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Mrs Brown
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Dear Mrs Brown

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 14 February 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 six lessons.

Context

The school has been teaching languages for two years in class time to all year groups; prior to this it ran language clubs. The main language taught is French but pupils in Reception and Year 1 learn Spanish. Pupils also have the opportunity to learn other languages such as Chinese during their time at school.

Achievement and standards

- Pupils have made excellent progress in the two years they have been learning a language in class time. Progress in listening and speaking is outstanding. They develop excellent pronunciation and fluency and they are confident in their spoken language, especially in French and Spanish. They understand a range of different spoken forms including language from DVDs, from teachers and from native speakers.
- Reading and writing are well developed. Pupils are introduced to books and understand the story with support from the teacher but techniques for pupils to link sound to print are not yet as well developed. Pupils copy words and phrases accurately and they are learning to experiment with writing in a foreign language. As one pupil said, 'Doing stories is making me understand French more'.
- Pupils have access to dictionaries and are beginning to learn to use them, for example, by putting words into alphabetical order.
- Pupils learn effectively about how language works, for example they are developing a correct sense of the gender of nouns because teachers use colour coding when introducing new language.
- Pupils' cultural understanding is excellent. They have regular contact with other cultures through trips and visits, for example, the recent trip to France. Pupils also learn about the culture of other countries through the topics covered in school. For example, the current topic on China covers many aspects of the Chinese way of life, including festivals and traditional songs, as well as the language itself. One pupil said 'I can talk to different people all over the world...although it takes a long time'.
- Pupils learn many techniques to help them memorise language, including rhythm and rhyme.
- Gifted and talented pupils make excellent progress, they say they enjoy the challenge of learning a language and they especially benefit from doing their mathematics revision in French, for example.
- Pupils with learning difficulties make excellent progress as the language learning helps them to revise concepts such as number bonds and odd and even numbers.
- Pupils are hugely enthusiastic about learning languages, they say they love the games and songs but they also like the challenge of learning a language.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

- At least two of the teachers have extremely good language skills and they use these to help other staff.
- Staff make very good use of resources to help develop their language skills. For example, when teaching the topic on China, they have used commercial resources and those available on the internet to help them to be able to teach the language.

- An enormous strength of the teaching is the way that teachers plan to integrate the language teaching with work they are already doing. Links are regularly made with literacy, numeracy, music and physical education (PE). This is extremely effective as it means that languages are constantly reinforced and used in context.
- Teachers use a wide range of techniques such as songs, games and actions and, because this is done with such energy, skill and enthusiasm, pupils are helped to learn sounds very effectively.
- Very careful and explicit links with literacy are a great strength of the teaching. In a literacy lesson where pupils were investigating the use of the comparative, pupils were expected to learn how to form this in French, English and Indonesian. They regularly use terminology such as suffix, prefix, adjective and noun accurately.
- In music pupils learn about rhythm and tempo by singing in a foreign language. They improve their pronunciation and confidence when trying different sounds, especially Chinese.
- Pupils know what they can do and are keen to demonstrate this but they are less clear about exactly what they need to do to improve.
- Teachers are considering using the Junior European Languages Portfolio to help record pupils' progress. There is good reporting to parents using statements from the framework.
- ICT is well used to support language learning. Pupils use some software which has been designed to help language learning but also use digital recording to allow them to listen to and evaluate their own performance.

Quality of curriculum

- The outstanding curriculum is designed to integrate languages with many other subjects but also allows for some discrete teaching.
- The discrete language teaching takes between 25 and 45 minutes a week. Most pupils have some language work integrated with other subjects every day.
- French is the main language taught. Aspects of several other subjects are taught using a language. For example, pupils regularly do PE activities using French songs or counting actions.
- The Key Stage 2 framework is used as a basis for all planning and assessment. There is a particular focus on oracy and on cultural awareness but there is also a good focus on language learning skills and knowledge about language.
- The school uses some commercial materials for its scheme of work but it carefully tailors these to the needs of different classes and to the topic being taught.
- The school encourages pupils who speak another language to teach this to other children. It has found it difficult to find resources to help with this, especially in Lithuanian.

Leadership and management of ML

- The rationale for language learning is extremely clear. It is well described in the policy and carried out in practice. Languages are used across the curriculum to extend, reinforce and develop other skills.
- There is extremely strong support and guidance for language learning from the senior leadership who want to ensure that the teaching is sustainable. The curriculum leader for languages has a very strong vision of how to introduce and support the development of language teaching in the school and provides excellent guidance and support for all staff.
- All teachers are expected to contribute to the teaching of languages. This has developed from the previous year when the teaching was mostly done by the curriculum leader.
- Self-evaluation is very good and accurately identifies strengths and areas for development. There is a clear identification of what needs improving and this is clearly reflected in the action plan.
- High quality provision is ensured by using national frameworks, local training and other support such as commercial resources. Teachers have a good knowledge of several languages between them and have ensured that their pedagogical skills have been enhanced through attendance at courses run by the local authority.
- Planning for progression between key stages two and three is in its infancy although there are plans to develop this.

Implementing languages entitlement

- The planning for entitlement is outstanding. The delivery of languages is excellent and sustainable.
- Pupils achieve very well in listening and speaking and they develop good skills in reading and writing.
- Teaching and learning are excellent. The links with other subjects bring languages alive and give pupils a sense of excitement and willingness to 'have a go'.
- Pupils are very interested in language learning and use it spontaneously and willingly.
- ICT is very well used to develop pupils' skills including helping them evaluate their own performance.
- Languages are a clear part of the improvement plan which has correctly identified areas that need to be developed such as reading and writing.
- Transfer of information to secondary schools about pupils' language learning is not yet well developed.

Inclusion

- Gifted and talented pupils are extremely well catered for. They are given the opportunity to do more challenging work. For example, one girl who had only been told how to form a negative once, was immediately able to apply this to be able to say what was not in her pencil case, from memory and with good fluency.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are given careful support, for example, they work with peers; they are given lots of reinforcement activities and benefit from regular support worksheets.
- All groups of pupils are well provided for and good use is made of the languages spoken by pupils, although the school finds it difficult to get suitable resources in Lithuanian.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- recording progress and helping pupils know how to improve
- developing further reading and writing skills
- improving the transfer of information to secondary schools.

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