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Mrs H Channing
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Dear Mrs Channing

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and those of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 15 July 2008 to look at work in modern languages (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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

Schools are expected to provide an entitlement for all pupils in Key Stage 2 to learn a modern language by 2010. As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on implementing languages entitlement.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of one lesson and pupils' presentations.

Context

The learning of a ML is in its early stages of development, having begun in September 2007. All pupils in Key Stage 2 learn French and those in Key Stage 1 have a more informal introduction to language learning largely through games and songs.

Achievement and standards

- All groups are making good progress. In Year 6 it is especially good.

- Pupils enjoy learning ML and work with enthusiasm.
- A concentration on songs and games is helping pupils to speak instinctively in French in response to a situation. They are learning to substitute words to change the meanings of phrases and sentences.
- Many respond with confidence and good accents.
- They see the written words when they have heard and spoken them. They are able to relate the two without affecting their pronunciation.
- Although they read words in this way, they do very little writing and have not yet developed the use of reference sources such as dictionaries.
- They have done individual research projects into French culture and, when questioned, had a good understanding of French life.
- They have a small number of friends in school of Chinese, Bengali and Icelandic origin and have tried to understand their language and culture.
- Pupils have limited understanding of their strengths and weaknesses because the school has not yet developed ML assessment framework. They can express their progress informally in terms of 'can do' statements.
- Pupils are creative in their speaking, in role-play and in games.
- They have a broad understanding of the value of learning ML, citing as incentives to do so family members who speak other languages and meeting French people at home and abroad.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

- Teachers' subject knowledge is improving and they are developing confidence. The only native speaker role model is through recorded material.
- Training and support has been provided by the ML consultant from the local authority and by a link teacher from the partner secondary school. This has been effective in equipping non-specialists to deliver the first year of the ML curriculum. Senior leaders recognise that further training will be necessary as the work extends. The co-ordinator plans to enhance her already good standard through a residential course in France.
- Teaching is supported by a good information and communication technology (ICT) network and interactive white boards (IWB).
- Planning in ML is of a high quality. Detailed medium-term planning of teaching and learning ensures good progress for all groups of pupils. It provides for much creative activity which inspires pupils' enthusiasm.
- Formal assessment is not yet in place although pupils can explain what they can do. Teachers use informal knowledge to support all pupils in the classroom. There is no formal information on standards to pass to the secondary school. The school has sought guidance from the LA ML consultant in judging standards.

Quality of curriculum

- All pupils study French. No pupils are withdrawn from ML lessons.
- In Key Stage 1, there are ten minutes a day, largely games and songs.
- As they move through Key Stage 2, there is more formal teaching but games, songs and role play still play a significant part of lessons.
- Teaching and learning focus principally on speaking and listening. Pupils are introduced to reading but there is very little writing although the school has medium term plans to develop these skills in upper primary classes.
- Teachers and teaching assistants have developed the necessary skills to teach all groups in the school. Some pupils are sometimes withdrawn for extra support in ML.
- Registers and parts of assemblies are sometimes taken in French.
- There is a developing use of cross curricular themes involving music, numeracy and other areas.
- The school has drawn from a wide range of materials to construct a scheme of work which meets the needs of pupils within the expertise of the staff.
- The curriculum meets the needs of all learners and engages their interest and enthusiasm because of the active nature of the learning.
- Resources, largely delivered through the IWB are engaging and ensure enjoyment and achievement.
- Display around the school features many aspects of learning ML and of other cultures, providing a constant reminder of the place of ML in the curriculum.

Leadership and management of ML

- You provide very strong support for ML. The ML coordinator is the deputy headteacher, ensuring liaison with the leadership team.
- The rationale for teaching and learning of ML is secure and well founded. It is endorsed by school governors.
- The development of ML teaching was the result of careful consideration of staff expertise and other resources and the availability of training opportunities.
- You have prioritised a programme of professional development to improve language skills and methodology for teachers and teaching assistants. The co-ordinator will shortly be undertaking a period of language skills improvement in France.
- The formal monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is not yet securely embedded although it is planned for. Pupils have had an opportunity to evaluate their experiences and their views have been acted upon.
- The school does not yet have robust assessment information to pass to the secondary school. However, a teacher from the secondary school is a regular visitor to the school and is aware of pupils' progress.

- Governors and the community confirm their support for ML. A parent runs a French club as an extra curricular activity.
- Partnerships with the LA, through the ML consultant, and the secondary school, make a major contribution to languages provision.
- School development planning for ML is accurately reviewed and issues, where appropriate, are carried forward to future planning.

Implementing languages entitlement

- Implementing entitlement is good. This because you have planned implementation thoroughly and in accordance with need and the availability of resources. This has provided an effective and developing model throughout the school. Pupils enjoy learning languages and their speaking and listening skills are developing well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing assessment and recording in the four skills to inform teachers' planning and provide information on standards for the secondary school
- developing pupils' reading and writing skills, especially in Years 5 and 6.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter McKenzie
Additional Inspector