The Education and Training Inspectorate

A Short Report on the Provision for Modern Languages in a Sample of Non-Selective Schools

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1.	**INTRODUCTION**

1.1	The Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) undertook an evaluation of the provision for and uptake of modern languages at key stage (KS) 4 in a range of non-selective post-primary schools, with a particular focus on year 10 (Appendix 1). In addition, the main findings from scheduled modern language inspections during 2009-2010 are included in the report.

1.2	Inspectors visited lessons, held discussions with heads of department and school leaders, class teachers and pupils. The Inspectors also evaluated documentation which the schools considered relevant to their provision for modern languages.

2.	**SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS**

- Most departments have revised their departmental planning and schemes of work in a measured way to address the requirements of the Revised Curriculum. Planning for and use of the target language is an area for improvement.

- The quality of the teaching in three-quarters of the lessons observed was good or better.

- The pupils respond enthusiastically when an element of interactivity or competition is included and when the language is well-rehearsed and used in a meaningful context. However, where the teaching is less than satisfactory, there is a narrow focus on the textbook activities or on the requirements of examination; this does not always meet the needs or stage of development of the pupils.

- The pupils' levels of motivation are heightened through the imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to develop effectively the target language.

- A majority of pupils report that they enjoy learning languages. The enthusiasm of their language teacher is often the most important and critical factor. A minority of pupils report that they find languages difficult; others report that their language learning experiences are not relevant to the real world.

- At the time of the survey, while in a minority of schools in the sample no pupils had taken up the opportunity to continue with the study of a modern language into KS4, in the others, a small number of pupils are entered for the relevant General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations.

- There is little evidence that schools are co-operating within an Area Learning Community (ALC) to explore consortium arrangements or to examine ways of joining small GCSE or A Level classes together.

- As the number of pupils studying a language at KS4 continues to decline, modern language teachers are becoming increasingly involved in delivering other strands of the curriculum, such as Learning for Life and Work, Citizenship and Employability. Where there is little or no uptake by pupils of modern languages at KS4, specialist teachers are re-deployed into other subject areas; this is leading to a reduction in language teaching capability in schools and the loss of a valuable resource.

- A minority of the departments make effective use of data for a variety of purposes but mainly to predict and set targets for pupil attainment based firmly on pupil ability, performance and aptitude. Too many departments are still unaware of the need to analyse examination results and, at the point of inspection, are often concerned and confused when presented with statistical data pertaining to their department.

- In just over one-half of the schools visited there is a positive attitude to modern languages, their place in the curriculum and their contribution to the pupils' learning, career prospects and overall educational attainment.

- In a significant minority of schools, the position of modern languages is vulnerable as a result of low uptake and reduced entries in public examinations at KS4 and beyond. There are clear indications that the study of modern languages will soon become the preserve of the selective sector unless the current trend can be arrested.

3. **MAIN FINDINGS**

3.1 THE QUALITY OF THE PROVISION FOR MODERN LANGUAGES

3.1.1 The quality of the teaching in three-quarters of the lessons observed was good or better. Teachers use effectively a wide range of resources and strategies, including ICT. Well-planned learning activities are used to integrate fully the main skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Where teachers have high expectations of the pupils they develop their 'Thinking Skills' well and build appropriately on their knowledge and manipulation of the target language.

3.1.2 Many teachers have revised their departmental planning and schemes of work in a measured way to address the requirements of the Revised Curriculum. The planning generally outlines the content, the teaching approaches to be employed and the opportunities for differentiation, continuity and progression in the pupils' learning. Planning for and use of the target language is an area for improvement; even in the same department there is evidence of wide variation and inconsistent use of the target language across the work of the teachers.

3.2 ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

3.2.1 The pupils respond enthusiastically when an element of interactivity or competition is included and when the language is well-rehearsed and used in a meaningful context. Their levels of motivation are heightened through the imaginative use of information and communication technology (ICT) to develop effectively the target language. Too often a minority of the teaching has a narrow focus on the textbook activities or on the requirements of examination; this does not always meet the needs or stage of development of the pupils. As a result there is a lack of challenge for the pupils and they do not build sufficiently on their prior linguistic knowledge.

3.2.2 During the course of the school visits inspectors spoke to groups of pupils in years 10, 11 and 12 to ascertain their views prior to choosing or not choosing a language option and about the experiences of those pupils who were studying languages already.

3.2.3   In discussions, a majority of pupils report that they enjoy learning languages. The enthusiasm of their language teacher is often the most important and critical factor. Among the other key reasons reported for continuing with language learning are the opportunities for contact with the target language community and the meaningful use of ICT to enhance learning.

3.2.4   A minority of pupils report that they find languages difficult and consider that they will achieve better in other subjects in public examinations. Others report that their language learning experiences are not relevant to the real world.

3.2.5   While in some non-selective schools in the sample there is no take-up of language learning beyond KS3, in others, a small number of pupils are entered for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). In a majority of non-selective schools, including those which are successful in languages at KS4, there is a perception on the part of both teachers and pupils alike that advanced language study is too difficult. Consequently, the number of pupils who go on to study languages is depressed. However, this is not borne out by the available evidence. Although schools are wary of their results in public examinations in an increasingly competitive environment, the examination statistics, grades and standards for GCE A level for modern languages have remained stable and consistent in recent years. There is little evidence that schools are co-operating within an Area Learning Community to explore consortium arrangements or to examine ways of joining small GCSE or A Level classes together.

3.3   LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

3.3.1   As the number of pupils studying a language at KS4 continues to decrease, modern language teachers are becoming increasingly involved in delivering other strands of the curriculum, such as Learning for Life and Work, Citizenship and Employability.

3.3.2   A minority of the departments make effective use of data for a variety of purposes but mainly to predict and set targets for pupil attainment based firmly on pupil ability, performance and aptitude. Heads of department, for example, examine and analyse benchmarking data as part of the self-evaluation process and compare how the pupils within their own school are attaining regionally and nationally when compared to pupils in similar settings.

3.3.3   Too many departments are still unaware of the need to analyse examination results and at the point of inspection are often concerned and confused when dealing with statistical data pertaining to their department.

4.   **CONCLUSION**

4.1   In a significant minority of schools, the position of modern languages is vulnerable as a result of low uptake and reduced entries in public examinations at KS4 and beyond. In a small number of schools, pupils do not have the opportunity to study a language beyond KS3. In other cases, poor teaching combined with a lack of leadership and vision have contributed to pupils opting out of the study of modern languages. Negative attitudes abound that modern languages are only for the 'elite' or that they are too difficult for some pupils. In such instances middle managers need to 'champion' more vigorously the cognitive, educational, social and economic benefits of language learning within their own schools in order to reverse the downward spiral in uptake and attainment.

4.2   In just over one-half of the schools visited there is a positive attitude to modern languages, their place in the curriculum and their contribution to the pupils' learning, career prospects and overall education attainment. In these instances, the school leadership team and the head of department promote, value and support languages effectively. The teachers provide enjoyable and meaningful experiences for the pupils and the pupils make good progress.

Actions required to bring about improvement	ACTION BY
In order to reverse the decline in take-up of modern languages at KS3 and beyond, schools, heads of department, principals, governors, teachers and parents should now work to ensure that pupils recognise the benefits of learning a modern language and should support their pupils more in making real and informed choices to continue to develop language skills critical to their personal future success.	Schools, principals, teachers, governors.
Non-selective schools must ensure that they offer viable options for pupils to allow them to access the study of a modern language and promote more vigorously increased uptake at KS4. Where necessary, Area Learning Communities need to consider a fuller provision for modern languages across a number of schools in their locality.	Schools and Education and Library Boards.
In order to encourage and enable more pupils in non selective schools to continue with language learning beyond KS3, schools need to develop a languages policy which gives due consideration to a more inclusive approach to the study of languages and the links between modern languages, community language and English.	Schools and Department of Education.
For modern languages to recover their place in a crowded curriculum and prosper, clearer strategic direction is required in relation to the importance of languages as a core element in a broad and balanced education which prepares young people for life and work in a global economy; to produce more pupils qualified to move into the enormous variety of jobs, professions and careers available for native English speakers who can also work in other languages; and to improve our languages capacity and capabilities.	Department of Education.
At KS4, there are clear indications that modern languages are becoming increasingly the preserve of the selective sector in Northern Ireland. If non-selective schools are to respond to the challenges of a multilingual and multicultural society they will need to ensure that fewer pupils give up languages before reaching a basic level of competence in a language other than English. There is a need for: an increase in the amount of target language used in lessons by both teachers and pupils; the language learning experiences of adolescents to be made more relevant and better related to their age and interests; and, more use of ICT applications by teachers and pupils to make language learning more effective.	Schools.

SCHOOLS VISITED FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

1. Orangefield High School, Belfast
2. Ashfield Boys' High School, Belfast
3. St Patrick's High School, Maghera
4. St Eugene's High School, Castlederg
5. St Mary's High School, Irvinestown
6. Strangford Integrated College
7. St Patrick's High School, Keady
8. Newtownabbey Community College
9. The High School, Ballynahinch
10. Shimna Integrated College, Newcastle
11. St Mary's High School,, Portglenone.
12. Holy Cross College, Strabane
13. Integrated College, Dungannon
14. Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE