

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Ryall
Headteacher
Milldown Primary School
The Milldown
Blandford
DT11 7SH

Dear Mrs Ryall

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 17 June 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, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

Context

French has been taught to Years 5 and 6 for two years by a specialist teacher from a local secondary school. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 have also been taught French by their class teacher for one year.

Achievement and standards

- Pupils listen very attentively and are developing good pronunciation and have made good progress in understanding spoken French in the short time they have been learning a language.

- Pupils are generally confident when speaking in French, especially the younger ones. Almost all pupils can ask and answer personal questions about themselves and have a good knowledge of topics such as numbers, colours and the weather.
- Pupils are developing some ability to make links between sounds and spellings when reading aloud and know some basic rules such as the silent final consonant.
- Pupils with learning difficulties make very good progress in speaking and listening. Higher attaining pupils sometimes find the work too easy.
- Most pupils can read and write single words; those in Years 5 and 6 have had experience of reading whole books such as 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears' in French and those with two years of language learning are beginning to join sentences with connectives.
- Pupils' cultural understanding is varied. Those in Years 5 and 6 have a good understanding of key festivals, know some famous French books and songs and know about some of the similarities and differences in food, for example, but this is less well developed in Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning a language and all said French was in their top three favourite subjects. They are less clear about why a language might be useful to them and they expressed the desire to learn a wider range of languages.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

- All teachers, including the secondary specialist, have undergone local training to enable them to teach languages effectively at primary level. To help them to improve their French, the class teachers have also made good use of the skills of the secondary teacher and have used resources and the local support groups well.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is well used for pupils in Years 5 and 6. They often use websites: for example, to learn about the weather or places in France. Teachers also use the interactive whiteboard well: for example, a story was illustrated using pictures and sound effects. There are, however, few opportunities for pupils to exchange messages with French-speaking children.
- The teaching focuses mostly on speaking and listening so pupils are more confident in these areas than in reading and writing, especially in Years 3 and 4.
- The pace of lessons is good with a wide variety of activities, including games and songs. Teachers select resources very carefully so that they are motivating and so that they encourage pupils to participate. The resources are also carefully chosen to support the teacher, with CDs being used to help teachers to ensure that pupils learn accurate pronunciation.
- Teachers try to ensure that pupils are aware of language learning strategies, such as looking for cognates.

- Pupils get good feedback on their performance in class but there has been little formal recording of progress and few pupils know precisely how well they are doing.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are very effectively supported in class by teachers who plan work that allows plenty of repetition. In Year 6 the teaching assistant has been attending local training to improve her French.
- Higher attaining pupils are not often given tasks which allow them to work on more extended texts and say they would appreciate more complex tasks.

Quality of curriculum

- All pupils in Key Stage 2 learn French for 30 minutes a week, taught in a discrete session. In Key Stage 1 pupils have a small amount of language work, for example when the register is taken they may say 'hello' in another language.
- There is some reinforcement of language work carried out at times outside the 30 minute lesson: for example, pupils in Years 5 and 6 are often set tasks such as looking at websites to check the weather in France during the week. Many pupils said they would prefer lessons to be longer so that they could make more progress.
- The curriculum is planned to take into account the Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages, although the focus is more heavily on oracy than literacy in Years 3 and 4. The programme for improving pupils' cultural understanding is currently less well developed for Years 3 and 4 but teachers are working on this aspect.
- There are a few cross-curricular events such as a Nepalese day when pupils learnt about the country and its traditions using the knowledge of pupils who were from Nepal. Some pupils were also taken to a local French market and expected to buy goods in French.
- Pupils have made a CD of songs which includes some French ones and they sometimes do physical education exercises to French songs. However, links with other areas of the curriculum are more often exploited in Years 5 and 6 than they are in Years 3 and 4. For example in Years 5 and 6 pupils have been studying the planets and have done some of this work in French. Links with subjects such as literacy, especially in Years 3 and 4, are not yet explicit.

Leadership and management of ML

- The rationale for teaching languages is clearly stated and is very well supported by parents and governors.
- Self-evaluation is informal but accurate: the senior leadership and staff are aware of what needs to be done next, such as improve assessment and this is identified on the school's self-evaluation form.

- The introduction of French to the curriculum uses a sustainable model which is part of a locally agreed strategic plan involving all local primaries and the feeder secondary school.
- The close involvement of the secondary teacher in both designing and helping to deliver the primary languages programme locally, means that the secondary school is in a strong position to adapt its teaching programme and styles to take into account pupils' skills.
- The primary school pays a contribution towards the costs of the secondary teacher and has invested in good local training for all staff involved which means that teachers' skills have significantly increased.

Implementing languages entitlement

- Implementing entitlement is good. All pupils in Key Stage 2 learn a language and are making good progress, especially in speaking and listening.
- The teaching of reading and writing are developing well and ICT is well used, especially in Years 5 and 6, to ensure pupils have access to authentic French texts and culture.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are making very good progress; those with higher abilities do not always have work that is challenging enough.
- There is little formal assessment of pupils' progress but this is an issue which has been identified. The school is discussing how it might recognise pupils' performance.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to explore ways to increase the time allowed for language learning, including by exploiting opportunities to make links with other subjects
- increasing the opportunities for cultural awareness in Years 3 and 4
- exploring ways to assess pupils' performance.

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

Joanna Peach
Additional Inspector