

Modern Languages – Achievement and Challenge



A review of inspection findings, and recommendations to improve provision in modern languages

Language World 2011

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Session outline

- Ofsted's survey programme
- Primary modern languages
- Secondary modern languages
- Languages post-16
- Challenges for modern languages

Ofsted's subject survey programme



Methodology

- On-going programme of modern language subject visits
- Representative sample of 30 primary and 30 secondary schools each year
- 1-day visits for primary schools, 2-day visits to secondary schools
- Small team of specialist inspectors
- Feedback letters published on Ofsted web site
- 3-year cycle of reports

Inspection focus

Common features:

- Achievement
- Teaching
- Curriculum
- Leadership & Management

Special issues:

- Reading
- ICT
- Take-up in KS4
- Progress towards entitlement in KS2

Additional evidence

- FE and SFC inspections 2009-10
- Survey of good practice in colleges 2008-9
- Telephone follow-up survey of primary schools found not to be teaching a language in KS2 when contacted earlier

Primary modern languages



Achievement

- Good or outstanding in just under six out of ten schools visited
- Most progress in speaking and listening
- Less systematic development of reading
- Writing the least developed skill
- Knowledge about language and understanding of basic grammar developing well
- Good development of cultural awareness in most, but not all schools
- Clear enjoyment of language learning

Teaching

- Good or better in two thirds of the 235 lessons observed
- Teachers' subject knowledge and teaching methods mostly good; occasional shortcomings in pronunciation and intonation
- Class teachers well supported by native speakers, foreign language assistants or other specialists
- Assessment predominantly satisfactory

Curriculum

- Good or better in more than half of the schools visited.
- Combination of classroom teacher and external specialist teacher generally supported provision well.
- French was the most popular language; Spanish and German were taught in a smaller number of schools. Turkish, Chinese, Polish, Arabic and Urdu featured in some areas.
- By final year of the survey, large majority of schools planned provision using the KS2 Framework.
- Not all schemes were adapted sufficiently, eg to meet needs of mixed-age classes.
- Planning for progression though KS2 remained a relative weakness.

Leadership and Management

- Good or better in more than two thirds of schools visited
- Strong commitment from senior leaders
- Generally clear rationale for the provision
- Transition arrangements to secondary schools generally underdeveloped
- Weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation of provision – senior staff often did not feel competent to judge language provision
- Improvement in teacher training over the period of the survey

Entitlement to language learning in KS2

- Progress towards achieving entitlement improved during the survey – good in two thirds of schools visited in the final year
- Of 14 schools contacted during the survey who were not then teaching modern languages, all but two were doing so when contacted again at the end of the survey
- Rationale for deciding which language to teach was increasingly sound, with improving, sustainable plans

Secondary – KS3 and KS4



Achievement

- Progress was good or outstanding in over half of the 470 lessons observed; it was inadequate in 25 lessons.
- Listening skills were generally satisfactory – but restricted by lack of use of target language for requests and instructions.
- Speaking remains a concern – there were too few opportunities to use languages routinely and spontaneously.
- Reading was good in only a small number of schools – with insufficient use of interesting, authentic text.
- Writing was good in the majority of schools visited, though it was often reliant on model texts, frequently focused on exam practice, and was rarely imaginative or exciting.
- Good GCSE results did not necessarily equate to competence in the language.

Teaching

- Good or better in two thirds of the schools visited.
- Weakest teaching was observed in Year 9.
- Outstanding teaching observed in 10 schools highlighted the shortcomings in others.
- Too often uninspiring teaching failing to bring the language to life.
- Opportunities for students to listen and communicate in the target language were often limited by teachers' unpreparedness to use it.
- Positive impact of explicit teaching of language learning strategies was evident in departments visited later in the survey.
- Assessment was better than in the last survey, but marking was inconsistent within half of departments visited.

Curriculum

- Good or better in two thirds of schools visited.
- Clear impact of specialist status – curriculum was outstanding in more than half of specialist language colleges visited.
- Features of outstanding curriculum: range of languages offered – leading to high take-up in KS4 and post-16, strong emphasis on cultural understanding, extensive enrichment activities, imaginative exploitation of ICT.
- Insufficient account taken of increasing language work undertaken in feeder primary schools.
- Extended writing not introduced early enough in KS3.
- Early entry for GCSE in a fifth of schools – with mixed success.

Leadership & Management

- Good or better in two thirds of schools visited
- Strong leadership typified by innovation, good use of local initiatives and networks, effective liaison with primary schools and partner post-16 providers.
- Weak subject leadership typified by inconsistencies in practice, insufficient monitoring and lack of clear policies and priorities for language learning.
- Variable access to, and impact of, professional development for teachers.

Languages post-16



Post-16 modern languages

- Progression from GCSE to A level lower than in other optional subjects with large GCSE entries.
- Take-up remained low in school sixth forms visited.
- Achievement generally good.
- Some high drop-out, linked to lack of understanding of the level of challenge at AS and A level compared to GCSE.
- Funding and resources for languages were generous, enabling small classes to continue.
- High proportions of good teaching in schools and colleges.

The challenges for modern languages



Primary

- Development of pupils' early skills in reading and writing
- Clarification of progression through KS2
- Teaching strategies for mixed age classes

Secondary and post-16

- Regular use of the target language in all lessons
- Greater use of authentic materials to develop language skills and improve motivation
- In Year 7, building on students' experience of modern languages in primary schools
- Increasing take-up in KS4 and post-16
- Ensuring that approaches to teaching and learning in KS4 prepare students effectively for study post-16