

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

**Subject Inspection of German
REPORT**

**Davitt College
Springfield Castlebar County Mayo
Roll number: 76060U**

Date of inspection: 7 May 2008

[Subject inspection report](#)
[Subject provision and whole school support](#)
[Planning and preparation](#)
[Teaching and learning](#)
[Assessment](#)
[Summary of main findings and recommendations](#)

REPORT ON THE QUALITY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN GERMAN

SUBJECT INSPECTION REPORT

This report has been written following a subject inspection in Davitt College. 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 the teacher, examined students' work, and had discussions with the teacher. The inspector reviewed school-planning documentation and teacher's written preparation. Following the evaluation visit, the inspector provided oral feedback on the outcomes of the evaluation to the principal, deputy principal and subject teacher. The board of management was given an opportunity to comment in writing on the findings and recommendations of the report; a response was not received from the board.

SUBJECT PROVISION AND WHOLE SCHOOL SUPPORT

Davitt College is a co-educational secondary school with a current enrolment of 358. Enrolment has increased significantly over the last few years. The school offers a comprehensive range of curricular programmes and it is to the school's credit that German is offered in all programmes.

There is a long tradition for the provision of German in the school, and whilst uptake had declined in the past, German is proving to be a very popular option once again. This is due to a number of factors: the dedication of the German department to the teaching and learning of the subject in the school, the commitment of management to the provision of resources, the visible whole-school impact of the official twinning with Höchststadt in Bavaria and the proactive efforts of the German teacher to promote German throughout the whole-school population. All this is most commendable.

During the inspection, it was noted that the current timetabling arrangements fall short of what is required to ensure that all students have access to twenty-eight class contact hours. Nonetheless, the timetable makes very good provision for the delivery of German. Second-year and third-year students are allocated five periods per week and sixth-year students are allocated six periods per week. An allocation of four and five periods, respectively, is usual practice in schools. Although these 'extra periods' are commended on the one hand, they are there to compensate for the fact that otherwise German would not have an appropriate time allocation due to lack of compliance with Department Circular Letter M29/95. While it is acknowledged that the school is actively seeking to address this matter, it is recommended that compliance with the terms and conditions of Department Circular Letter M29/95 takes effect for the next academic year. Single periods should be allocated where possible for the teaching and learning of German to facilitate continuity.

Laudably, a taster programme is in operation for the first term in the school. Discussions between staff and school management as to the appropriate length of the taster programme are ongoing. German is taught in mixed-ability classes and some students with additional educational needs have access to a modern European language. It is suggested that the school should monitor the uptake of languages with regard to gender balance in German.

The German department renews membership of the *Gesellschaft der Deutschlehrer Irlands* (German teachers' association) on an annual basis. This membership is paid for by the board of management and management authorities are to be commended for the support they afford to teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). Management encourages annual in-service by staff and this is praiseworthy. In this context, it is recommended that the German department attend available in-service as part of their CPD.

The German department is committed to trying new ideas, with particular reference to information and communications technologies (ICT). School management has ensured that every teacher in the school has a laptop and data projector. These are used regularly by the German teacher in the preparation of learning materials and in the delivery of learning objectives. School management is to be highly commended for the progressive approach that has been taken to building a most effective ICT infrastructure throughout the school.

The German department is well resourced. Whilst there is no official annual budget for the subject, funds are provided on request. The German department also acquires numerous authentic resources for the school when the school exchange is running or when students are in the countries of the target language. This is very effective practice and the department is to be commended for its foresight in this approach that ensures that a comprehensive range of resources is available. German is taught in a base classroom. The room is vibrantly decorated with a variety of language learning materials. Maps of Germany, posters with vocabulary and students' work were all on display. The provision of such well-decorated language rooms enhances the learning environment for students and is to be commended.

Commitment to the provision of extracurricular and co-curricular activities as witnessed in the course of the evaluation is evidence of the dedication and professional approach of the German teacher. Indeed, all language teachers in the school are to be commended for their integrated, co-curricular approach to language teaching, in particular the celebration of *International Language Day* with an international breakfast.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

The school is actively engaged with whole-school planning and subject departments have been established. Department heads, or co-ordinators, have been appointed and part of their duties is to write an end-of-year report on their department. This is passed on to school management for inclusion in the school's annual report. State examination results are analysed also and these are used to inform planning.

Commendably, there is formal collaboration with all language departments as part of modern-foreign-language planning, particularly in the area of cross-curricular planning and students with special educational needs. The language departments liaise with each other with regard to the assigning of lengthy written homework, such as essays, on an ongoing basis. This is praiseworthy.

An excellent structure is in place for individual subject planning. Weekly plans and targets are contained in a bound folder. Long-term planning is, laudably, stated in terms of learner outcomes and there is an evaluation record of work covered to date included. The department also prioritises its goals at the beginning of the year. For example, this academic year the delivery of PowerPoint teaching was its main focus and this priority has been actualised. A wide range of resources is stored in folders, with Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Transition Year (TY) resources separate. These are varied in terms of style and nature and are differentiated to accommodate the learning abilities of students at both junior and senior cycles.

To further enhance the good work done to date, it is recommended that learner outcomes be stated in terms of language skills and that the evaluative aspect of planning should be extended to encompass reflection on the success of the delivery of the theme or topic. It is also suggested that resource folders should be organised thematically to aid ready retrieval.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Inspection activities included the observation of three classes, the monitoring of students' work and interaction with students. A very good standard of teaching and learning was observed. German classes, as observed, were conducted in an energetic and enthusiastic manner and as a result students remained focused and motivated at all times. This is laudable.

In all classes observed, the lessons were well structured and the necessary resources were used to very good effect. Particularly noteworthy was the seamless integration of ICT and all four-language skills on the topic *Fächer* (subjects). Such high standard of preparation is to be commended as it facilitates the learning process greatly. Work in preparation for an examination task was very appropriate and effective. Clear instructions were given at all times by the teacher and this facilitated students' engagement with tasks.

Teacher circulation was facilitated by the use of a remote control device for the data projector. The teacher could move throughout the room providing support where necessary. It was immediately obvious to the teacher whether there were any general difficulties with the task that needed to be addressed at class level. This is commended as good practice.

Whilst German is being used as the language of classroom management there is scope for further development in this area. During the inspection, it was noted that due consideration was given to students' pronunciation. Drilling and imitation activities observed at junior cycle proved to be very successful in modelling learners' pronunciation in German. Indeed, this is beneficial to aural comprehension also, as focused oral production can improve aural skills.

Language skills were integrated well in some lessons observed. Whilst listening skills were practised during classes visited, it is recommended that pre-listening and post-listening activities should be exploited to consolidate learning. An example of this would be to examine the errors students are making and, having looked at mistakes, replay the tape exercise. This provides further reinforcement and consolidation of learning.

In some classes, pair-work was included and students were presented with opportunities to practice a dialogue with a partner in a 'safe' environment. It is recommended that the use of active methodologies be employed whenever possible to accommodate all learners' styles and abilities.

ASSESSMENT

Through whole-school planning, school management has prioritised homework and assessment for 2008-2009 and in-service on Assessment for Learning (AfL) principles is planned. This is commendable. In this context, it is recommended that the German department familiarise itself with AfL through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's website www.ncca.ie. The department should begin to adopt new methods of providing feedback to students on written work and is advised to adopt a method of providing feedback that would be uniform across year groups in the school.

Whilst the sample of copybooks observed showed an extensive range of vocabulary and topics covered, the provision of feedback was not consistently evident. It was noted in some copybooks that students receive motivational stickers in German for good work. This is very effective as students respond well to praise and encouragement. It is praiseworthy that formal assessment is an integral part of TY and project work is also an important element. Students are encouraged to follow up on their corrections and this is good practice.

Orally, students demonstrated a very competent knowledge of topics being covered in class and of vocabulary learned to date. While junior cycle students have received informal oral examinations to date, the department reported it hopes that students presenting for the Junior Certificate in 2009 would sit the optional Junior Certificate oral examination. This is commended. It is, therefore, recommended that the informal provision for oral assessment be formalised and that all examinations have a formal oral assessment component.

In accordance with good practice, students' progress is continually monitored and detailed records of progress are kept.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:
- It is to the school's credit that German is offered in all programmes.
- A taster programme is in operation for the first term in the school.
- School management is to be highly commended for the progressive approach that has been taken to building a most effective ICT infrastructure throughout the school.
- Long-term planning is, laudably, stated in terms of learner outcomes and there is an evaluation record of work covered to date included. The department also prioritises its goals at the beginning of the year.
- German classes, as observed, were conducted in an energetic and enthusiastic manner and as a result students remained focused and motivated at all times.
- Orally, students demonstrated a very competent knowledge of topics being covered in class and of vocabulary learned to date.

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 school comply with Department Circular Letter M29/95 for the next academic year.
- It is recommended that the use of active methodologies be employed whenever possible to accommodate all learners' styles and abilities.
- The informal provision for oral assessment should be formalised and all examinations should have a formal oral assessment component.

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