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Dear Dr Young

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 7 October 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 two lessons.

Context

Pupils in three year groups learn ML: French has been taught to pupils who are currently in Years 4 and 5 since the summer term 2008. Pupils in Year 3 have been learning French since September 2008. By September 2009, all pupils in Years 3 to 6 will be learning French. French has been selected as the ML following advice from the local authority (LA) that this is the language most commonly taught in LA schools. The school has also been mindful of the potential to benefit from the rich variety of resources available for ML in French. The ML Manager has some prior subject and pedagogic knowledge of

French. The school also carried out a survey of staff language competency which revealed that French was the most common ML.

Achievement and standards

- From their starting points, pupils' achievement is satisfactory.
- Pupils achieve satisfactorily in listening and speaking. They listen attentively and respond with accuracy to familiar spoken words and short phrases, for example: simple greeting phrases. During the subject survey visit, pupils were keen to demonstrate to the inspector the role play dialogues they have been learning.
- Their pronunciation and intonation are satisfactory. Teachers use recordings of native speakers to support pupils' in developing their pronunciation and there is some explicit teaching of sound spelling links.
- Pupils are introduced to some written forms of the new vocabulary they are learning which is also developing their reading skills.
- They behave well and show positive attitudes to learning languages.
- In lessons, pupils enjoy opportunities to work together in pairs and in small groups. For example: in a Year 5 lesson pupils playing 'Lotto' helped each other to check their numbers, promoting their good social skills.
- Pupils are clear why learning languages is important, for example: to get ready for going to secondary school and for their future economic well-being. They are also aware of the value of learning French in helping them to learn other languages at a later stage in their lives.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

- Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
- The teachers' knowledge of the language is satisfactory for the level at which the pupils are currently working. The teachers' pronunciation is generally careful and accurate and supported well with online recordings of native speakers.
- Teachers use computers well to enhance teaching. For example, in a Year 4 lesson the teacher displayed pictures of a well-known cartoon family to support the introduction of family vocabulary. This captured the pupils' interest well. In another lesson, pupils in Year 5 practised their pronunciation of numbers in French listening to online native speaker recordings. However, pupils do not yet make use of computers to enhance their independent learning and their computer skills in French.
- Teachers use praise in lessons to acknowledge pupils' efforts. However, there is no system for checking how well pupils are making progress and marking is not used to make clear to pupils what the next steps are in their learning.
- All pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 are included in ML lessons and no pupils are withdrawn from ML. Teachers' planning includes some

differentiation, such as opportunities for more able pupils to deduce the meaning of new language and partner work so that those who find literacy more difficult are supported. However, teachers do not always plan tasks consistently well matched to pupils' learning needs.

Quality of curriculum

- Pupils are motivated to learn because they enjoy the games and fun tasks they are given to do. They enthuse about singing songs, counting, doing role-play conversations and learning new language.
- Pupils in Years 3 to 5 have one 30-minute lesson per week. The class teachers teach the foreign language. There is an expectation that class teachers will plan opportunities for pupils to practise new ML language in a variety of other curriculum subjects in order to give an additional 30 minutes review and practise time per week. However, this is not formally monitored.
- The strengths of this model lie in the knowledge class teachers have of their individual pupils and their individual learning needs. However, in this very large primary school, this involves developing ten teachers' knowledge. The sustainability of this model depends on continued enthusiasm and recruitment of staff to deliver ML; on the quality of schemes of work and teachers' planning to ensure progression and that tasks are appropriately challenging for all pupils; and on ensuring pupils have systematic opportunities throughout each week to review and practise new ML language across the curriculum. The school is aware also that teachers in Years 5 and 6 will require higher language skills in order to ensure progression in ML learning for pupils across the key stage.
- The scheme of work (SoW) is based on the qualifications and curriculum authority (QCA) units. So far the scheme developed for teacher use is limited to the early units. Reference to the Key Stage 2 Framework and the five headings is limited at this stage and there is little differentiation, extension or support work identified to help teachers who have limited subject knowledge and confidence. Pupils' work is uneven between classes as a result of the variation in the subject knowledge and confidence of teaching staff across classes.
- Many pupils at the school speak languages other than English at home. The school celebrates this. Pupils respond positively to the languages spoken by their peers. For example in a Year 5 lesson pupils who could speak Arabic and Portuguese volunteered to count 1-10 as an introduction to counting in French.

Leadership and management of ML

- The school is very supportive of ML. Your commitment to ML is seen in the appointment of the ML manager, in allocating time for training during staff meetings, in your investment in resources and in starting ML in good time for the 2010 deadline.

- ML features in the school improvement plan. Appropriate actions are identified as a result of accurate self-evaluation. These are not always put into place swiftly enough to bring about rapid improvement to provision in ML.

Implementing languages entitlement

- Implementing entitlement is satisfactory.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring schemes of work are consistently in place so that provision between classes is even and that pupils have regular opportunities to practise new ML language skills across the curriculum
- ensuring ML assessment systems are set up and that information from assessment and marking is used to plan the next steps in pupils' learning and make clear to pupils how to improve their ML work.

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

Madeleine Gerard
Additional Inspector