

An Roinn Oideachais agus Eolaíochta
Department of Education and Science

Subject Inspection of German
REPORT

Castleknock Community College
Castleknock, Dublin 15
Roll number: 76062B

Date of inspection: 6 May 2008



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 E O L A Í O C H T A | **A N D S C I E N C E**

REPORT
ON
THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GERMAN

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Castleknock Community College, Dublin 15. 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 on the findings and recommendations of the report; the board chose to accept the report without response.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Castleknock Community College is a mixed post-primary school under the auspices of the County of Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC). The current enrolment is 1111 students. The curricular programmes on offer in the school are: the Junior Certificate (JC), the Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP), the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and the Leaving Certificate established (LC). German is offered in all curricular programmes with the exception of the LCA. The school is to be commended for offering the full range of curricular programmes and for the provision of German in the majority of these.

In Castleknock Community College first-year students are offered a choice between German, French and Spanish. This choice is made prior to entry. All students must study a modern European language in the school and this is commendable. The numbers of students taking German in junior cycle is low. Approximately seven per cent of students have opted for the language. The numbers in senior cycle are lower again. While there is a slight increase in this year's cohort of first-year students, it is suggested that ways be sought to raise the profile of the language in the school. The possibility of a small taster programme in modern languages could be considered. This would enable students to make a more informed decision about which language they will choose.

The school has many resources, such as books, CDs and magazines to support the teaching and learning of German. Requests for resources are usually met. It is recommended that an inventory of resources be made and included in the planning documentation. This will ensure that resources are regularly updated and reviewed. This inventory will also inform planning for use of such resources.

There is a good time allocation for the subject. This is praiseworthy. Junior cycle students have four class periods of German. In TY three class periods are allocated to German. The TY is optional in the school and in the current year there are only four students in the TY German class. The management authorities are to be commended for the provision of German in TY given the very low number of students in the class. The provision for German in senior cycle is five class periods.

German is taught in base classrooms. Some rooms were well decorated. Posters, maps and student work were on display. This is very good practice and enhances the learning environment. Some of the classrooms where German was taught were unsuitable. One of the lessons observed was taught in a very small room with no natural light and no black board. Another lesson was held in a room where sounds from neighbouring classrooms caused distraction. It is recommended that the provision of rooms allocated for the teaching of German be reviewed, resources permitting.

Eight members of staff in the school are qualified to teach German. Currently four members of staff are timetabled to deliver the German curriculum in the school. Presently the German department does not hold membership of the German teachers' association, Gesellschaft der Deutschlehrer Irlands (GDI). It is recommended that membership of the teachers' association be acquired when practicable.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The school is engaged in development planning and this process is co-ordinated by the senior management team. The German department meets formally at times allocated by management. There are effective formal structures in place. These structures are overseen by senior management and a school development planning committee. Agendas for meetings are set by senior management and very good minutes of meetings of the German department are kept. The position as co-ordinator of the department rotates. This is commendable. Members of the German department liaise very frequently on an informal basis. There is good cooperation between members of the German department. This is praiseworthy.

Long-term planning documentation was presented in the course of the evaluation. This was good and included information on curricular content in all years. These plans include details of intended student learning outcomes. This is to be commended. To build on this good practice it is recommended that the student learning outcomes be specified in terms of the skills of language acquisition, that is, what is expected of the learner in terms of aural and reading comprehension and in terms of written and oral production.

Currently there is little evidence in the planning documentation of the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) and German. It is recommended that the plan for German be developed to include the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of German. This could include short-term objectives such as students producing some written assignments using ICT and student use of selected websites for project work. These types of activities should be documented in the plans for all years taking the subject.

The plan for German in TY outlines the aims, objectives and the content that will be taught in the course of the programme. It is recommended that the plan for TY be developed further to include more detail on interdisciplinary activities. It is also recommended that a section on evaluation of the German programme in TY be included in the plans in accordance with the brochure *Writing*

the Transition Year programme which is available on the website of the second-level support service at www.slss.ie.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

A variety of effective teaching methodologies were employed. In some lessons observed the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening were integrated effectively with lesson content. This is most laudable. It is recommended that this good practice be extended to all lessons. This will ensure that students practise all the skills of language acquisition and that new vocabulary and structures will be reinforced through repetition.

Individual lessons were well planned. Good use of resources was made. Handouts were prepared for all lessons. These were well made out and showed evidence of good advance planning. In a lesson observed, German magazines were used as the basis for lesson content. Using authentic materials such as this is very good and to be commended.

The skill of listening was developed in many lessons. Students were completing the listening activities with relative ease and showed good understanding. This is commendable. It is recommended that all members of the German department be provided with remote controls for CD players, when resources permit. This will enable teachers to circulate in the course of listening activities and to observe how the students are completing the tasks. It is recommended that, when teaching this skill, post-listening activities be included. This will enable students to follow up on texts that they have heard. This will ultimately ensure that learning is consolidated.

Teacher use of the target language was generally good. In many lessons observed German was used as the means of communication in the lessons. This is praiseworthy. In a minority of lessons English was used as the medium for communication with the students. It is recommended that in order to increase student capacity to understand the target language a list of common classroom phrases be compiled and distributed to students. Student use of the target language was good. In interaction with the inspector the majority of students were able to understand and reply to questions asked. It is recommended that student use of the target language be developed further in the course of lessons. Increased use of pair work and general conversation in German would benefit the students greatly in this regard.

Lesson content in all lessons was appropriately chosen and matched the requirements of the syllabus. Students were helped on an individual level in many of the lessons observed. Teacher circulation was good and this meant that students' individual needs were catered for. This is to be highly commended.

The classroom atmosphere in all lessons was good. Students were called on by name and were affirmed in their efforts in the classroom. The nature of student-teacher interactions was positive. The atmosphere was at all times conducive to learning. Teachers and students are to be commended for the good classroom atmosphere that prevailed.

ASSESSMENT

Formal assessment takes place at Christmas and in the summer. All skills of language acquisition are tested formally in senior cycle. In junior cycle reading, writing and listening skills are tested. It is recommended that formal assessment of students' oral production take place.

Castleknock Community College has a homework policy. The German department has developed its own homework policy in line with the overarching school policy. This is good practice and allows for a uniform approach across the department. A sample of students' journals was examined on the day of the inspection. The majority of students are recording homework in German on a regular basis. A sample of students' copybooks was also viewed. There was evidence of homework being monitored and corrected by teachers. In one particular class in junior cycle, it was evident that substantial written assignments were being given to students on a weekly basis and being corrected most thoroughly with a significant amount of individual feedback being given to students. This is exemplary practice and to be very highly commended.

In the course of staff meetings dedicated time has been devoted to working on developing approaches to teaching and learning which are underpinned by the principles of assessment for learning (AfL). Staff and management are to be commended for this. Some members of the German department were directly involved in the promotion of a pilot scheme relating to AfL. In order to develop further the approaches of AfL it is recommended that students of German be encouraged to follow up on errors they have made in written work. In the copybooks viewed across the different levels, there was little evidence of students doing this type of follow up. This emphasis on student follow up should be documented in the German department homework policy.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- There is good whole-school support for German.
- Subject department planning is good and there is very good collaboration between members of the German department.
- A variety of effective teaching methodologies was employed and teacher use of the target language was generally good.
- The classroom atmosphere in all lessons was conducive to learning and the rapport between teachers and students was positive.
- In some cases the correction of students' work was comprehensive and the individual feedback given to students on written work was excellent.

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

- Means of raising the profile of German in the school should be considered to address the low numbers of students taking the language.
- It is recommended that the student learning outcomes be specified in terms of the skills of language acquisition in long-term planning.
- It is recommended that student use of the target language be developed further in the course of lessons.
- It is recommended that students be encouraged to follow up on errors they have made in written work and that an emphasis on student follow up be documented in the German department homework policy.

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

