

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

**Subject Inspection of German
REPORT**

**Portumna Community School
Portumna, County Galway
Roll number: 914130**

**Date of inspection: 3 December 2007
Date of issue of report: 22 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 Portumna Community School. 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 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

Portumna Community School is a co-educational, post-primary school with a total enrolment of 451 students. The school offers a comprehensive range of curricular programmes to its students including the Junior Certificate, Transition Year (TY), Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA).

German is one of two modern languages on offer in the school. Prior to entry, parents and students attend an open night to inform themselves about the various subjects on offer. Thereafter, students are required to indicate their subject choices and subject option bands are constructed around these choices. It is commendable that students presenting with special educational needs are provided access to modern languages. Whilst this student-centred approach to subject choice is commendable, it is recommended that school management should consider the introduction of a taster curriculum to allow for a more informed choice of subjects.

During the course of the inspection it was noted that a significant percentage of students, particularly at senior cycle, do not study a modern foreign language. Whilst acknowledging that the school offers an open choice to students regarding subject options and that many students attend colleges or take up courses which may not necessarily have a language requirement, this is still a matter of concern. There are many transferable skills taught in language classes which are of ultimate benefit to students. Therefore, it is recommended that an analysis of general student uptake of modern languages be carried out to provide valuable insights into the reasons why students are opting out of modern languages. It would also be useful if a whole-school policy for language learning could be developed. Management could also utilise the popularity of LCVP to ensure the recognition and continuity of modern languages in the curriculum.

It is laudable that German features in programmes at junior and senior cycle. However, in an effort to promote the equal status of languages in the curriculum, it is recommended that consideration be given to allow German feature on all programmes on offer. The study of German and French could be offered to LCA and LCVP students on a rotational basis. It is also recommended that, single periods be assigned to the study of German to sustain continuity with the language.

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. The school indicated that it would address the matter and would hope to make adjustment to the timetable for future years. While it is acknowledged that the school is seeking to address this matter, it is recommended that compliance with the terms and conditions of Circular M29/95 take immediate effect for the next academic year.

There is no official budget for German but funds are made available on request. The German department has access to a variety of material resources, including tape recorders, overhead projectors, TVs and video recorders and two computer rooms. The school has broadband access and school management reported that it is committed to the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the school. This is praiseworthy. It is also commendable that the school is preparing to explore e-twinning and e-pals as an integral part of the teaching and learning of modern languages.

There is a base classroom for the teaching and learning of German. It is laudable that some displays of students' work as well as posters were on display.

Whilst efforts have been made to provide extracurricular and co-curricular activities for students of German, it is recommended that further activities are organised to help raise the profile of the subject in the school. These could include: debating competitions, food-tasting events or a modern-languages day. It is laudable that the school has had a tradition of contact with the University of Kassel in Germany and native-German speakers have come to Portumna Community School to act as foreign language assistants down through the years.

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

Portumna Community School has engaged with the School Development Planning Initiative and planning has been established. A plan for German has been put in place. This plan contains references to students' access for the subject, available resources, co-curricular activities, general schemes of work and an outline of homework procedures for the subject. This level of subject department planning is praiseworthy. Worthy of comment is the fact that specific teaching and learning methodologies for use with students with special educational needs are included. As there was no separate plan for TY students, it is recommended that one be formalised.

Whilst acknowledging that general schemes of work for the year are thematic in nature, it is recommended that planning should include the integration of all four language skills. Learning outcomes for each year group should be specified and detailed in an effort to plan for mixed-ability classes. Planning for the future integration of ICT should also be included.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Inspection activities included the observation of three classes, the monitoring of students' work and interaction with students. In all classes observed, the lessons were well structured and the necessary resources were used to good effect. The purpose of the lessons was clear and a very good rapport and a sense of mutual respect were evident in interactions. It is laudable that students were positively affirmed on a regular basis throughout lessons observed.

A positive work environment was evident in lessons observed and students remained engaged in their work throughout. It is praiseworthy also that sufficient time was taken and care was given to ensure students understood explanations around points of grammar and that they knew what was expected of them in class.

Some lessons, particularly at junior cycle, were lively and motivating and students were quite responsive. However, most lessons were teacher-centred. Therefore, it is recommended that more active teaching methodologies should be utilised to respond to the differentiated needs and abilities of students studying German and to promote students' engagement.

Overall, target language usage was good and students were supported in their use of German. However, it is recommended, that strategies should be developed to consolidate and firmly embed the target language for students at all stages in their language learning. It is also recommended that due consideration be given to pronunciation. Teachers are the only model of the target language community that students have access to, therefore, it is very important that teachers avail of opportunities to up-skill themselves as part of their continuing professional development (CPD), both in terms of their own linguistic competence and in the development of the linguistic competence of their learners.

Commendable differentiation of oral responses was observed where students were allowed to manipulate their language skills and offer examples at their own competency levels. This was evident at senior cycle, where students were asked to give examples of sentence structure using the conjunction *'weil'* (because). Students were also required to reflect on their learning in that they had to consider whether an exercise was easy or difficult. This is good practice. However, students in their responses should be appropriately challenged to provide full utterances.

The planning for all four language skills was evident in some of the lessons observed and this is good practice. It is recommended that the planning for, and delivery of, such integration be extended to all classes.

ASSESSMENT

Appropriate homework was assigned in all classes observed. Particularly commendable was the freedom of choice offered to students in some of their homework assignments. The sample of copybooks observed contained a variety of exercises, including: grammar exercises, vocabulary and grammar notes, and letters and notes in the target language. Some copybooks were thoroughly corrected and provided detailed and informative feedback to students. The signing and dating of corrected exercises is good practice and to be commended. However, in an effort to promote autonomous learning, it is recommended that an 'over correction' of mistakes by teachers should be avoided. For example, instead, mistakes could be highlighted in the margins or underlined but the onus is then on the students to follow up on their mistakes. It is also recommended that written exercises assigned to students should allow for manipulation of language skills rather than translation.

A system of continuous assessment is in operation in the school for all year groups and this is commendable. Students' aural competencies are assessed both at junior and senior cycle on a regular basis and oral examinations are administered at senior cycle. It is recommended that students' oral abilities should be formally assessed at all stages of their language learning.

Generally, contact with parents concerning students' progress is maintained through the use of the students' journal, school reports and annual parent-teacher meetings.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- German is one of two modern languages on offer in the school and features in programmes at junior and senior cycle.
- There is a base classroom for the teaching and learning of German.
- It is laudable that the school has had a tradition of contact with the University of Kassel in Germany and native-German speakers have come to Portumna Community School to act as foreign language assistants down through the years.
- The school has broadband access and school management reported that it is committed to the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the school.
- It is laudable that specific teaching and learning methodologies for use with students with special educational needs are included in subject planning.
- A positive work environment was evident in lessons observed and students remained engaged in their work throughout.
- Overall, target language usage was good and students were supported in their use of German.
- Particularly commendable was freedom of choice offered to students in some of their homework assignments.

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

- Whilst a student-centred approach to subject choice is commendable, it is recommended that school management should consider the introduction of a taster curriculum to allow for a more informed choice of subjects.
- Therefore, it is recommended that an analysis of general student uptake of modern languages be carried out to provide valuable insights into the reasons why students are opting out of modern languages.
- It is recommended that compliance with the terms and conditions of Circular M29/95 take immediate effect for the next academic year.
- More active teaching methodologies should be utilised to respond to the differentiated needs and abilities of students studying German and to promote students' engagement.
- It is recommended that the planning for, and delivery of, the integration of all language skills be extended to all classes.
- It is recommended that students' oral abilities should be formally assessed at all stages of their language learning.

Post-evaluation meetings were held with the teacher 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.