



**An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science**

**Subject Inspection of German
REPORT**

**Coláiste Chiaráin
Leixlip, Co Kildare**

Roll number: 91371B

Date of inspection: 2 March 2009

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REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GERMAN

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Coláiste Chiaráin, Leixlip, Co Kildare. 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 relevant staff. 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.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Coláiste Chiaráin is a post-primary community school. The current enrolment is 525 students. The school offers a very wide range of programmes including the Junior Certificate (JC), the Transition Year (TY) and the Leaving Certificate established (LC), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). The school is commended for having a wide range of curricular programmes available to meet the needs of the student cohort. German is offered in all programmes with the exception of the LCA.

The modern foreign languages on offer in Coláiste Chiaráin are German and French. Prior to entry into first year, students are invited to choose between these two languages. In the course of the first month in first year, students are permitted to change their mind regarding subject choice. This flexibility on behalf of the school is good practice. According to the data supplied by the school approximately twenty-five per cent of students study the language in junior cycle in the school. The class size in junior cycle is on average twenty-one students. In senior cycle approximately 13% of the students take German and the average class size is ten students. School management in conjunction with the German department keeps the uptake of the language under review. It may be useful to consider ways in which the profile of German could be raised further. Students currently studying the language could be consulted regarding ideas that would work in the school to encourage a larger uptake of German at both junior and senior cycle.

There is good whole-school support for German. School management is to be commended for providing appropriately for the subject. The school has a number of good resources such as books, DVDs, tapes and magazines. Members of the German department have been proactive in seeking information and communication technology (ICT) resources such as data projectors and computers to enhance the teaching and learning of German. There is no official budget for the subject but requests for resources are looked favourably upon by management and granted where feasible. It would be useful to compile a complete list of resources held by the German department when time permits.

There is a good time allocation for the subject. In junior cycle all students have four periods per week in German. In Transition Year three lessons, comprising one double and one single period, are provided for the language. If timetabling in TY permits, it is recommended that only single periods be allocated. This would allow for a more even distribution of German lesson across the week. In the remainder of senior cycle German is allocated five periods weekly. One double period is allocated in both fifth and sixth year. German is taught in base classrooms. These rooms are very well decorated. German posters, maps and photographs were on display. Very attractive student work was on display. This is good practice and gives the students a sense of ownership of their learning environment.

The German department comprises dedicated and committed teachers. Membership of the Gesellschaft der Deutschlehrer Irlands (German Teachers' Association) is held by the German department. Teachers have engaged in continuous professional development, have attended courses in the language and visited the countries of the target language. Activities have been organised to support the teaching and learning of German in the school. For example participation in German language exchanges have been offered to students. Trips to the Irish Film Institute have been organised. The provision of such activities is to be commended as they enhance the learning opportunities for the students.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The school is engaged in development planning. Subject department planning for the teaching of German is effective and takes place on a regular basis. The German department meets regularly on a formal and informal basis. Good records of meetings are kept.

Long-term planning documentation was presented in the course of the evaluation. The plans for the delivery of the German curriculum in all years are theme based. Plans show the desired student learning outcomes. This is highly commendable as it ensures that subject planning is very focused. To build on the existing good practice and to develop these plans further, it is recommended that differentiated learning outcomes and methodologies be detailed. This will ensure that the nature of the mixed ability classes is taken into account and that individual learners' needs will be met.

Planning for TY is very good and well organised. Interesting themes are outlined in the plans and very good materials are included. Topics to include German film studies are detailed in the TY German plan. This is in keeping with the spirit of the TY programme guidelines and to be commended. The plan for TY could be developed further in consultation with the document *Writing the Transition Year Programme (Part 2)*. This will provide a useful basis for the development of a plan for German in the programme.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Lesson content in all lessons observed was good and appropriate to the needs and interests of the learners. Lesson content was theme based. Themes such as school and the world of work were covered in junior and senior cycle. This is in line with syllabus guidelines. The use of handouts to ensure good learning outcomes is to be commended. For example in a senior cycle lesson a comprehensive handout containing the main phrases, grammatical structures and vocabulary pertaining to the theme of the world of work was given to the students. This assisted the learners in the development of their capacity to speak and write about the topic in a most effective manner. In some instances typographical errors were noted in these handouts. It is recommended that all handouts be proofed for errors in advance of distribution to the learners. Given the excellent linguistic competence of the German department this will ensure that such errors will be eliminated in future.

Good quality teaching and learning was observed in all lessons. A range of effective methodologies was evident. In one lesson observed brainstorming was used as a technique to elicit previous knowledge and vocabulary from students. It was noted that in lessons where students were being prepared for the certificate examinations, due attention was given to developing an awareness of good examination techniques. This is laudable as it assists students in the critical knowledge of assessment criteria. Autonomous learning was encouraged whereby students used verb lists to ascertain different forms of verbs in the various tenses. The development of language learning skills in this manner encourages the students to become independent learners and is to be highly commended.

Good practice was observed in the development of the skill of reading in a junior cycle lesson. Students were given pre-reading exercises to complete in pairs. These exercises involved matching words and expressions in German and English. In addition students worked on a task related to verbs in the past tense. Both exercises were effective in preparing students to read the text in German. In another lesson students were given pre-listening activities to complete before listening to a text relating to school life in Germany. The use of pre-reading and pre-listening activities in lessons is commendable and effectively prepared students to comprehend the language better thus increasing the opportunities for students to experience success in task completion.

Good integration of the skills of language acquisition was noted in lessons. For example, students were asked to complete tasks that involved reading and speaking or reading and listening. It is recommended that further tasks which facilitate the integration of all skills of language acquisition, that is reading, writing, listening and speaking, be used in lessons. In particular the skill of listening needs to be developed in the junior cycle. Currently listening comprehension is assigned to one day per week for some year groups. This is less effective practice. In the Junior Certificate examination 43.75 % of the total marks is allocated to listening comprehension. It is therefore imperative that this skill be formally developed throughout junior cycle and on a daily basis. This is particularly important in view of the fact that most learners may not practise listening tasks outside of the classroom setting and it is more difficult to assign listening comprehension tasks as homework than for example reading or writing tasks.

Teacher use of the target language was very good. German was used to communicate with the students in many instances. This is good practice as it ensures that students are required to comprehend and follow instructions in the target language. Teacher use of German clearly assisted in the processes of language acquisition. In order to build on this good practice it is recommended that increased opportunities be given to the learners to practise using the target language themselves. In particular tasks which involve student-student interaction will afford the students greater possibility of maximising their use of German. It is recommended that some dedicated pronunciation exercises be done in the course of lessons. When students make errors in pronunciation it is suggested that such dedicated pronunciation exercises be done in the first instance in the global setting followed by opportunities for individual students to practise pronouncing the German sounds that they find difficult. This will provide a focus for the learners to ensure that they pronounce words correctly in German.

The atmosphere in all lessons was very good. Students remained on task throughout and discipline was maintained to a very high standard at all times. The nature of teacher-student interactions was very positive. Students were always called on by name and were treated with respect at all times. The caring atmosphere in the classrooms and noted in interaction with the teachers is to be highly commended.

ASSESSMENT

A wide range of assessment measures is in place in the German department. Good records of assessment are kept by the teachers to ensure that student progress is monitored. Formal assessments for students who are not taking certificate examinations take place at Christmas and in the summer. Students who are taking the Junior Certificate examination are formally assessed in October or November. Assessment in TY comprises oral and project work and also a credit system. This is good and in keeping with the ethos of the programme. At the time of the inspection the timing of formal assessment for Leaving Certificate students in the first term was under review. In preparation for the state examinations students sit 'mock' papers in the spring. All skills of language acquisition are assessed on a formal basis with the exception of oral assessment in junior cycle. It is recommended that students in all years be given short oral assessments on a regular basis. This is particularly effective in mixed-ability settings where some students may find grammar and accurate written work more difficult than oral production. Given the expertise in oral assessment among the members of the German department the feedback provided to the students would be very valuable.

Good communication is maintained between the school and the parents of the students. School reports are sent home after formal assessments. Parent-teacher meetings are held for each year group. In addition parents are welcome to contact the school if there are concerns about students' progress. This is commendable.

Members of staff in Coláiste Chiaráin are in the process of designing a homework policy and the teachers are to be commended for their commitment to this very valuable work. While it is acknowledged that the German department assigns homework on a very regular basis it was noted that in the course of some lessons observed homework was neither asked for nor assigned. It is recommended that homework based on the lesson of the day always be assigned. It would be useful also for lessons to begin by checking homework from the previous day as this provides for continuity between lessons. Student journals in TY were inspected and it was evident that some students are not recording homework on a regular basis. It is recommended that all types of assignments, project work and homework be recorded by students. A sample of students' copybooks was viewed by the inspector. In senior cycle students had received written feedback about their work. This is good practice and should be extended to the work of junior cycle students. In junior cycle students should be required to write short paragraphs on different themes. Once students' written work has been corrected, it is recommended that the learners be required to focus on a limited number of errors and should seek to correct these with a view to improving the skill of writing in German. The German department could usefully consult information on the principles of assessment for learning (AfL) on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) at www.ncca.ie

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole-school support for German. School management is to be commended for providing appropriately for the subject.
- Long-term planning for German is good. The plans for the delivery of the German curriculum in all years are theme based and the plans show the desired student learning outcomes.
- Good quality teaching and learning was observed in all lessons. A range of effective methodologies was evident.
- Teacher use of the target language was very good.
- A wide range of assessment measures is in place in the German department. Good records of assessment are kept by the teachers to ensure that student progress is monitored.
- Members of staff in Coláiste Chiaráin are in the process of designing a homework policy and the teachers are to be commended for their commitment to this very valuable work.

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

- It is recommended that the uptake of the language be kept under review. It may be useful to consider ways in which the profile of German could be raised in the school.
- In order to build on the good practice of using the target language in the classroom, it is recommended that increased opportunities be given to the learners to practise using German themselves. In particular tasks which involve student-student interaction will afford the students greater possibility of maximising their use of the language.

- It is recommended that students in all years be given short formal oral assessments on a regular basis.
- It is recommended that students in junior cycle be given written feedback on their work. Students should be required to focus on a limited number of errors and should seek to correct these with a view to improving the skill of writing in German.

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

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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 welcomes this report and intends to build on the good practices identified and engage with the recommendations.