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Mr S Beck
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Beck

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 18 May 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 two lessons and a singing session.

Context

The school began teaching languages in 2006-07 as one of the local authority's 'first phase' primary schools. The decision was taken to teach two languages over Key Stage 2. In that year, Year 3 pupils began French and those in Year 5 German. These languages then worked through to Years 4 and 6. In the current year, however, French is taught to Years 3 and 4, Spanish to Year 5 and German to Year 6.

Achievement

- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall, and good in Years 5 and 6, where they learn German or Spanish. Achievement in French in Years 3 and 4 is weaker, where pupils' learning has been more fragmented.
- They listen and respond very well, and contribute well to lessons when they are given the opportunity. In a Year 5 Spanish lesson they participated with enthusiasm in whole class and pair work.
- Pupils speak confidently and generally have good pronunciation and intonation. A particular strength is their delight in singing. They perform songs in French and Spanish with relish. A group of last year's Year 6 pupils returned to the school and gave impromptu performances of songs they had learned in German.
- Pupils write accurately when taught key elements of sound-spelling links, but these have not yet been taught systematically. Grammatical knowledge and understanding are at an early stage of development.
- Pupils' intercultural understanding is developing well. The use of DVD materials in a Spanish lesson, for example, provided a good springboard to discussion of cultural similarities and differences. Pupils' knowledge of the French-speaking world is more limited and they were, for example, surprised to learn the breadth of 'La Francophonie'.
- Pupils in the school have a wide range of linguistic and cultural heritages. They are proud to talk about the different languages they know.
- Pupils are very enthusiastic about their language-learning; they understand why languages are important and are keen to continue into secondary school. Year 7 pupils visiting from one of the main destination schools talked about how learning German in Years 5 and 6 had made them feel more confident as they moved into secondary school.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

- Whilst pupils in Years 5 and 6 have access to good teaching in German or Spanish, the quality of French teaching in Years 3 and 4 has been more variable.
- In the best teaching, lessons are very well planned, with clear learning objectives which build well on prior learning. Pupils undertake a range of activities – whole class, paired activities, listening and speaking – and enjoy these greatly.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources benefits pupils' learning: for example, learning to tell the time in Spanish was enhanced by watching lively video clips of children's daily routine in a Spanish school. Non-specialist teachers use resources with recordings by native-speakers of the target language to ensure that pupils have good models of language.

Quality of curriculum

- Pupils in Years 3 and 4 currently receive one session of approximately 30 minutes discrete French teaching a week. These sessions are delivered by external or part-time teachers during preparation and planning (PPA) time. Class-teachers do not attend and learning is not systematically reinforced elsewhere in the curriculum during the remainder of the week.
- In Years 5 and 6 pupils are taught for 45 minutes a week by a class-teacher, who teaches her own, and three other groups. This enables greater flexibility for integrating ML within the curriculum and giving the subject appropriate time.
- Lessons are planned following the qualifications and curriculum authority (QCA) schemes of work and the coordinator is currently set to review and update planning according to the new schemes, with stronger links to the Framework.
- Pupils in the school speak a range of different languages and opportunities are taken for bilingual pupils to share their knowledge with their peers.
- The school hosts a number of extra-curricular language classes, mostly paid for by parents. It is planning to offer extra-curricular continuation sessions, open to all, for the language taught in Year 3 and 4 so that pupils keep this 'refreshed' during Years 5 and 6.
- In summer 2007 the school took pupils on a day-trip to Calais. This proved very popular, and it is planned to undertake a similar journey when difficulties around finance and passports, which would currently limit those able to take part, have been resolved.

Leadership and management of ML

- School leaders are committed to the introduction of primary languages, and a languages coordinator has been in post since the inception of the initiative. Her main role has been to attend local authority meetings and disseminate information about ML developments to colleagues.
- Although based currently in YR, she has worked closely with colleagues in Key Stage 2 to support the development of French, German and Spanish. The school recognises that she needs to have time allocated to lead more fully the planning, monitoring and review of the subject.
- The school has undertaken a full self-evaluation exercise for languages, in line with other school subjects. This self-evaluation is honest and accurate, recognising what has been achieved and setting out future priorities.
- Staff competence in languages initially determined the Year 3/4 and Year 5/6 language split, but the school has evaluated this model and there is now good planning for future development to ensure pupils' progression over Key Stage 2.
- Good links with one of the main secondary destination schools have been established, with reciprocal visits undertaken by teachers.

- Formative and summative assessment procedures are under development to suit the school's own systems and to ensure appropriate transfer of information into Year 7.
- Resources are in place for all three languages. The school plans to evaluate schemes of work at the end of the current year to build in faster progression.

Implementing languages entitlement

- Progress towards implementing entitlement is good. Now in its third year of developing Key Stage 2 languages, the school has achieved some significant successes – notably older pupils' confidence and competence in German – and managers are clear about where elements of provision have not worked so well. Current staffing and clear plans for future sustainability show good capacity for future development of the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- planning more fully for progression over Years 3 to 6 – both in terms of knowledge about language and developing reading and writing skills - with clear outcomes identified for both languages taught at the end of Years 4 and 6
- ensuring that the coordinator has time to work with the teachers in charge of the different languages and develop their skills, as well as supporting other colleagues as they become involved and confident in 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

Anne Feltham
Her Majesty's Inspector