



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Subject Inspection: French

## REPORT

Ainm na scoile/School name      Portumna Community School

Seoladh na scoile/School address      St. Brigid's Road  
Portumna  
Co. Galway

Uimhir rolla/Roll number      914130

Dáta na cigireachta/ Date of evaluation      19/11/2024

Dáta eisiúna na tuairisce/Date of issue of report      13/03/2025

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# What is a subject inspection?

Subject Inspections report on the quality of work in individual curriculum areas within a school. They affirm good practice and make recommendations, where appropriate, to aid the further development of the subject in the school.

## How to read this report

During this inspection, the inspector evaluated learning and teaching in French under the following headings:

1. Teaching, learning and assessment
2. Subject provision and whole-school support
3. Planning and preparation

Inspectors describe the quality of each of these areas using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown on the final page of this report. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision in each area.

Included in this subject inspection report is a student-friendly page that provides information for the children/young people in your school about the inspection that occurred recently. It outlines for them some of the main findings and recommendations.

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.

## Actions of the school to safeguard children and prevent and tackle bullying

During the inspection visit, the following checks in relation to the school's child protection and anti-bullying procedures were conducted:	
<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Anti-bullying</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The name of the DLP and the Child Safeguarding Statement are prominently displayed near the main entrance to the school.</li><li>2. The Child Safeguarding Statement has been ratified by the board and includes an annual review and a risk assessment.</li><li>3. All teachers visited reported that they have read the Child Safeguarding Statement and that they are aware of their responsibilities as mandated persons.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The school has developed an anti-bullying policy that meets the requirements of the <i>Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (2013)</i> or <i>Bí Cineálta (2024)</i> and this policy is reviewed annually.</li><li>2. The school's current anti-bullying policy is published on its website and/or is readily accessible to board of management members, teachers, parents and students.</li></ol>

The school met the requirements in relation to each of the checks above.

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# Subject inspection

<b>Dates of inspection</b>	18 and 19 November 2024
<b>Inspection activities undertaken</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of relevant documents</li><li>• Discussion with principal and key staff</li><li>• Interaction with students, including focus groups</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation of teaching and learning during 4 lessons</li><li>• Examination of students' work</li><li>• Feedback to principal and relevant staff</li></ul>

## School context

Portumna Community School is a co-educational, multi-denominational post-primary school with 493 students enrolled at the time of the evaluation. The school offers the Junior Cycle programme, an optional Transition Year (TY) programme, the Leaving Certificate (Established) (LCE), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

## Summary of main findings and recommendations:

### Findings

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good with aspects of very good practice evident.
- Teachers regularly provided positive reinforcement to motivate students, recognising efforts and celebrating achievements, which contributed to boosting students' confidence.
- Students were immersed in the French language through the use of visuals, gestures and repetition by teachers in the majority of lessons.
- Teachers used assessment for learning (AfL) techniques effectively to enhance student understanding and identify areas for improvement.
- The overall quality of subject provision and whole-school support for French was very good, including a taster programme at the start of first year.
- Overall, planning and preparation was good, with very good planning at Junior Cycle.

### Recommendations

- In order to enhance learning focus, and help students understand the purpose of the lesson, teachers should design learning intentions that clearly focus on the specific skills and knowledge they aim for students to develop during lessons.
- Teachers should extend differentiation strategies to ensure all tasks are appropriately challenging for students, catering to their individual learning needs and abilities.
- Teachers are encouraged to extend the structure of their Junior Cycle plans to their Senior Cycle plans to ensure clear, structured planning across both cycles.

## Detailed findings and recommendations

### 1. Teaching, learning and assessment

- The overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment was good with instances of very good practices evident in most lessons.
- The classroom environment was supportive, with a strong rapport between teachers and students. Teachers consistently used positive reinforcement to encourage student participation, praising efforts and celebrating successes, which helped to build students' confidence. Students in the focus group remarked on how comfortable they felt in lessons to answer questions and to look for help from teachers.
- The target language was used effectively by teachers in lessons. Best practice was noted where the teacher spoke French throughout the lesson, using imagery to support student understanding. This allowed students to immerse themselves in the language, reinforcing their comprehension and retention. In one lesson, the teacher provided students with descriptions in French and students had to draw the corresponding image. This was a very engaging task. Teachers are encouraged to use the target language throughout all lessons, avoiding unnecessary English translations, such as classroom instructions, which helps students develop a stronger, more intuitive grasp of French.
- Learning intentions were made clear at the beginning of lessons. The learning intentions however, primarily focused on a list of tasks or activities to be covered during the lesson, rather than clearly articulating the skills and knowledge students were expected to develop. There were missed opportunities to explicitly connect these tasks to specific learning intentions. Focusing learning intentions on the skills and knowledge that students will develop will help students understand the purpose of the lesson, improving engagement and motivation. In one lesson, the teacher recapitulated the learning with an interactive game at the end of the lesson. This allowed students to reflect and allowed the teacher to assess their understanding. Teachers should leave adequate time at the end of all lessons to recapitulate the learning that has occurred. Providing this time for review will help reinforce learning, clarify any misconceptions, and ensure students leave the lesson with an understanding of the learning they have achieved.
- Teachers used effective AfL techniques, such as direct questioning and peer correction, to gauge individual student comprehension, providing opportunities for immediate feedback and clarification. An examination of student copybooks revealed that students reflected and reviewed their performances, identifying areas for improvement, and planning the next steps in their learning. This practice supported one of the school self-evaluation focuses of giving students a sense of ownership and responsibility. While the feedback from teachers in copybooks was mainly to affirm good work, teachers reported giving feedback orally to students regularly. Teachers should encourage their students to record the oral feedback so that it can be used to guide them in their work.
- Teachers promoted differentiation in lessons by providing students with opportunities to support one another with pair work activities, encouraging the use of dictionaries, and using probing questioning to support higher-order thinking skills. One teacher gave their students differentiated handouts to complete. This is very good practice and should be extended to all lessons as well as to homework exercises. Teachers should consider not only students who need additional support but also those who would benefit from more challenging class and homework tasks to further extend their learning.
- Digital technology was used very effectively to support student learning through various tools such as authentic materials sourced online, videos, games, and the school's online platform. The teacher uploaded oral recordings, which facilitated personalised learning experiences, and provided greater access to resources and support.

## 2. Subject provision and whole-school support

- The quality of subject provision and whole-school support was very good, with senior management very supportive of the subject and providing appropriate time allocation at both Junior and Senior Cycle.
- Senior management supported and facilitated teachers to pursue professional learning on a regular basis. All teachers were members of their professional associations.
- While languages were optional, there was a very good uptake of French and there was a very positive attitude towards languages in the school. A taster programme at the beginning of first-year encouraged students to study either French or German.
- The school promoted French by facilitating events such as Euroscola programme where TY students visited the European parliament. Commendably, the school is currently setting up an Erasmus group with the intention of students partaking in the programme next year. Teachers organised a lunch club twice a week to encourage students to practice speaking French. Students reported that they enjoyed these activities.
- Summative assessment included term testing for students. Teachers of French included an oral communication project for first-year students. This approach provided students with an opportunity to demonstrate their speaking and communication skills, and encouraged active learning. Students in the focus group spoke of the positive experiences of completing their classroom based assessment (CBA). In line with best practice, students should be encouraged to select their own CBA in order to foster a sense of ownership and enhance the overall learning experience.

## 3. Planning and preparation

- The overall quality of planning and preparation was good, with very good practice visible at Junior Cycle. The Junior cycle plans were time-bound with clear learning activities divided into weekly schemes of work. However, the units of learning did not line up with the content in the lessons observed. Teachers should use their plans as live documents to inform their teaching and learning, and update time frames where necessary.
- The Junior Cycle plans included teaching methodologies and activities aligned with the three strands of the modern foreign language (MFL) specification. The plans incorporated AfL and differentiation strategies to support and challenge students. Teachers completed reflections at the end of units of learning and used this section to assess the effectiveness of lessons and identify areas for improvement.
- The Senior Cycle plans were structured around term planning, with a focus on vocabulary, oral communication, written tasks, and grammar. While general assessment techniques were outlined, such as peer assessment, verbal and written questioning, and listening exercises, specific activities to help students achieve the intended learning outcomes were not detailed. Also, the time frames for completing these tasks were not clearly defined, making it difficult to gauge lesson pace. Teachers should extend the planning of Junior Cycle with clear learning activities and differentiation strategies to their Senior Cycle plans. Well-defined time frames together with specific learning activities will help maintain a balanced pace and allow teachers to monitor progress effectively, ensuring that learning objectives are met within the allotted time.
- Language teachers effectively collaborated as a MFL department. Minutes from meetings were documented and shared with senior management. Minutes included references to teaching and learning strategies and discussions of areas of improvement. Additionally, assessment and planning for students with Additional Educational Needs (AEN) were addressed. Peer assessment was one of the teaching and learning strategies being promoted through the school's SSE focus of giving students a sense of ownership and responsibility, with evidence of this seen in the lessons observed.
- A detailed analysis of students' results in the State Examinations was carried out annually. With the support of the school's Academic Director, the outcomes were discussed at department meetings, where teachers set targets. Teachers should

document the strategies they will use to achieve the targets they set and review them during the year to assess their effectiveness and impact.

The draft findings and recommendations arising out of this evaluation were discussed with the principal, deputy principal and subject teachers at the conclusion of the evaluation.



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

## For the students of Portumna Community School about their learning in French

Date of inspection:

18 and 19 November 2024

### What kind of inspection did your school have?



A subject inspection was completed in your school. The inspector observed lessons and spoke with the principal and teachers. The inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning in French.

### What were the main findings of the inspection?



- Teachers regularly praised students for their hard work, which made them feel more confident and eager to join in
- Teachers helped students learn French by using pictures, gestures, and repeating words
- Teachers used helpful assessment methods to see how well students understood, and to find areas where they could improve

### What did the inspector recommend to make teaching and learning better in French?



- To help students stay focused and understand the lesson better, teachers should clearly explain what skills and knowledge they want students to learn during each lesson
- Teachers should use different teaching methods to make sure all tasks are the right level of challenge for each student, helping them learn at their own pace

Thank you for taking the time to read this page.  
Special thanks to the students who participated in the focus group.

## The Inspectorate's Quality Continuum

Inspectors describe the quality of provision in the school using the Inspectorate's quality continuum which is shown below. The quality continuum provides examples of the language used by inspectors when evaluating and describing the quality of the school's provision of each area.

Level	Description	Examples of descriptive terms
<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Provision that is excellent</b> is exemplary in meeting the needs of learners. This provision provides an example for other schools and settings of exceptionally high standards of provision.	Excellent; exemplary; outstanding; exceptionally high standard; with very significant strengths
<b>Very good</b>	<b>Provision that is very good</b> is very effective in meeting the needs of learners and is of a very high standard. There is potential to build on existing strengths to achieve an excellent standard.	Very good; of a very high quality; very effective practice; highly commendable; very successful
<b>Good</b>	<b>Provision that is good</b> is effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to build on existing strengths in order to address the aspects to be developed and achieve a very good standard.	Good; of good quality; effective practice; competent; useful; commendable; good standard; strengths outweigh the shortcomings; appropriate provision although some possibilities for improvement exist
<b>Requires improvement to achieve a good standard</b>	<b>Provision that requires improvement to achieve a good standard</b> is not sufficiently effective in meeting the needs of learners. There is need to address certain deficiencies without delay in order to ensure that provision is good or better.	Fair; less than effective; less than sufficient; evident weaknesses that are impacting on learning; experiencing difficulty; shortcomings outweigh strengths; must improve in specified areas; action required to improve
<b>Requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard</b>	<b>Provision that requires significant improvement to achieve a good standard</b> is not meeting the needs of learners. There is immediate need for significant action to address the areas of concern.	Weak; poor; ineffective; insufficient; unacceptable; experiencing significant difficulties; serious deficiencies in the areas evaluated; requiring significant change, development and improvement to be effective