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Mrs L Baggett
Acting Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Baggett

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 5 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 four lessons.

Achievement in primary languages

- Pupils have learned a satisfactory amount of vocabulary, given the time they have been learning French. They recall single words quite well, though they forget some after time. They know a few songs and take pleasure in singing them. They do not know the meaning of words that are important for constructing sentences, such as subject pronouns or the definite article.
- Pupils speak set phrases with good pronunciation, and the oldest pupils copy and write words and phrases accurately, but they are unable to make up their own sentences.

- Pupils enjoy their French lessons. They concentrate in class, volunteer answers readily, and try hard to perform well. They believe it is important to learn other languages but have few ideas why.

Quality of teaching of primary languages

- Teachers have satisfactory knowledge of the language and how to teach it, given the limited content they are expected to teach. They do not know enough to sustain its use as the main language of the lesson.
- Lessons are planned well. Learning objectives are clear and activities are selected to help the pupils meet those objectives. In the best teaching, the activities are designed imaginatively to excite and enthuse the pupils.
- Teachers skilfully use a range of approaches to maximise pupils' active participation.
- In some lessons, the teacher assesses how well something has been understood to decide when best to move on to the next activity. In that way they maintain a good pace.
- Teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of French culture.
- Work is often pitched at too low a level, particularly for the most able.

Quality of the curriculum in primary languages

- The amount of time for teaching the subject is less than that recommended.
- 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, links with other subjects or opportunities for teaching French outside the weekly timetabled lesson are not recorded.
- The school has hitherto rightly focused on pupils' speaking skills and has recently introduced a little reading and writing. The development of pupils' knowledge about language, intercultural understanding, and language learning strategies is rudimentary.
- The curriculum includes a lot of repetition of new vocabulary, even when pupils have mastered a particular topic; and not enough long-term consolidation as they progress to higher levels. In the words of one pupil: 'We do loads of the same stuff till it gets boring; then none at all so you forget it.'
- The school has made a good start with assessing and recording the progress made by each pupil.
- The school provides a good range of cultural events outside French lessons to develop pupils' awareness of the world.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in primary languages

- A well-considered action plan correctly identifies the main priorities for the subject and lists suitable actions to develop it this year.
- A detailed audit of staff skills has been used to plan appropriate training.
- Liaison with the partner secondary school and other primary schools is well established.
- Senior leaders have not begun to monitor the subject formally; for example, they do not consider whether different groups of pupils are achieving as well as they should.

Progress towards entitlement in Key Stage 2

The school has made satisfactory progress with introducing a modern language at a time when it has had other priorities, most notably the need to improve achievement in the core subjects. All pupils in Key Stage 2 now learn French. The school has instituted a sensible approach to planning and teaching the new subject, despite the lack of a subject specialist on the staff, and has detailed plans to accelerate its development over the coming year.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- helping pupils, especially the most able, to make more rapid progress
- improving the curriculum by devising more links with other subjects and recording how French is to be taught outside the weekly timetabled lesson
- developing teachers' ability to speak French more in lessons.

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