

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

**Subject Inspection of German  
REPORT**

**Athlone Community College  
Athlone, County Westmeath  
Roll number: 71410T**

**Date of inspection: 5 and 6 October 2006  
Date of issue of report: 22 February 2007**

[Report on the Quality of Learning and Teaching in German](#)  
[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 Athlone Community 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 two days 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, deputy principal and subject teachers. 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**

Athlone Community College is a second level school with an enrolment of 865 students. A comprehensive range of curricular programmes is available in the school as follows: the Junior Certificate, Transition Year Programme (TY), Leaving Certificate (established), the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). German is available in all programmes except the LCA. The school is to be commended for its range of programmes and for the inclusion of German in most of them.

German and French are the modern languages on offer in the school. Incoming first-year students pick a number of subjects from the wide range that is on offer. Parents and students are asked to choose one modern language. This choice is made before the students enter first year. The numbers taking German in recent years have shown a small decrease. There is no obvious reason for this. It is suggested that all such trends be carefully monitored and reviewed.

German is well provided for in Athlone Community College. The German department comprises three qualified teachers of the subject and one German language assistant. The teachers of German have spent extended periods of time in the countries of the target language. The German department holds membership of the GDI (German Teachers' Association) and staff have availed of courses offered by the teachers' association. The German department is committed to continuous professional development. This is most laudable.

The time allocation to the subject is good. Students in the junior cycle and in TY are allocated four class periods per week in the subject. In the senior cycle five or six class periods (alternating each year between fifth and sixth year) are allocated to German. Six class periods per week is a generous time allocation. In the junior cycle single class periods are allocated to the subject. However in the senior cycle double class periods are allocated to German. It is recommended that this be reviewed and that every effort be made to allocate more single class periods to German in the senior cycle. Single class periods are more effective for language teaching and learning.

The school has a comprehensive programme of activities to support the teaching and learning of German. An annual exchange is organised with a school in Ludwigshafen in Germany. This exchange has a great uptake and a large number of students from junior and senior cycle take part. The exchange affords the learners the wonderful opportunity to attend school and experience the language and culture at first hand. The German department and the management of the school are to be highly commended for the time and dedication that the organisation of such an exchange involves. Other activities are organised throughout the school year such as quizzes, cinema outings (to see German films) and pen pals. Some of these activities occur as part of a wider languages programme across Irish and French. Establishing links and organising activities across the various languages departments is most effective practice and should be continued.

There is no official budget for the purchase of resources. Instead the German department submits a list of required resources to the management authorities and these are acquired for the department. There are many resources available to support the teaching and learning of German in the school. A wide range of books, tapes, CDs, video tapes, posters and films is available. At present these are stored in the two base classrooms. It is recommended that a list of all resources be drawn up and be included in the planning documentation. It is also recommended that some resources pertaining to language teaching methodology be acquired.

German lessons take place mainly in a dedicated German room or alternatively in a dedicated language room (shared with French). These 'base' classrooms were decorated to the highest standard. Photographs, posters, signs and maps were all on display in these rooms. A considerable amount of students' work (some which included photographs of the individual learners) was also on display. This is very effective and gives the students a sense of ownership of the learning environment. The German lessons take place in a setting which is most conducive to learning.

It was noted in the course of the evaluation that two large displays relating to German activities were on show in the concourse at the main entrance of the school. The first display showed several photographs relating to the German exchange. The second display was entitled 'Tag der deutschen Einheit' (Day of German unity). This colourful and comprehensive poster had been displayed to mark the German national holiday which was celebrated that week in Germany. Displaying up-to-date relevant cultural material such as this in the public corridors raises the profile of the subject in a highly effective manner and is to be commended.

### **Planning and preparation**

The school is actively engaged in school development planning. Subject departments have been formally established. The German team works very well together on a formal and an informal basis. Formal subject department meetings take place on a regular basis and a coordinator has been appointed. Agendas are set, minutes and records of decisions are kept. It is school policy that the coordinator reports on the meetings to the senior management team, thus ensuring a clear flow of information. This is very good practice. The school management is to be commended for putting such effective structures in place.

Excellent planning documentation was made available in the course of the inspection. This documentation contained information on the long term goals, departmental resources and forms of assessment. Information on strategies for teaching students who have special educational needs was also included. Throughout all the documentation there was great evidence of innovation and attention to detail. This is to be highly commended.

It is particularly noteworthy that a number of activities are planned that will involve the German department engaging in self review and self evaluation. For example, according to the planning documentation the German department intends to implement a peer support system whereby teachers would visit each other's lessons for the purpose of mutual self help. Creating a climate whereby teachers are enabled to engage in frank and open professional dialogue is an excellent idea. The senior management team indicated their strong support for this initiative. This is also to be commended.

A comprehensive subject department plan for German was included in the planning documentation. The yearly scheme of work detailed the themes that will be covered with each year group. For each theme, further information on the objectives, specific learning outcomes, learning activities, socio-cultural aspects, assessments and resources was supplied. This is a most effective approach to planning for the teaching and learning of the subject and is an example of excellent practice. To develop these schemes of work further, it is recommended that specific information on the development of the skills of language acquisition be included.

### **Teaching and learning**

The subject matter dealt with in all lessons observed was in line with syllabus requirements. In a junior-cycle lesson students were learning vocabulary related to the theme of food and how to order food in a German restaurant. In senior-cycle lessons students dealt with the themes of the environment. In other lessons observed the theme of sport and the recent world cup held in Germany formed the basis for lesson content. Towards the end of the lesson students were asked to write about their own favourite team. This is very effective practice as it relates the theme to the learners' own lives. It is suggested that this practice be extended to all lessons. Making the theme relevant and connecting activities to students' own lives will enhance the learning process.

Many excellent teaching methodologies were observed in the course of the inspection. Particularly noteworthy was the use of group work and pair work. For example in junior-cycle teaching, students were given role play cards and carried out pair-work activities on the theme of giving directions. In senior-cycle, students were invited to work in groups to

complete a large sheet of activities on the theme of environmental protection. Once the sheets were completed students were invited to display them on the walls of the classroom. This is very good practice.

It is also noteworthy that the permanent seating arrangement in the 'base' German classroom facilitates such effective language teaching methodologies. All tables are arranged so that learners can sit in groups rather than the traditional row-by-row arrangement. This is most appropriate to a modern language classroom. This seating arrangement is to be highly commended. It is suggested that if possible this arrangement be tried in other classrooms.

The use of materials to accompany activities was excellent. It was clear that a lot of work and time had gone into the advance preparation of materials. For example, in junior cycle, a song was played to accompany a dialogue. The use of song and music in modern language teaching is very praiseworthy. In senior-cycle, pages from German newspapers were fixed to the board and students were asked to complete a worksheet using information from the newspapers. Using authentic material in this manner is very good practice and most praiseworthy.

The manner in which the learning of vocabulary was consolidated also merits comment. A variety of methods was used effectively to expand the students' vocabulary. For example, vocabulary had been put on colourful flashcards. In another instance, students were required to categorise vocabulary. This is a most useful way of testing students' understanding without using English and is to be commended.

The use of the target language in most of the lessons visited was very good. German was used effortlessly for all communication in the classroom. In a minority of instances German was used followed by an English translation. This is less effective as students will rely on translation rather than making the effort to understand the foreign language. Students interacted well in German with the inspector in all lessons observed. To enhance the students' use of the target language it is recommended that dedicated pronunciation work take place in all lessons.

Most lessons began with some form of ritual. For example in many lessons the day and date were written on the board in German. Other lessons began with a 'warm up' session which involved students being asked simple questions in German about themselves. This activity worked very well and the learners engaged effectively with and benefited from the task. It is recommended that this oral warm-up activity at the start of lessons be extended to all classes.

The classroom atmosphere in all lessons was uniformly very good. The student-teacher rapport was good and students felt a sense of security in the classroom. Students were encouraged to participate in class and were always called on by name. When students made errors these were corrected with sensitivity. Discipline was maintained to the highest standards in all lessons. This was due to the careful advance preparation of all activities and to the positive manner in which teachers carried out their teaching. Creating such a pleasant classroom atmosphere ensures that effective learning can take place.

## **Assessment**

Formal assessment for all classes of German takes place at Christmas and in summer. The results of these assessments are communicated to parents by means of reports. Parent-teacher meetings are held for all year groups on an annual basis. Students of German are assessed in all the skills of language acquisition. This is very good practice as it ensures that any difficulties students may have in the individual skills are detected. This comprehensive assessment informs teaching practice. Good records of student assessments are kept.

Students in Transition Year are assessed in a number of different ways. Formal assessment comprises Christmas and summer examinations. A credit system is also in place for students following this programme. Credits are awarded for criteria such as attendance, punctuality, assignments completed on time and oral work. In addition, TY students create a German

magazine which contains articles written in German by the students themselves. The magazine created by the TY German students in the last academic year was viewed in the course of the evaluation. This was an excellent production. Broadening the assessment criteria as is done in this programme is most effective practice and is to be highly commended.

Students are encouraged to evaluate their own learning. Student self evaluation documentation was supplied in the course of the inspection. These self evaluation sheets ask students to record information regarding how they managed tasks, whether they, as learners, asked good questions and which of the language skills they need to improve. Encouraging students to reflect on their own learning and engage in the process of self evaluation is an example of excellent practice and is most commendable.

Homework is given and corrected on a very regular basis. In all lessons visited care was taken to explain the homework that was being assigned. Homework was always effectively linked to lesson content. Written homework is carefully corrected. Students' copybooks were generally very well organised and a lot of work had been done by the students. It was noted that in a minority of instances a negative comment was written at the end of students' work. This is not conducive to students making an effort to improve. It is recommended that the German department draw up a homework policy which will contain information on how written work will be corrected by the German team. As part of this policy it is suggested that students be required to follow up on a limited number of mistakes and that formative assessment/assessment for learning be adopted. Further information on assessment for learning (AfL) is available on the website of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment at <http://www.ncca.ie/> It is also recommended that teachers date and sign student copybooks as part of the correction process.

## **Summary of main findings and recommendations**

The following are the main strengths identified in the evaluation:

- German is well provided for in the school
- There is good support for the subject in terms of appropriate human resources, time allocation and co-curricular activities
- The school is actively engaged in development planning and the German department meets formally and informally on a regular basis
- Excellent yearly schemes of work have been drawn up which demonstrate a high level of innovation
- Lesson content in all lessons observed was in line with syllabus requirements
- The use of the target language ranged from very good to good
- Excellent language teaching methodologies were in evidence in all lessons observed
- The student-teacher rapport was very good. The classroom atmosphere in all lessons was most conducive to learning
- Regular assessment takes place and all skills of language acquisition of are assessed

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

- The allocation of double periods to the teaching of German in senior cycle needs to be reviewed
- It is recommended that a list of resources be taken and included in the planning documentation
- Yearly schemes of work should be developed to include specific information on the development of the skills of language acquisition
- Lesson content should be linked to the interests and lives of the students as much as possible

- The good use of the target language in the classroom should be developed to include dedicated pronunciation exercises
- It is recommended that the German department establishes a homework policy regarding the development of the students' written skill.

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