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Mrs J Cottrell
Headteacher
Halterworth Community Primary School
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Dear Mrs Cottrell

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and pupils, during my visit on 7 June 2011 to look at work in ML.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and pupils; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of pupils' work; and observation of four lessons.

Achievement in ML

- Pupils achieve well by the end of Key Stage 2. They speak confidently within the topics that they have covered and with good pronunciation. They are able to write short paragraphs about themselves and they very much enjoy writing creatively, such as when they adapt a story that they have read. They have a good understanding of a range of spoken French, including songs and rhymes, although higher attainers say that they sometimes find the work too easy and they would like more challenge. Most pupils, however, said that French was challenging and fun. All groups of pupils are making good progress.
- Pupils are very accurate in what they say and write. They have an excellent understanding of grammatical rules, such as adjectival agreements and word order, because teachers make it a key part of their teaching activities.

- Pupils are beginning to use some language spontaneously, for example to say hello and goodbye, but this is an area which the department has correctly identified as in need of development.
- Pupils are able to read short texts and get the opportunity to read some stories but there is less non-fiction available and pupils do not often use authentic websites to read things of interest to them. When reading aloud, their pronunciation is sometimes anglicised as they have not learnt how to convert print to sound.
- Pupils have a good understanding of life in France as each topic has at least one 'fact of the day' about France associated with it; but pupils are less well informed about life in other French-speaking countries.
- Pupils are just beginning to learn how to use dictionaries and resources such as the internet independently, and show a keen interest in the new books which have been bought for them to read. They are also well aware that learning a language is important both for jobs and for their next school. They very much enjoy learning French, with one pupil summing this up by saying 'it couldn't be better'.

Quality of teaching in ML

- Teachers are very enthusiastic about teaching French and have good subject knowledge which they use to plan interesting and varied activities. The main focus is on developing pupils' spoken and listening skills which is very effective, with many opportunities to practise, for example during assemblies and broadcasting on the school radio. Year 5 pupils have begun to do some creative writing and the school has plans to increase the amount of writing that pupils do.
- Most teachers use French well to give key instructions and for basic phrases, such as greetings, but they do not always encourage pupils to express their opinions or to use language more spontaneously.
- Teachers know their pupils very well indeed and carefully plan tasks which support the lower and middle attaining pupils, especially when writing. In some lessons seen, work could have been more challenging for the most able pupils who were always encouraged to be extremely accurate in their work but could also have done more extended reading and writing tasks.
- There are few opportunities for pupils to work with other adults in the classroom, especially those who speak another language and pupils said that they would like to do more of this.
- Pupils get helpful comments about their work in class and they are therefore able to make progress quickly, for example improving pronunciation or accuracy. They are, however, less clear about their overall progress and what they need to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

- Pupils have between 50 and 60 minutes a week of French; at least 30 minutes of this is during a discrete lesson which enables them to make good progress.

- Pupils in Year 6 have been learning French for four years and over this time the curriculum has been very carefully developed and reviewed to make sure that it is relevant and interesting. Schemes of work and assessment systems have been designed in collaboration with the local authority as well as other local secondary and primary schools. They cover all the skills in the Key Stage 2 framework and there is clear progression over the four years.
- There is a private French club which is attended by about 10 pupils and there are occasional events when speakers of other languages are invited to share their language and culture with pupils.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

- Senior managers and the governors have an outstanding vision of how languages will develop in this school. The school has appointed a very effective subject leader who has a specialism in teaching primary French and who is driving forward improvements. A strong sense of purpose is shared by all staff and there is a continual desire to improve. The school seeks external advice when necessary and is keen to try new approaches. For example, in previous years, primary school staff have observed teaching by staff from the local secondary school. The primary staff have now become confident enough to teach French on their own.
- Languages have a very high profile in the school among both staff and pupils. They are pivotal in the school development plan and there have been clear improvements in the curriculum design and the quality of the teaching through access to very effective training and support.
- The school has a very accurate picture of its provision in French and the action plan correctly identifies areas such as the need to develop pupils' spontaneous speech. The tracking of pupils' performance in French is an area that is on the action plan for development.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop pupils' ability to speak spontaneously and to read more widely in French
- developing systems to track pupils' performance overall in French and ensure that they are aware of what they need to do to improve.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Peach
Additional Inspector