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Mr R Rutherford
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Dear Mr Rutherford

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and for the help of your staff and pupils during my visit, on 7 October 2009, to look at work in modern languages.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how well the school is implementing entitlement in Key Stage 2.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

Achievement in primary languages

- Pupils have learned a satisfactory amount of vocabulary in the short time they have been learning French. They can carry out a simple conversation introducing themselves, and pronounce the language well. Some pupils know more words and songs than others because different teachers have been using different approaches.
- Pupils can copy and write words and sentences accurately, though on the whole they do little written work. They seldom create their own sentences or write from memory.

- Their reading and listening skills are fairly limited.
- Most pupils are enthusiastic about learning a language. They greatly enjoy their lessons, particularly activities that involve a game. For the most part they work hard in class, volunteer answers readily, and carry out pair work very responsibly. They know it is important to learn another language and understand the social and vocational benefits.

Quality of teaching of primary languages

- The quality of teaching varies considerably.
- Lessons usually have a range of activities, mainly designed to develop pupils' oral skills. The teachers' explanations are clear. They often give instructions, for example, by helpfully demonstrating the task they want the pupils to do. They use new technology competently to present new vocabulary and to give pupils an insight through video clips into life in France. They use praise and encouragement well to keep pupils motivated and build up their confidence.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress, particularly where they are excited by the teacher's lively style. However, lessons are insufficiently challenging at times, particularly for the most able. For example, an activity may go on for too long or the teacher does not ask the more able pupils to attempt a task without the aid of written support.
- Teachers have an adequate grasp of the French they need for teaching a particular lesson and their pronunciation of that vocabulary is satisfactory. However, they do not have the confidence or fluency to speak the language with the pupils, other than when using the words they are teaching.
- Very occasionally, when the work is not particularly interesting, pupils' concentration wavers and a small number become restless and do not pay attention.

Quality of the curriculum in primary languages

- Work is based on a well-regarded scheme of work but the school has not adapted the content to reflect its own circumstances. For example, the approach to be used in mixed-age classes is not explained.
- The time allocated for teaching the subject is less than what is recommended. Sessions that are additional to the timetabled weekly lesson are not planned systematically. Progress through the scheme so far has been at a fairly slow rate.
- There is too much inconsistency between classes in what teachers decide to teach.

- The wider school curriculum includes imaginative opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of different cultures.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in primary languages

- Senior leaders show a good level of support for the subject. Their commitment is reflected in the provision of adequate resources, including a part-time foreign language assistant.
- A comprehensive action plan accurately identifies the most important areas the school needs to attend to in the coming year. It is complemented by an aspirational policy statement, though much of its vision is not yet reflected in practice.
- Liaison with the partner secondary school is well established.
- Senior leaders have not begun to monitor the subject formally; for example, they do not check often enough what is going on in different classes.
- Staff have not received enough training, either in the language or in how to teach it.

Progress towards entitlement in Key Stage 2

All pupils learn French, so the school is now providing the basic entitlement. It is on a sound footing to develop the subject further. It has a well-considered improvement plan and has recently appointed a subject specialist. It has plans for assessing and recording pupils' progress using the languages ladder, and has made a good start to reporting pupils' progress to parents.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- providing more challenge in lessons, especially for the most able
- adapting the scheme of work to reflect the school's own circumstances
- supporting staff with suitable training to meet their needs.

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

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

Yours sincerely

Derek Neil
Her Majesty's Inspector