

26 March 2009

Mr R Varney
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Dear Mr Varney

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 25 March 2009 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, an assembly and the French Club.

Context

French has been taught in different year groups for a number of years at the school. Since January 2008, it has been taught systematically by a part time specialist teacher to all classes in Key Stage 2. There is also some teaching of French to pupils lower down the school.

Achievement and standards

- The progress made by pupils in the lessons observed was good overall.
- Pupils' speaking skills are good. They have a good range of vocabulary and can speak confidently about themselves and where they live. They answer questions willingly. Their pronunciation is generally good which

reflects the emphasis placed on pronunciation by the teacher of French. Their intonation is developing.

- Listening skills are also well developed. Pupils listened carefully to the teacher's questions at the start of lessons that required them to draw on prior learning. They also listened well when the teacher modelled the pronunciation of new vocabulary and when their pronunciation was corrected.
- Pupils' writing is satisfactory overall and some is good. Pupils have opportunities to complete worksheets and older pupils have some opportunities to write in sentences.
- Reading is satisfactory. Pupils read from displays, worksheets and song sheets and from the interactive whiteboard.
- Pupils have a sound understanding of the basic grammatical differences and similarities between French and English. For example, they know that accents change the sound of words and that some words such as the months of the year do not have capital letters.
- Pupils enjoy learning French and all those spoken to wished to continue with a modern language at secondary school.
- The intercultural understanding of pupils is good. They could name key buildings in the French capital, such as the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel tower and some of the other countries where French is spoken, such as Canada. They could describe French customs, popular games such as 'boules' and name a range of French food.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the advantages of learning a language. They cited its usefulness in secondary and university education and when on holiday. They also explained how it could be used in careers in translation, legal work and for business, including the airline and haulage industries.
- Learning French makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development and well-being. Pupils were well behaved in lessons and other activities where French is promoted. They work well together and participate willingly in activities such as role play that are designed to consolidate learning.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

- The teacher's subject knowledge is good as is her pronunciation. The pronunciation of new vocabulary was modelled well and pupils' pronunciation was frequently corrected.
- There was good use of the target language in lessons. It was extensively used at the start of lessons to pose questions about prior learning to pupils and to capture pupils' attention. Salutations and instructions were also used in the course of lessons. There is also some use of praise words in the marking of pupils' work.
- There was good use of language learning strategies to reinforce new learning. In one Year 3 lesson, cognates were well used to teach the months of the year. Good links to learning in literacy were also made in

this lesson, when pupils were reminded that months of the year in English are spelt with capital letters.

- Lesson planning is good overall and takes account of national programmes of study. It identifies more able groups of pupils and how the less able will be supported and also indicates reinforcement work for class teachers to follow up the lesson. Activities match pupils' abilities, although there is scope to ensure that some higher attaining pupils are challenged more. On occasion, explanations of what pupils are expected to do are not as clear as they could be.
- There is satisfactory use of information and communication technology (ICT) such as interactive whiteboards. Pupils do not currently have opportunities to independently develop their language skills using ICT.
- Additional adults, including class teachers, are well used to support pupils' learning and to assist with assessment procedures.
- Pupils' work is helpfully marked and corrections are made to common and basic errors.
- Questioning is well used to check and reinforce prior learning and to assess pupils' understanding of new learning.
- Assessment is in the early stages of development. Coverage of topics by pupils is recorded and particularly good work, such as excellent pronunciation, is sometimes noted.
- Pupils have begun to assess their own progress in listening and speaking but do not yet record how well they are doing in reading and writing.

Quality of curriculum

- The curriculum model of using a specialist teacher to deliver lessons with reinforcement provided by class teachers throughout the week is effective and sustainable. The school is working towards a model whereby class teachers will take over the responsibility for teaching French.
- The time spent on learning French is appropriate. Pupils are taught French for half an hour per week and receive reinforcement from their class teachers for a further half an hour. This takes the form of completing work set by the specialist teacher, taking the register in French and other languages and occasional use of classroom instructions in French.
- The school uses a national scheme of work. Activities meet the interests of learners well and contribute to their enjoyment of French. There is a strong focus on speaking, listening and intercultural understanding.
- There are supportive displays around the school and in classrooms that cover topics such as the days of the week, colours and useful new vocabulary. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils made good use of a wall display of sports vocabulary to help them with their work.
- The curriculum is enriched by an annual French day where pupils learn about French foods, customs and games. Good links are also made

with other subjects such as design technology when pupils are asked to construct models of the Eiffel tower using straws or with history when they make Napoleonic style hats complete with cockades.

- Assemblies are also used to demonstrate and reinforce pupils' learning in French and to give them opportunities to be creative. In the assembly observed, older pupils performed a series of role plays in French to demonstrate their conversational skills and some led a guessing game that involved all pupils and teachers. Pupils also sang a French song and listened to a French 'chanson'. The school's Mambo Steel band demonstrated its skills by playing 'Frère Jacques'. A useful link was also made in the assembly between the importance of languages and the gift of tongues made to the disciples at the Pentecost.
- A well attended French club for pupils in Years 3 and 4 is run by students from a local language college and provides further enrichment for the curriculum.
- There are few books or resources in the school library or around the school which pupils can read for enjoyment and use to extend their knowledge of French.

Leadership and management of ML

- You are passionate about the need for pupils to learn and enjoy a ML and the governing body is very supportive of this. A number of different approaches to teaching French have been trialled in the past and the school is preparing well for the time when class teachers will teach French.
- The rationale for teaching French is well founded. It takes into account pupils' future needs at secondary school, parental wishes and the school's proximity to France. Parents are supportive of language learning.
- The subject leader and specialist teacher, who is part time, leads the area of ML well and is supported, when necessary, by a senior teacher. An accurate assessment of classes' abilities in French was undertaken in early 2008 to ascertain the level each class was working at. This has ensured that different year groups make appropriate progression in their studies.
- Good links have been established with a local language college.
- An audit of staff skills in ML has been undertaken and the strengths and weaknesses of staff identified. This informs the school's training programme. Training, including evening courses and study trips abroad, has been well accessed by class teachers in order to build up their subject knowledge.
- The teaching of French is monitored by class teachers and senior leaders.
- A policy for ML is in place. This contains a clear rationale for why pupils should learn a foreign language. ML is included in the school's improvement plan. Self evaluation of the subject's effectiveness and

how it should develop is good. There are good plans to increase resources for teaching.

- Assessment procedures, including some for pupils to assess how well they are doing, have been introduced although these are in the early stages of development.

Implementing languages entitlement

- Implementing entitlement is good.
- All pupils at Key Stage 2 are learning a modern language.
- An effective model of delivery has been established. The school is also preparing to move eventually to a model where class teachers will teach French.
- Pupils have good, positive attitudes to learning a language.
- Although there are few pupils with home and heritage languages, their linguistic background is used to promote language learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing reading, including opportunities for pupils to read books for pleasure
- developing formal assessment procedures so that the school has a clearer view of the levels pupils are working at
- extending pupils' use of ICT.

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

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector