

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

**Subject Inspection in French**

**REPORT**

<b>Ainm na scoile / School name</b>	Mercy Secondary School
<b>Seoladh na scoile / School address</b>	Ballymahon Co Longford
<b>Uimhir rolla / Roll number</b>	63710M

**Date of Inspection: 17-04-2018**



## **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 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.

## **CHILD PROTECTION**

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection procedures were conducted:

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.

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

## SUBJECT INSPECTION

### INSPECTION ACTIVITIES

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	16-04-2018 and 17-04-2018
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during four class periods</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal, deputy principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

### School context

Mercy Secondary school is a voluntary co-educational post-primary school with an enrolment of 644 students. The school offers the junior cycle, an optional Transition Year Programme, the Leaving Certificate (Established) and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme.

### SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

#### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good, with aspects of exemplary practice also in evidence.
- Teacher use of the target language was excellent in every lesson and all teachers demonstrated a high level of linguistic competence; opportunities for student-student interactions in French were less prevalent.
- Highly effective questioning strategies were noted in each lesson; learning intentions could be further developed.
- The quality of provision and whole-school support for French is mostly very good.
- The quality of individual planning and preparation was very good, collaborative planning should be further developed.

#### Recommendations

- Student-student oral interactions should be extended within the lesson structure.
- Learning intentions should be framed in terms of what students should be able to do by the end of the lesson; teachers should also provide adequate time at the start of lessons, to explain the learning, and at the end of lessons, to assess the intended learning.
- Schemes of work should be furthered to include more specific learning outcomes and methodologies.

## DETAILED FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. TEACHING, LEARNING, AND ASSESSMENT

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in the lessons observed was very good, with aspects of exemplary practice also in evidence.
- Teachers spoke French to a consistently high standard and the language was spoken throughout all of the lessons observed. Teachers also provided very good attention to student pronunciation through individual correction and whole class pronunciation drills.
- Students interacted with their teachers in French and there were many opportunities for active learning in the lessons observed. While these worthwhile learning experiences included student-student oral interactions, this aspect should be extended through placing a greater emphasis on pair and group work tasks aimed specifically at developing student-student oral skills.
- A highly effective integrated approach to language teaching permeated each lesson, and students had numerous opportunities to develop a variety of language skills through the various methodologies proposed by their teachers. The teaching of verbs was informed by a communicative purpose and was, for example, carefully included within the teaching of topics such as food and clothing.
- Teachers outlined the intended learning to students at the start of every lesson. To build on this good practice, it is advised that learning intentions are framed in terms of what students should be able to do by the end of the lesson. Teachers should also provide adequate time at the start, to carefully explain the intended learning, and at the end of lessons, to assess the intended learning.
- Highly effective questioning strategies were noted in each lesson, with teachers skilfully alternating between lower and higher-order questions. Student knowledge of prior learning was also frequently elicited, and often extended, by teachers. Students were, for example, encouraged to make connections between new and old vocabulary and to take risks in their language learning development.
- Very good assessment for Learning (AfL) practices observed included the use of 'think-pair-share' type activities, 'fishbone' tasks and 'exit-pass' vocabulary revision tasks at the end of lessons to assess the quality of learning.
- Homework was regularly assigned and monitored. In most lessons, excellent examples of homework corrections were observed where teachers' written comments very clearly identified strengths that guided students towards improvement. These practices should be further extended to all class groups.
- An effective system is in operation in order to keep parents informed of student progress through the provision of regular reports and this includes an oral assessment for all year groups. It is also praiseworthy that, as part of the school's school self-evaluation strand in developing oral literacy, all junior cycle students of French deliver oral presentations as part of their annual assessments.
- Both teacher-student rapport and classroom management was exemplary in every instance with students on task and well behaved in all lessons observed.

- Seating arrangements in each of the classrooms were traditional and this should be reviewed in order to further enhance the conditions best suited to the creation of active learning environments.
- All of the classrooms were print-rich, with various relevant materials prominently displayed to stimulate student interest in the subject. Noteworthy examples included laminated statements outlining practical statements in French that were displayed and attached to each student desk and, in other classrooms, very useful expressions that were attached to the blackboards, affording students immediate access to key expressions in the target language.

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

- Timetabling provision for French is very good for almost all year groups in terms of appropriate allocation of time and the spread of lessons across the week to ensure regular contact time.
- There is, however, some scope to improve the current timetabling arrangements for French in fifth-year. At present, four lesson periods are assigned each week, one of which is a double lesson period. The lessons are also scheduled on concurrent days. This practice should be reviewed in future timetables in order to enhance both the allocation and spread of lessons across the week.
- While the study of a modern foreign language is optional in the school, in practice most students study either French or Spanish from first-year onwards. It was also reported that the identified trend showing a low continuation rate from junior to senior cycle has improved over the last year.
- Teachers have engaged in continuing professional development (CPD), some of which has involved subject-specific programmes and attendance at conferences in Ireland. Consideration could also be given to ongoing subject-specific CPD, including programmes available from the Department of Education and Skills and the French cultural services.

## **3. PLANNING AND PREPARATION**

- The quality of individual planning and preparation was very good, with some scope to review collaborative plans.
- Teachers have commenced planning for the new subject specification, introduced in September 2017. In the existing schemes of work, some very good topic specific strategies to promote literacy and numeracy were identified. To build on this, teachers should work towards ensuring that all schemes include learning outcomes specific to each unit of learning, and to elaborate on topic specific methodologies.
- Outcomes in certificate examinations are analysed and compared to national averages. Emerging trends in data indicate improving trends in attainment in the Leaving Certificate, but declining trends in attainment at junior cycle. Teachers, in their annual reflection on the results, have identified strategies with a view to bolstering attainment.
- Subject department meetings are minuted and contain evidence of agendas relating to organisational matters and to teaching and learning practice, which is commendable.

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.

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.

## 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 of quality the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Example of descriptive terms
<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Very good</b> applies where the quality of the areas evaluated is of a very high standard. The very few areas for improvement that exist do not significantly impact on the overall quality of provision. For some schools in this category the quality of what is evaluated is <b>outstanding</b> and provides an example for other schools of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful; few areas for improvement; notable; of a very high standard. Excellent; outstanding; exceptionally high standard, with very significant strengths; exemplary
<b>Good</b>	<b>Good</b> applies where the strengths in the areas evaluated clearly outweigh the areas in need of improvement. The areas requiring improvement impact on the quality of pupils' learning. The school needs to build on its strengths and take action to address the areas identified as requiring improvement in order to achieve a <i>very good</i> standard.	Good; good quality; valuable; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; some areas for improvement
<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b> applies where the quality of provision is adequate. The strengths in what is being evaluated just outweigh the shortcomings. While the shortcomings do not have a significant negative impact they constrain the quality of the learning experiences and should be addressed in order to achieve a better standard.	Satisfactory; adequate; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist; acceptable level of quality; improvement needed in some areas
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Fair</b> applies where, although there are some strengths in the areas evaluated, deficiencies or shortcomings that outweigh those strengths also exist. The school will have to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is satisfactory or better.	Fair; evident weaknesses that are impacting on pupils' learning; less than satisfactory; experiencing difficulty; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
<b>Weak</b>	<b>Weak</b> applies where there are serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated. Immediate and coordinated whole-school action is required to address the areas of concern. In some cases, the intervention of other agencies may be required to support improvements.	Weak; unsatisfactory; insufficient; ineffective; poor; requiring significant change, development or improvement; experiencing significant difficulties;

# **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 and the French Department accept the findings of the inspection and wish to highlight the following:

- The overall quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was very good, with aspects of exemplary practice also in evidence.
- There were many opportunities for active learning in lessons.
- A highly effective approach to language teaching permeated each lesson.
- Acknowledgement of very good assessment for learning practices (AfL).
- Acknowledgement of our school's SSE strategy in developing Oral Literacy.

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

The French Department and school management has taken on board the findings and recommendations of the inspector and will aim to implement the recommendations in the following ways:

- Teachers will aim to extend student-student oral interaction within lessons.
- Teachers will give more focus to Learning Intentions at the beginning of class and evaluate what the students have learned at the end of each lesson.
- Teachers will strive to include Specific Learning Outcomes and new methodologies in their schemes of work.