

Report summary

Modern languages

Achievement and challenge 2007–2010

In 2008 Ofsted published *The changing landscape of languages: an evaluation of language learning 2004/2007*. The current report follows up achievements since then and examines the remaining challenges. Since the 2008 report, the Government, its agencies, local authorities and schools have put a lot of energy and support into improving languages provision but there is still much to do.

This report draws on evidence from survey visits conducted between 2007 and 2010 in 92 primary schools, 90 secondary schools and one special school. The primary and secondary schools were located in urban and rural areas across England. More secondary schools with sixth forms and specialist language colleges were visited in 2009–10 than in the first two years of the survey. Evidence has also been drawn from primary school inspection reports, and from five further education and sixth form college inspections in 2009–10.

Principally, this report analyses provision for modern languages in schools over the last three years. During this time, studying a language has been compulsory in Key Stage 3; in Key Stage 4, provision has been statutory but students have not been required by law to study a language. Since languages were made non-statutory in 2004, the proportion of students at Key Stage 4 taking a language qualification has gradually declined from 61% in 2005 to 44% in 2010.

The recent government White Paper recognises this decline and indicates the intention to encourage take-up through schools introducing a five-subject English Baccalaureate, which would include a language, and which is expected to be given prominence in the performance tables for five GCSE grades at A* to C. Take-up in Key Stage 4 was much improved in the schools visited when students had enjoyed purposeful experiences in Key Stage 3. These included being able to say what they wanted to say and opportunities to talk to or work with native speakers.

The study of languages has been introduced gradually in primary schools to meet the former Government's requirement that, by 2010, primary schools should have provided an entitlement for Key Stage 2 pupils to learn a language. During the three years of the survey, the primary schools visited were at varying stages of introducing languages. Some were well-advanced in 2007; some were just starting in 2009.

Overall, progress towards providing an entitlement for Key Stage 2 pupils was good or outstanding in approximately two thirds of the schools visited. By 2009–10, just under three quarters of the primary schools visited were using their own staff to plan and teach languages.

Part A of the report is devoted mostly to reporting on achievement, teaching and learning, the quality of the curriculum and leadership and management in primary schools. Part B reports on similar aspects in Key Stages 3 and 4. Part A also reports on progress towards providing entitlement to language learning in Key Stage 2, an issue inspectors evaluated in depth. Part B reports on issues which have been investigated in detail in secondary schools: reading, information and communication technology, and take-up of languages in Key Stage 4. Part C reports on post-16 outcomes and provision.

An increasing number of primary schools provided languages during the course of the survey. The large majority of the schools taught French. Almost all the schools provided suitable time on the timetable. In half the schools visited, pupils' progress was at least good, particularly in speaking and listening, the skills predominantly taught. Teachers were often skilful, combining very well their knowledge of primary teaching methodology with their knowledge of the language. Around a third of the primary schools visited were beginning to develop intercultural understanding and some were celebrating and building on their pupils' heritage languages. By the end of the survey, despite some weaknesses, it was clear that, overall, senior leaders in the schools visited were committed to making the initiative work.

Since the publication of *The changing landscape of languages* in 2008, some improvements have been made in attainment in secondary schools nationally. The number of students gaining grade A* to C in a language at GCSE has improved slightly. In over half the lessons observed during the survey, students' progress was generally good or occasionally outstanding towards the objectives set for the lesson. The overall effectiveness of modern languages was good or better in six out of ten of the schools visited. However, too often, the teaching was too uninspiring and did not bring the language to life for pupils. The key barriers observed to further improvement in Key Stages 3 and 4 were teachers' lack of use of the target language to support their students' routine use of the language in lessons, as well as providing opportunities for them to talk spontaneously; providing good opportunities for developing reading; and ensuring consistent marking for improvement.

Part C of the report considers post-16 provision which was principally inspected from 2009 to 2010 in sixth form colleges and further education colleges, and was a particular focus in school sixth forms in this period. Part C also revisits Ofsted's report on good practice that was published in 2009.¹ Take-up of languages post-16 was low but has increased since 2007. Entries in French have remained steady, they

¹ *Identifying good practice: a survey of college provision in English language and literature, and modern foreign languages* (070248), Ofsted, 2009; www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/070248.

have declined slightly in German but have increased in Spanish and lesser-taught languages. The students observed generally achieved well, because of the good quality of the provision. However, retention was sometimes low because the students had not appreciated the level of challenge that study beyond GCSE would pose.

Key findings

Primary

- Achievement was good or outstanding in just under six out of ten of the primary schools visited. Pupils made most progress in speaking and listening because this was where most emphasis was placed in lessons. Although there were good examples of systematically planned reading, these were rare and even more so for writing.
- Pupils' enjoyment of language learning in the primary schools visited was very clear. They were usually very enthusiastic, looked forward to lessons, understood why it was important to learn another language and were developing a good awareness of other cultures.
- Teaching was good in two thirds of the 235 lessons observed. Despite some occasional shortcomings in pronunciation and intonation, primary teachers' subject knowledge and their teaching methods were predominantly good.
- Senior leaders were very committed to introducing modern languages into primary schools. The initiative featured well in whole-school planning with a clear rationale for how and when it would be taught and by whom. Weaknesses lay in assessment, and the monitoring and evaluation of provision, often because leaders did not feel competent enough to judge language provision.

Secondary and post-16

- The overall progress made by students at Key Stages 3 and 4 was good or outstanding in over half of the 470 lessons observed. However, there were weaknesses in too many lessons, particularly in speaking, listening and reading in modern languages.
- In many of the secondary schools visited, opportunities for students to listen to and communicate in the target language were often limited by many teachers' unpreparedness to use it. Too often, students were not taught how to respond to everyday requests and thus routine work in the target language and opportunities to use it spontaneously were too few.
- Inspectors evaluated reading in modern languages in 33 of secondary schools visited as a specific issue. It was ill-thought through in over half of these schools. Reading was not taught beyond exercises in course books or previous examination papers and teachers made insufficient use of the wealth of authentic material that is available to develop students' speaking, listening, writing,

knowledge about language, language learning strategies and intercultural awareness.

- The schools visited did not begin teaching extended writing early enough in Key Stage 3 for students to make good progress in being creative and expressing themselves spontaneously from early in their language learning.
- Numbers choosing modern languages in Key Stage 4 have declined since the subject became optional in 2004, falling from 61% in 2005 to 47% in 2007 and remaining low at 44% in 2010. However, in the specialist language colleges visited, numbers remained high; they provided good teaching and an innovative curriculum. In half of the 28 specialist language colleges visited, the curriculum was judged to be outstanding.
- Most secondary students had positive attitudes to learning languages despite low take-up in Key Stage 4 and they knew why languages could be useful to them in the future. Their intercultural understanding, however, was weak in the majority of the schools visited because they did not have good opportunities to develop it.
- Teaching in Key Stage 4 was focused on achieving good examination results, but this did not always prepare students sufficiently for study at a more advanced level, post-16.
- Assessment was better in the schools visited for this survey than for those in the 2004–07 survey. However, inadequate standardisation in Key Stage 3 assessments resulted in outcomes being unreliable. In over half the schools in the survey, marking remained inconsistent within departments.
- Most of the secondary schools visited had not yet modified their Year 7 curriculum or adapted their teaching of languages to build on, and exploit, the increasing amount of work being undertaken in the primary schools from which they drew their pupils.
- Teaching and learning were good in most of the post-16 providers visited, and the relatively small numbers of students on modern language courses achieved well.

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