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Mrs J Cunningham
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Cunningham

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and for the help of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 05 November 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 included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of four lessons.

Context

The school opened in 2006, after the closure of three schools. Its priorities in the first challenging years have understandably been unrelated to modern languages. Different classes have had varying experiences of learning French, until this year, when the teaching of the subject has become more systematic.

Achievement and standards

- Pupils have covered a satisfactory amount of vocabulary in the time they have been studying French. However, they do not retain it well, nor can they use it to construct their own sentences.
- In speaking, they can answer simple questions by repeating short sentences with reasonably accurate pronunciation.
- In reading and listening, they understand single words and simple phrases with which they have recently become familiar.
- They can copy write words and short phrases neatly and accurately.
- They have little understanding or knowledge of French culture.
- They greatly enjoy learning French. They behave very well in class and carry out pair work very responsibly.
- They have little idea of the other languages spoken by pupils in the school.
- They believe it is important to learn a language and have some understanding of the benefits.

Quality of teaching and learning in modern languages

- Lessons are well planned. They have clear and suitable learning objectives and a well designed structure that enables pupils to make progress in each of the four language skills.
- Relationships are very good. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and build up their confidence with lots of praise and encouragement.
- The lower attaining pupils are ably supported by teaching assistants, who play an active part in improving their spoken French.
- In the better lessons the teachers strive to use French as much as possible, despite the limitations in their own skills in the language. In these lessons, pupils are shown how to create their own simple sentences. However, overall, the opportunities for them to do this are very limited.
- Teachers' pronunciation and fluency have shortcomings and this restricts the amount of French they use in lessons and the accuracy of the model they present to pupils.
- The teachers do not always make sure that the pupils fully understand the words they are being taught.
- In some classes the higher attaining pupils are not challenged enough by the work; for example, they are not encouraged to reduce their reliance on written support.

Quality of curriculum

- The school uses a commercial scheme of work but has not yet adapted it to meet its own circumstances.
- Until recently classes have been progressing at different rates through the scheme but since the start of this year a more systematic approach has been adopted.

- The scheme is rooted in the Key Stage 2 Framework but several aspects remain underdeveloped. The teaching of the rules of pronunciation and of grammar is not planned across the key stage. There is little emphasis on knowledge about language, intercultural understanding, or language learning strategies.
- Although the school is planning to develop links between French and other subjects, these are not yet working effectively.
- Pupils' progress is assessed and recorded but this development is still at an early stage.
- The school is involved in some interesting enrichment activities which have been enjoyed by a small number of pupils.
- A well established link with a school in France has been exploited in some curriculum areas but has made little contribution so far to pupils' skills in French or to their intercultural understanding.

Leadership and management of modern languages

- Managers and teachers share a strong commitment to provide pupils with a valuable experience in learning a modern language.
- A well written draft policy sets out an ambitious vision for the subject, although at present its aims are not all reflected in practice.
- Managers have a realistic awareness of staff's training needs.
- The plan for developing the subject is well conceived and has identified relevant objectives for the current year.
- Although managers monitor and evaluate the performance of other curriculum areas, this has not yet started in modern languages.
- Links with the partner secondary school are well established. Although the school is not yet in a position to provide formal records of pupils' achievement to ease transition into Key Stage 3, the close working between staff at both schools makes sure that the secondary school is fully aware of the work the pupils have covered.

Implementing languages entitlement

- Given the challenges that staff have faced in setting up the new school, the subject has not been given a high priority until now. Nonetheless, implementing entitlement has been carried out satisfactorily. All pupils in Key Stage 2 learn French, and with some success. Plans for developing the subject further are well founded on a sound knowledge of strengths and weaknesses. Staff have received basic training and further support is in the planned.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing a scheme of work that accurately reflects the way the school wants the subject to be taught
- providing staff with training to improve their pronunciation and fluency in the language

- making sure pupils learn to create their own sentences in the language.

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

Derek Neil
Her Majesty's Inspector