

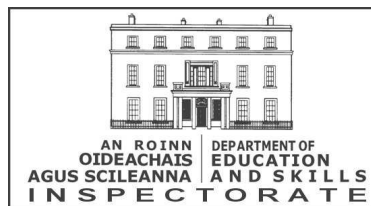
An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna

Department of Education and Skills

**Subject Inspection of German
REPORT**

**St Louis High School
Rathmines
Dublin 6.
Roll number: 60890C**

Date of inspection: 15 December 2010



REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GERMAN

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in St Louis High School, Rathmines. It presents the findings of an evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning in German 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. The board of management of the school was given an opportunity to comment on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

The learning of modern languages forms a central strand of the curriculum offered in St Louis High School to its cohort of students. The diversity of the language provision deserves praise, as French and German are offered in junior cycle and Spanish and Japanese are offered during TY. Students are afforded the opportunity to continue with Spanish after TY in senior cycle, along with French and German. Different languages and cultures are celebrated at assemblies throughout the school year which promotes an awareness of languages and language learning. This is good practice.

All first-year students learn German and French. This allows students to make an informed choice regarding their language of study and students may opt to study one or both languages to Junior and Leaving Certificate. School management together with the modern language teachers monitor and review these arrangements from year to year. Only about twenty of the six hundred and five students enrolled at the time of the evaluation did not continue with a language to Leaving Certificate.

The uptake of German is at a consistent level, as at the end of first year, two out of the five first-year groups continue with learning the language. At the time of the evaluation, there was one group in Transition Year (TY) and two groups in fifth and sixth year. Overall, the allocation of time to the teaching and learning of German is good and the distribution of those units of time across the week are appropriate and ensure optimal regular class contact with the target language for the students of German. This is commendable. Three periods are assigned each to French and German in first year. There are four periods allocated to German in second and third year of junior cycle. Transition year is optional and German is offered for the full year. There are three lesson periods assigned to German in TY for the full year. Five lesson periods, three singles and a double, are allocated in fifth and sixth year, and concurrent timetabling for the two class groups in sixth-year German is facilitated, when possible.

The German teachers are appropriately qualified in the language and participate in available CPD, attending seminars of the German Teachers' Association. The German teachers participate in staff development days, where such themes as co-operative learning, assessment for learning (AfL)

and developing information and communication technology (ICT) in the classroom have been addressed. Members of the German teaching team also have involvement with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in developing Transition units, with the correction of the certificate examinations and the conduct of certificate oral examinations. These factors have contributed to the maintenance of the teachers' linguistic and pedagogical skills.

At the time of the evaluation, a German language assistant was working with the teachers in their classrooms. School management is praised for facilitating the German language department's participation in the Language Assistant Scheme, whereby both teachers and learners of German have access to the invaluable resource of the native speaker for a period of time. Both school management and teachers acknowledged the benefits that participation in such schemes can bring.

The co-curricular programme offered to students of German includes such activities as the celebration of German feasts, the possibility of school trips to German speaking countries as well as to an adventure and language centre, attendance at the screening of German films suitable for young learners and participation in European projects. The school organises a German exchange for students of German. The diligence and commitment of the school staff to the provision and organisation of such a range of activities is acknowledged. The co-curricular provision enhances and enriches the language learning experience for students of German and is praiseworthy.

Students are given learning support in German during their learning support class time. Students are also given the opportunity outside of class time to improve their oral skills and differentiated approaches are adopted during German classes.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The quality of collaborative subject department planning is very good and the German department sets out to share ideas and agree objectives for the teaching of the subject. Planning time is facilitated by school management at regular intervals throughout the year. In this way, the subject plan and programmes of work are monitored at subject department meetings. Minutes are kept of these meetings and records of such meetings examined illustrated the range of items covered. These included planning for an open evening, analysis of certificate examination results, organisation of trips, including a German exchange, the debating team, the profile of the subject and developmental priorities for student learning. This is highly praised. A recent developmental priority identified was the motivation of students.

The quality of the German plan is very good. Each year group has a written scheme of work, which includes itemising materials and resources, current language teaching methodologies, interactive teaching methods, differentiation for mixed-ability groups, ways of encouraging students to communicate in the target language and incorporating ICT into teaching and learning. Before any new academic year starts, the German teachers review and evaluate the plans and adapt them to meet the needs of their particular students. The German department strives to create a positive classroom environment by having visually stimulating classrooms and by achieving a balance between teacher-focussed classroom interactions and student contributions. The objectives of the subject plan were observed in practice during the classroom visits.

To augment the very good work completed to date, it is recommended that the teachers record in the plan the range of methodologies deployed in class, thereby providing an accurate picture of the range of learning experiences provided for students, and an accurate picture of their own good practice. It is good that a thematic approach is adopted in line with syllabus guidelines, which includes the topics, the lexical items and linguistic structures required to cover the syllabus

content. These lists should be expanded over time as part of the annual review and adaptation of the subject plans.

The TY plan is in line with the philosophy of TY, with a focus on the development of language awareness and a vocational orientation to the further development of linguistic skills. This is appropriate and deserves praise.

The quality of short term planning was very good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The quality of the teaching of German was very good, with some examples of excellent practice observed. The German department's objective of creating a positive classroom atmosphere and environment, as articulated in planning documentation, was seen to be achieved in practice. On one occasion, the understated approach of the teacher created a nice atmosphere where students felt at ease in responding to questions. On another occasion, the teacher successfully conducted an innovative interactive activity even in the context of being observed. Throughout the lessons observed, there was exemplary use of German, the target language. The approach of the teachers was systematic with every thing conducted in German. The instructions for activities and for pair work were given in clear and simple German. Only on one occasion, should the rules of a particular game have been made clearer. Throughout the lessons students heard and used a lot of German, both new and familiar material.

In all lessons, the objective and purpose of the lesson was outlined for students. Consequently, lessons were characterised by clarity of direction, with the objective of tasks and activities clear. Some lessons started with recapitulation of vocabulary and material already covered in previous lessons. When a grammatical item was being introduced, students were reminded of material previously covered which eased students into understanding new structures. ICT was integrated effectively. Material presented on the data projector provided immediate reinforcement of new learning. This helped to ensure accuracy and also ensured student attention and engagement. Teachers used new vocabulary items or linguistic structures very simply and correctly in context. Reinforcement exercises were given as homework and the homework assigned would have helped students assimilate linguistic structures further.

An integrated, thematic approach was used by all the teachers in line with syllabus guidelines. The oral and interactive work observed was then reinforced with the same exercise in written format. Language awareness was carefully developed and grammatical items were introduced and applied in context. The teachers demonstrated admirable awareness of how learners learn, building on prior learning and learner confidence. Exercises were effectively designed and consequently, worked well. Only on one occasion was an exercise too demanding and the level of complexity of language too high. Nevertheless, the students made valiant efforts to complete the task and worked co-operatively in groups drawing on the individual skills and knowledge of their peers. Teachers correctly demanded full sentences as responses from students, when required. Lesson content was appropriate, where themes were of interest to the students and typical of the German culture, introducing an intercultural perspective. There was an appropriate focus on strategy for oral examination for the sixth year group observed. The exercise of matching the appropriate verb to noun was useful for retention of language and the standard of complexity of language was appropriate.

Lessons were also enhanced by the integration of a range of resources, including ICT, different visual and audio resources, as well as being supported by a print-rich authentic German

environment which was effectively created and sustained. The reference to descriptions of well-known celebrities was fun for students and a good idea. The active learning observed where students exchanged and passed pictures on to each other helped the students to use the language correctly and retain it. Through the use of group activity, the teacher was also able to focus on the accuracy of student responses. Teacher ensured that each student had learnt vocabulary, verbs, sequence of sentences and correct endings.

The students of German were busy and active throughout lessons. The students were accustomed to pair and group work and organised themselves quickly and diligently. They had fun, challenged each other and spoke a lot of German, some more correctly than others. It was heartening to see that students were encouraged to attempt, for example, a dialogue without recourse to written prompts the second time. In this way, students had to become accustomed to generating spontaneous language without recourse to written prompts and notes. On other occasions, students did very well in writing up their oral responses. The very natural accurate German pronunciation of the students was noted. The students spoke almost exclusively in German and clarifications were given in English, only when necessary. In the student written work examined, students showed accurate use of linguistic structures. In the copy books examined, there was also evidence of a considerable amount of material being covered. The students were attentive to teacher direction and before the end of the lesson they returned to their normal classroom layout. On completion of activities, students recorded these carefully into notebooks. While students were writing, the teachers circulated and checked note-taking.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment focuses on feedback regarding strengths as well as areas for improvement. Students are assessed at the end of each topic and through regular assignment of homework and correction of home work. It is good practice in language assessment to include the testing of the four language skills. This is the practice in relation to in-house examinations and pre-certificate examinations in St. Louis High School. An analysis of student attainment is conducted by school management and by the teachers of German. The analysis is used to affirm effective teaching and learning in the subject and both the board of management and parents are informed of the school analysis. This is good practice. The school has identified very good attainment at both ordinary and higher levels in German and uses its analysis to identify learning and attainment priorities.

The TY students are given credits for class participation and contribution. As part of an initiative during TY, students engage in peer learning with 5th and 6th class pupils from the local feeder primary schools. This promotes independent learning and an awareness among students of their own learning.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- The quality of the teaching of German was very good, with some examples of excellent practice observed.
- Throughout the lessons observed, there was exemplary use of the target language.
- An integrated, thematic approach was used by all the teachers in line with syllabus guidelines.

- Lessons were also enhanced by the integration of the range of resources, including ICT, as well as being supported by a print-rich authentic German environment which was effectively created and sustained.
- Language awareness was carefully developed with grammatical items introduced and applied in context, and the teachers demonstrated admirable awareness of how learners learn, building on prior learning and learner confidence.
- The quality of collaborative subject department planning is very good and the German department sets out to share ideas and agree objectives for the teaching of the subject.
- The learning of modern languages forms a central strand of the curriculum in the school and the diversity of the language provision deserves praise.
- The co-curricular provision enhances and enriches the language learning experience for students of German and is praiseworthy.

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

- To augment the very good work completed to date on planning for German, it is recommended that the teachers record in the plan the actual methodologies deployed in class, thereby providing an accurate picture of the range of learning experiences provided for students, and an accurate picture of their own good practice.
- The German plan includes the topics, the lexical items and linguistic structures required to cover the syllabus content. These lists should be expanded over time as part of the annual review and adaptation of the subject plan.

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

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