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Colette Barrett
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Dear Mrs Barrett

No formal designation inspection of St Cuthbert's RC Primary School

Following my visit to your school on 28 January 2020, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. The findings do not change the overall effectiveness judgement of outstanding from the last section 5 inspection.

This inspection was conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 and in accordance with Ofsted's published procedures for a no formal designation inspection of schools. The inspection was carried out to enable Her Majesty's Chief Inspector to better understand the quality of education in specific subjects provided by outstanding primary schools. The subject in focus was languages.

Main findings

You are committed to ensuring that the study of languages plays an important role in the curriculum at St Cuthbert's. All pupils from Year 1 receive a 30-minute languages lesson per week. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Mandarin and French are taught at school. To support the teaching of Mandarin, you are working in partnership with two local secondary schools and an international Chinese language foundation. Mandarin is taught to all pupils in Years 1 to 3. In Year 4, currently, pupils stop learning Mandarin and begin to learn French. They continue with this language until they leave Year 6.

Mandarin is taught by a specialist teacher. Curriculum plans and specialist teachers are provided by the language foundation. The curriculum is tightly planned in

Mandarin. Due consideration has been given to the order in which topics, vocabulary and grammar are taught. There is logical progression in Mandarin for speakers of English.

Most vocabulary chosen is represented by relatively simple Chinese characters. This aids learning and word recognition. These include commonly used radicals and pictograms that are directly linked to the topics that are being studied. Radicals link different characters to one semantic field. Pictograms resemble their meaning and are less abstract than other characters. This approach helps pupils to decipher words and remember them at the beginning of their studies.

Teachers introduce vocabulary and structures gradually. Pupils practise them so that they are easy to recall. These are limited in number. This helps pupils to focus on their pronunciation, meaning, spelling in Pinyin (Romanised system for representing standard Chinese) and characters. Pupils' pronunciation is generally accurate. They incorporate the different tonal qualities of syllables when practising words and repeating sentences.

Mandarin teachers use assessment well to ensure that pupils are making progress through the curriculum. Teachers use this information to shape their plans to make sure that anyone who is falling behind is able to catch up. They change their delivery if the class as a whole does not grasp a concept.

By Year 3, pupils have learned a range of vocabulary. They are able to produce simple sentences in Mandarin with support. They can say these, transcribe them in Pinyin and write these as characters. The steady, consistent, step-by-step approach to building sentences works very well. Teachers focus on the basics and make sure that these are learned and understood.

You are aware that there has been substantial turbulence as far as French is concerned. There have been changes to curriculum leadership and to teaching staff. Currently, French is taught by the subject leader in Year 4. Other class teachers have needed to 'step up to the plate' due to staff absence. They have little or no training in either the French language or French teaching.

Curriculum plans are based on a scheme of work that requires more than 30 minutes per week to deliver. The subject leader is altering these schemes and omitting some elements. However, in doing so, no consideration has been given to ensuring that the order in which sounds, grammar or sentence structures are introduced remains intact.

Current pupils have experienced a jumbled curriculum in French. Several classes are going back over topics that have been missed in the past. Their exposure to vocabulary and different topics is relatively strong. Pupils can remember words, simple rehearsed phrases and some simple grammatical concepts, such as gender. They do not recall high frequency words or simple verbs as well. Their

pronunciation is weak. This is because this has not been taught systematically in the past. Sometimes, they are exposed to inaccurate pronunciation and incorrect written French. No meaningful assessment takes place in French. This does not help teachers to refine their plans or support individuals. Pupils cannot build simple sentences. They simply rehearse question and answer exchanges and practise vocabulary.

As a result, achievement in languages across the school is varied. Pupils produce sentences in Year 6 French that are the same in complexity as those in Year 3 Mandarin. Pupils' achievement is stronger in French when there is a structured approach to the curriculum that teachers deliver well. Achievement of pupils in Year 4 in French is relatively strong. However, the languages curriculum as a whole currently does not match the aims or scope of the national curriculum by the end of Year 6.

Evidence

I met with you, members of the senior leadership team and the teacher with responsibility for French. I spoke to a colleague from the international Chinese language foundation about Mandarin schemes of work. I visited a Year 3 Mandarin lesson and French lessons in Years 4, 5 and 6. I looked at a selection of pupils' work from the lessons that I visited with the deputy headteacher and the teacher with responsibility for French. We also considered work produced in Mandarin. I met with teachers of the lessons that I had visited. I spoke with two groups of pupils about their learning in French. I evaluated the curriculum plans for French and Mandarin and policies for languages.

Context

St Cuthbert's RC Primary School is a smaller than average primary school. There are currently 184 pupils on roll. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is average. The proportion of pupils with SEND, including pupils with education, health and care plans, is below average.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Newcastle upon Tyne. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Wardle
Her Majesty's Inspector