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Mr G Jones  
Headteacher  
St Ambrose Barlow Catholic Primary School  
Shirley Road  
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Birmingham  
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Dear Mr Jones

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 2 December 2009 to look at work in ML.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of two lessons.

#### Achievement in primary languages

- Pupils achieve very well in French across Key Stage 2. The curriculum is planned clearly to enable progression from Year 3 to Year 6.
- Pupils love learning languages. They are exceptionally enthusiastic about their lessons and they know why it is important to learn a language. It contributes exceptionally well to their personal and social development.
- Pupils listen and respond well to their teacher and their behaviour is unfailingly good.
- They are very willing and confident speakers with good pronunciation because their teacher encourages them to be so and insists gently on 'getting it right'. They can have mini conversations from an early age and the content of these is added to as they progress through the school.

- They are beginning to learn about language and know some language-learning strategies. They understand how to deduce meaning from cognates and cues, and remember spellings from clues. Older pupils can talk about gender, adjectives and plurals.
- They can read words and sentences from early stages in their learning from the whiteboard and sheets. However, developing this to reading books is hindered by a lack of resources.
- Particularly impressive is their capability to write words and phrases at an early age and complex sentences in Years 5 and 6, sometimes with support. This has the potential to progress quickly to text level.
- Their intercultural understanding is developing: they know, for example, where French is spoken in the world and some facts about France. However, this is not extensive or linked, to geography and history, for example.

#### Quality of teaching of primary languages

- Lessons are planned very well and meet their learning objectives which pupils are aware of. They have a built-in progression which ensures that pupils, for the most part, succeed. There is also a good match to ability, with teachers supporting well.
- There are high expectations of pupils who respond with vigour and are constantly on task. Lessons generally have very good pace and a lot is accomplished in a very short time.
- The teacher has excellent subject knowledge and provides lots of interesting activities to meet objectives. Pupils particularly like pair work and using the interactive whiteboard, flash cards, and matching activities. The teacher makes many of her own resources.
- The teacher does not always use as much French for routines as she could. This would provide a more constant role-model.
- Assessment, in the form of plenary sessions and the use of mini whiteboards, is embedded in lessons. More formal assessment of each child has been introduced this year for Year 3, taking account of the five strands. This is a very good trial. The subject leader is also ready to pilot an external scheme in Year 3.

#### Quality of the curriculum in primary languages

- The school uses an external scheme but alongside it there is extensive use of the Key Stage 2 Framework and the QCA schemes of work. It meets the needs of pupils well and clearly contributes to their enjoyment, and very good progress.
- Time for learning languages each week is good, including time outside of the discrete lesson. The subject leader teaches all four classes with support from the classroom teachers in Years 3 and 4.
- Pupils whose first language is not English have their home languages celebrated and other pupils spoke eagerly about them.

- Other than an after-school club by an external provider, which is mainly used by lower Key Stage 2 pupils, the school does not provide opportunities beyond the curriculum to take part in language events, such as The European Day for Languages. There are no links with a French-speaking school.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in primary languages

- You are extremely supportive of the introduction of French and have enabled it to be fully embedded in the school in time for 2010.
- Subject leadership is very good. The policy lays out clearly the expectations the school has for languages. Development is highlighted in the school improvement plan and the departmental action plan highlights priority areas for development for this year, for example, assessment and building sustainability by training classroom teachers.
- French is not only embedded but is planned and taught so that pupils make progress across Key Stage 2.
- While there is no formal observation of French lessons, learning walks in this small school provide you with a means of providing you the information you need.
- There is not a wealth of resources and this is an area to tackle, for example by acquiring books, big books, games and puppets to appeal to the younger language pupils.
- There are good links with secondary schools. The transfer of information about pupils has not yet been tackled but the school is involved with the local authority to resolve this.
- Parents and governors are supportive of the introduction of French.

#### Progress towards entitlement in Key Stage 2

This is good with many elements that are outstanding. The school is planning very effectively with a sound rationale and it is at the stage of all pupils in Key Stage 2 learning French with progression across the key stage. It has a reasonably sustainable model of delivery and is looking to improve this. Pupils achieve very well in at least four of the five strands and they are all extremely enthusiastic. The school has yet to meet requirements for assessment and monitoring of achievement across all groups and for effective arrangements for transfer of information to secondary school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving intercultural work and links with French-speaking countries and communities so that pupils experience the real purpose of learning a language
- improving the amount of resources
- ensuring that transfer of information to secondary schools is swiftly in hand.

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

Pam Haezewindt  
Her Majesty's Inspector