to be commended for ensuring that every student is afforded the opportunity to take French at higher level. However, consideration should be given to the creation of two discrete groupings, one comprising those who will definitely be taking the subject at higher level and a second grouping of those who aspire to taking higher-level French, but who may need to advance at a slower pace.

There are three teachers of French in the school. They have all availed of the Department of Education and Science's inservice training for teachers of French in recent years. Some have also attended inservice courses held for teachers of French in Dublin City University (DCU). School management pays for the group membership of the subject associations and teachers reported attending meetings of the recently revived regional branch of the French Teachers' Association. School management and teachers are to be commended for their commitment to continued professional development.

Classrooms are student based. Nevertheless, there were displays of maps, posters and samples of students' work in some of the rooms visited. This is good practice as the provision of a print-rich environment for students is an attractive and effective means of exposing students to many aspects of the French language and culture. It is recommended that, where possible, this practice be extended to all classrooms.

Most teachers have their own designated CD / cassette players or easy access to such equipment. The school also has an audio-visual room which is used for showing films or videos. Resources available to the French department include videos, DVDs, tapes, dictionaries, magazines and books. A small room has recently been allocated to the members of the French department for storing such resources and there is a budget of €400 available for the purchase of resources for the current year.

Practical difficulties in accessing the computer room were the reasons cited for the overall limited use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a teaching tool. However, teachers reported some use of ICT in the language class with junior cycle students and for downloading materials. It is suggested that greater use of ICT be considered as soon as it becomes more accessible. In the interim it is suggested that students be made aware of appropriate websites to support them in their learning of the language.

Co-curricular activities to support the teaching and learning of French include a French breakfast for junior cycle students, French theatre for schools and attendance at French films. The organisation of co-curricular activities is to be commended as it enhances students' enjoyment of learning a language. Teachers also reported that Transition Year (TY) students are planning to organise a quiz and treasure hunt for first-year students later in the year. This is highly commendable as student involvement in the organisation of co-curricular activities benefits all members of the school community both linguistically and socially.

## **PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School is involved in the school development planning process and teachers have embraced collaborative subject planning as part of that process. The members of the French department meet formally in September and informally on a regular basis throughout the year. A co-ordinator of French has been appointed. This is a voluntary position to be rotated among all teachers of French. Minutes have been kept of some French department meetings. It is suggested that a brief note of decisions taken at informal meetings might also be recorded as a means of acknowledging teachers overall contribution to the subject planning process.

A review of the plans submitted indicate that the members of the French department are progressing well in the subject planning process having developed a long-term plan for the teaching and learning of French. As a means of building on the good work completed to date it is suggested that, over time, teachers identify and document for each year group a series of desired learning outcomes in terms of what the students will be able to do as a result of their learning. These plans should also include the linguistic strategies needed to support such outcomes and proposed methodologies to achieve them. This should enable students to develop a range of transferable skills and avoid the problem of subject planning becoming textbook bound. It will also facilitate evaluation of learning and self-evaluation.

Subject plans for French in Transition Year indicated a commitment to promoting a variety of activities and methodologies to support the teaching and learning of French. It is suggested that the introduction of some aspects of learner autonomy would enrich the learning experience of the TY students and prepare them for the challenges of senior cycle.

There was evidence of good preparation for the lessons observed with the advance readiness of audio-visual equipment and worksheets.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

Inspection activities included the observation of five lessons, two at junior level, one TY lesson and two at senior level. There was also the opportunity to interact with the students at the end of each lesson.

All lessons observed were purposeful, well structured and paced, and the content was appropriate to the age and abilities of the students. The textbook was the main resource used in most lessons. This can create difficulties in lessons at senior cycle where students within the same group are taking different levels and consequently have different textbooks. It is suggested that consideration be given to sourcing common texts which can be used by students of all levels and differentiating through the choice of tasks based on the text.

There was extensive use of the target language by the teacher in most of the lessons observed. This is good practice and to be commended. In some instances students also made efforts to communicate in French with simple requests and expressions of difficulty in the target language. This is to be commended. It is recommended that students in all classes be encouraged to interact with the teacher in the target language. This can be achieved by providing students with the linguistic strategies to ask questions, make requests and express difficulties or opinions in simple French. The posting up of key expressions on the walls of the classroom or sticking them on to the front of the students' copies is an effective way of supporting such learning. Grounding the target language in authentic situations will enhance students' communicative competence and confidence. It would also help to reduce the use of translation into English, which was observed in some instances, as the foremost means of ensuring or testing students' comprehension.

Attention to pronunciation and intonation was observed in some lessons with errors discreetly corrected through the use of pronunciation drill at the end of the relevant activity. There were also instances where students were asked to spell out their answers in French. This is to be commended as correct pronunciation and intonation are integral components of successful language learning.

Efforts were made in all lessons observed to integrate the different language skills. This is good practice in line with syllabus requirements. However, it is recommended that greater focus be placed on integrating oral skills prior to the introduction of written tasks, as oral competence will support the development of writing skills.

There was effective use of the board to consolidate learning. Vocabulary was systematically classified into masculine or feminine nouns, verbs and adjectives thus promoting good practices among students in noting work in their copies.

Most of the methodologies observed involved whole class teaching. It is recommended that in the interests of promoting more active student involvement, autonomy and individual

responsibility, a variety of short, focused individual, pair or group work activities be integrated into the body of the lessons. This will help engage all of the students in the learning process, build on the strengths that they already have acquired and enrich the learning experience for them.

There was evidence of good classroom management throughout and a climate of mutual respect and positive affirmation prevailed.

Student responses indicated a good understanding of the lesson content and there was evidence of high levels of enthusiasm for the language in many of the lessons observed. They responded well to questions asked by the teacher and there were some instances where students, reading aloud, displayed very competent mastery of correct pronunciation and intonation. This is to be commended. Interaction with the inspector revealed a willingness to communicate by most students which, with increased emphasis on the integration of oral skills, could be further enhanced.

#### **ASSESSMENT**

Student progress is assessed and monitored through the use of question and answer sessions in class, the assignment and correction of homework, class tests and formal examinations.

The school has a homework policy in operation and a review of student copies revealed that homework is assigned and corrected and either signed off or commented on. The inclusion of a comment is to be commended as it provides affirmation of student effort and, where necessary, indicates areas for improvement. Many of the student copies reviewed were well organised and presented, thus facilitating ease of referral when revising work. This is to be commended.

Class tests are given at the end of a chapter or topic studied and Christmas results are based on continuous assessment. Students sit formal examinations in the summer. All examinations include an aural component and oral assessments are given within class time. The inclusion of an aural and oral component is good practice and to be commended. Reports are sent home twice yearly and parent-teacher meetings are held annually for all year groups.

Teachers reported that students were ambitious to reach their full potential through the uptake of appropriate levels in the state examinations.

#### **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 as evident from the allocation of time, timetabling and the provision of resources.
- The members of the French department are advancing well in the area of collaborative subject planning.
- The methodologies observed took place in an atmosphere conducive to learning.
- There was evidence of good student learning and potential.

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

- It is recommended that, as part of the good work completed to date in the area of collaborative subject planning, the members of the French department develop a series of desired learning outcomes for each year group, and the strategies and methodologies to support these outcomes.
- It is recommended that, where relevant, the use of the target language be extended and oral skills be integrated and used to support the development of written skills.
- It is recommended that attention be paid to ensuring an ongoing balance between whole class teaching and active student engagement through the use of short focused individual, pair or group work tasks.

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