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09 July 2009

Mr S Kurth
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Kurth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Modern Languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and for the help of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 02 July 2009 to look at work in modern languages.

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 included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of one lesson.

Context

The school has only just introduced modern languages: pupils in Year 3 have recently had four lessons in French. The school has plans to teach the language to other classes in the near future.

Achievement

- Pupils have covered a satisfactory amount of vocabulary given the time they have been learning French. Their retention of this vocabulary is reasonably secure.
- They know basic greetings and numbers 1-10. The more able can use their knowledge of numbers to carry out simple mental arithmetic.

- They pronounce the language well and have knowledge of some links between the sound of a word and the way it is spelled.
- They are enthusiastic about the subject and think it is important to learn a language, though they have little idea why. They are unaware of the different languages spoken by some of the other pupils in the school and have little knowledge or understanding of French culture.

Quality of teaching and learning in modern languages

- The lesson observed during the visit was good. The teacher had a good command of French, and used it a lot during the lesson, though sometimes the classroom instructions were unnecessarily complicated and needed to be translated into English.
- The lesson was well structured. It built on pupils' prior learning and developed new learning very successfully.
- Pronunciation was taught well. The links between sounds and spelling were highlighted effectively. Errors were corrected sensitively.
- Well designed activities and enthusiastic teaching ensured pupils were actively involved and greatly enjoyed the lesson. Only towards the end did a small number lose concentration and become restless.

Quality of curriculum

- Planning the French curriculum is at a very early stage. The school intends to use a commercial scheme and is aware of the need to adapt this to suit its own context. For example, the place of information and communication technology needs to be decided, and the contribution of the subject to the school's well established work on multicultural education needs to be planned.
- The school's model for implementing the subject has several unknown factors. The organisation of the timetable to ensure all pupils get an hour a week has not been planned yet. The decision to introduce the subject to all year groups at once will have subsequent effects for planning the curriculum in the next few years.
- It is too early for the school to have set up arrangements for assessing and recording pupils' progress. For the same reason, the school has not liaised with the partner secondary schools about transition.

Leadership and management of modern languages

- Senior leaders and the subject coordinator are aware of the challenges they face. The subject development plan shows they recognise the key issues. It lists suitable actions to support the introduction of the subject over the coming year, though much of the detail is still undecided or unknown. For example, the importance of staff development is recognised but it is not clear what form this will take.

- The school has not yet agreed a policy for languages to clarify important matters such as the reasons for teaching the subject and how the staff intend to go about it.
- The school has a good range of resources for teaching French.
- Managers report the availability locally of useful sources of support; for example, the local cluster of primary schools has a network that it has not used yet. The school is not making use of various key sources of national support, such as the dedicated websites, the national framework of objectives or the languages ladder.

Implementing languages entitlement

- Implementing entitlement is at a very early stage. The school's relatively late introduction of modern languages is due to its preoccupation with other priorities and to the maternity leave of key staff.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- assessing the staff's skills in teaching French and providing appropriate training and support
- agreeing a policy and a scheme of work that reflect the school's own circumstances
- liaising with partner primary and secondary schools about content and assessment.

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

Derek Neil
Her Majesty's Inspector