The Education and Training Inspectorate

An Evaluation of the

Primary Modern Languages Programme

August 2009

CONTENTS

I.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   In May 2007, the Minister for Education announced her intention to establish a programme to promote the teaching of modern languages in primary schools across all five Education and Library Board (ELB) areas. The intention was to provide a network of peripatetic language tutors, focusing initially on tuition in Irish and Spanish at the foundation stage (FS) or key stage (KS) 1. The Partnership Management Board (PMB) agreed to take the work forward and established the regional Primary Modern Languages Group (PMLG) to recruit, train and manage a network of peripatetic tutors and to identify interested primary schools. In January 2008, primary schools were invited to express an interest in the Primary Modern Languages Programme (the Programme) by completing a self-audit of existing modern language work and making a bid for selection by the PMLG.

1.2   As stated in the letter to schools of January 2008, it is the Minister's view that the Programme can have major strategic effects in the education system, by:

   ❍   raising awareness of good methodology in early modern languages teaching and establishing standards for ongoing good practice;

   ❍   helping schools gradually develop their own capacity for incorporating the successful teaching of modern languages within the primary curriculum;

   ❍   providing primary children with a positive, enjoyable experience of language learning, which might then generate ongoing interest through to post-primary level; and

   ❍   enhancing the primary curriculum, particularly the development of communication skills.

1.3   The Programme is not intended to replace any existing modern language work in primary schools. Indeed, there are a number of other primary language initiatives in various Education and Library Board (ELB) areas and a number of schools, including some of those participating in the Programme, have developed their own modern language programmes. This is, however, the first regional initiative to promote learning and teaching in modern languages across all educational sectors in all ELB areas in a consistent

manner, and significant additional resources have been made available to support it.

1.4   The Spanish Embassy and Foras na Gaeilge have taken a keen interest in the Programme and have made a range of very useful resources and training opportunities available to schools and tutors.

2. METHODOLOGY USED IN CONDUCTING THE EVALUATION

2.1 During February and March 2009, inspectors of the Education and Training Inspectorate (the Inspectorate) met with members of the PMLG and with a group of language tutors, and visited 47 primary schools (see Appendix) observing a total of 81 taught sessions. Prior to the visits, schools were invited to complete a pro forma questionnaire outlining their perceptions of the Programme and identifying its strengths and any areas they felt needed to be developed further or improved. The questionnaire formed the basis for discussions with class teachers, language co-ordinators and principals during school visits. Inspectors also attended two training sessions for schools involved in the Programme in March.

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

Almost/nearly all	–	more than 90%
Most	–	75%-90%
A majority	–	50%-74%
A significant minority	–	30%-49%
A minority	–	10%-29%
Very few/a small number	–	less than 10%

In assessing the various features of the provision, Inspectors relate their evaluations to six descriptors as set out below:

DESCRIPTOR
Outstanding
Very Good
Good
Satisfactory
Inadequate
Unsatisfactory

A number of short case studies are inserted in shaded text throughout the report to exemplify some points.

3. LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

How effective are the leadership and management of the Programme?

■ external management of the Programme;

■ quality of information available to schools;

■ internal management by school;

■ whole-school approach;

■ staff development and deployment;

■ clarity of roles and responsibilities;

■ monitoring and evaluation;

■ use of resources;

■ evidence of capacity building; and

■ future training needs.

3.1 At the time of the evaluation the demand for the Programme was 323 schools, with 247 asking for tutors of Spanish and 76 for Irish across all five ELBs. At that time, 231 schools had been allocated a Spanish tutor and 58 had been allocated an Irish tutor. Thirty four schools were still waiting for tutors, 16 for Spanish and 18 for Irish. By June 2009, only 12 schools had not been allocated a tutor, all 12 were waiting for Irish tutors.

3.2 In a relatively short time, a very good start has been made to offering Irish and Spanish in primary schools through the Programme. The PMLG has worked effectively to manage and co-ordinate the Programme. This group has, with little additional resources, successfully managed to recruit and train language tutors to meet the demand identified in primary schools. Almost 90% of schools that expressed an interest in the Programme have been provided with a language tutor in their preferred language in a very short timescale, despite problems with recruitment and retention.

3.3   The PMLG meets on a monthly basis to monitor and evaluate aspects of the Programme and to plan its further development, its expansion to a wider range of children in schools already in the Programme, to new schools wishing to become involved in the Programme and to introduce the teaching of Polish to the Programme. Thirty-one tutors of Polish were successful in the recent recruitment campaign. The Polish strand of the Programme will begin in September 2009.

3.4   The PMLG has provided training and a good range of strategies and resources to tutors to enable them to deliver a programme of language teaching to children in the FS and KS1.

3.5   The PMLG has provided some training for schools involved in the Programme. There is a need to focus more sharply on supporting schools to build their own capacity to deliver modern languages.

3.6   Courses have been evaluated by participants and the feedback from both tutors and schools is very positive.

3.7   A minority of schools expressed the view that they need more support in relation to monitoring and evaluating the work of the tutors and the standards achieved by the children.

3.8   A majority of schools involved in the Programme have an action plan to promote and support the learning and teaching of modern languages throughout the school in their School Development Plan (SDP). Only a minority of schools, however, have a clear idea about how this can be achieved in the absence of the provision of peripatetic tutors. While most primary schools have established good links with local post-primary schools, only a small number have meaningful language-related links with post-primary schools. While many schools have Comenius and other international links, only a minority have been trying to develop a language element within these links. The leadership teams in schools need to consider how learning and teaching in modern languages will be planned for strategically within their own school. They need to give clear direction on the role of teachers to support the Programme and to enhance their own skills to reinforce the work of tutors.

School A

The school has planned strategically for the sustainable implementation of the language programme in the FS and KS1. For example, the school provides additional language development classes for teachers and classroom assistants on a weekly basis; they are taught by the tutor. Furthermore, a modern language is available to all children in an after-school club to extend the opportunities for the children to avail of the language provision in the school.

3.9   A majority of schools report that they would like to have a more detailed overview of the Programme. Although schools have been advised by the PMLG to allocate time for teachers and tutors to liaise and plan, this very seldom occurs. Tutors generally spend all their time in schools teaching as they follow a very tight timetable and often need to travel to another school immediately at the end of the session. The result is that teachers feel they do not have a clear understanding about what the tutor has planned and there is little opportunity for tutors and teachers to make meaningful connections between the Programme and other elements of the children's learning.

3.10   There is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities in relation to the Programme. In some schools, principals and teachers are unsure if they should advise tutors about aspects of pedagogy.

3.11   A minority of schools expressed reservations about the languages offered through the Programme, and the lack of connection with the languages provided at the post-primary schools to which their children will transfer.

School B

The school has a well established programme of French teaching at KS 2 drawing on the expertise of a local post-primary school. They bid enthusiastically to become involved in the Primary Modern Languages Programme and although they are still very keen to promote languages in the school, they are unsure about the sustainability of the Programme in its current form and cannot yet see how the Programme will feed into their existing provision.

3.12   All the tutors report that they have been well received in the schools they work in, they are made very welcome, and feel that their work with the children is valued.

3.13   The Programme has raised the expectation of schools. Schools are beginning to expect peripatetic support for all years. There is a need to address urgently the key issues regarding the sustainability of the Programme and on building capacity within schools to develop further the teaching of languages beyond the life of the Programme.

4. QUALITY OF PROVISION FOR LEARNING

How effective are learning, teaching and assessment?

- tutors' planning;

- quality of resources;

- teaching approaches/activities taking account of the children's needs, interests and abilities; and

- benefits to the children, teachers and school.

4.1 All schools visited value highly the benefits of learning languages and would welcome the expansion of the Programme to all children in their schools. Many schools report that parents have commented very favourably on the provision.

4.2 The quality of the taught sessions observed during the evaluation was good or better in most schools. In a small number of schools, the teaching by the tutors was outstanding.

4.3 Teachers in a majority of the schools participated in the taught sessions. On the few occasions when teachers took an active part in the sessions, they added greatly to the quality of the children's learning. The sessions were lively and focused on aural and oral activities; tutors used a variety of stimulating resources and activities; the children were engaged in the learning, and they enjoyed greatly the rhymes, songs and games. All activities were promoted within a practical context.

School C

There were excellent working relationships between the class teacher and the language tutor. The tutor and the teacher used the target language effectively throughout the lesson and deployed a good range of teaching strategies to motivate and engage the children. The tutor led the lesson and was ably assisted by the class teacher who supported the children generally in their learning. The teacher was clearly familiar with the routines, key words and phrases and showed the same interest in, and enthusiasm for, the language as the children. The children were benefiting from effective teamwork between the class teacher and the tutor.

4.4   The tutors prepare very well for their lessons, they use an appropriate range of resources and strategies to engage the children and maintain their interest. There are good working relationships between tutors and the schools.

4.5   Most taught sessions observed were predominantly whole-class and tutor-directed. There is a need to develop further the teaching approaches used by the tutors to include paired and group work which will give the children more opportunities to rehearse, use and improve the language learned with their peers.

4.6   In a minority of schools teachers took no part in the taught sessions. They report, however, that they try to rehearse and reinforce the work between the weekly visits by tutors. There is a need to encourage all the adults present, teachers and classroom assistants, to become involved in the activities and to interact more with the children.

4.7   The provision in most schools is focused at the FS and KS1. In a small number of schools some children in KS2 are involved due to the composite nature of the classes. In all composite classes there is a need to ensure that there is appropriate differentiation in the provision.

4.8   In a significant minority of schools the class teachers report a concern that tutors try to cover too much material too quickly. There is a need for the teachers and the tutors to pace the work more appropriately and to use language work as another context to extend the strategies of the revised curriculum.

School D

The tutor taught very effectively the body parts integrated with the key colours through the use of the game, Twister. The children were actively learning throughout; they were applying their linguistic skills aligned with a regular game and developing co-operative and listening capabilities. The activity exemplified the participatory learning strategies which underpin the revised curriculum for primary schools.

4.9   While all tutors used the target language predominantly during taught sessions, a small number of tutors, especially native speakers, were inclined to use English unnecessarily.

4.10   A small number of tutors who were neither native speakers nor graduates of the target language lacked the confidence and the competence needed to carry out their role effectively.

4.11   A small number of schools expressed disappointment and frustration when their language tutor left the Programme for one reason or another and they found themselves having to deal with disappointed children and their parents.

5.   ACHIEVEMENTS AND STANDARDS

How well do the children achieve?

- children's motivation and attitudes;

- participation and engagement;

- fun and enjoyment in learning;

- interaction with others; and

- standards achieved.

5.1   The children in all schools visited enjoyed the taught sessions, they were highly motivated and were keen to take part in the activities. The children were very happy to 'have a go', to offer answers, and ask questions; they displayed high levels of participation and risk-taking in the development of oral competence.

School E

In this small rural primary school there is marked enthusiasm for the teaching of modern languages. The Principal proposes that the learning of another language not only enriches the children's experiences but also develops the children's thinking skills which has a positive spin off for other aspects of their learning. The development of language learning and teaching features on the SDP; there is an associated action plan which details the approaches to be used and the expected outcomes to be achieved. The class teachers are given time on a regular basis to meet with the language tutor to plan jointly for the sessions. Through this approach, aspects of the language teaching can be integrated with a theme or topic which the class is undertaking. During the language sessions, the class teachers participate fully, either by taking part in the activities or in assisting the children when they have opportunities for shared working. The teachers take opportunities throughout the week to reinforce elements of the language which the tutor has introduced and support further the children's learning through the creation of wall displays which match key vocabulary to their visual equivalents. The children clearly enjoy their learning and take pride in their ability to sing, play, understand and perform simple communications in another language.

5.2   Most schools supported the aural/oral focus of the language activities and recognised that all children, including those with special educational needs, have experienced success in their modern language work.

5.3   The children are very familiar with songs, rhymes and routines and their oral responses are generally very accurate.

5.4   Most schools have display areas in classroom and corridors, celebrating the work and achievements of children in modern languages. Children are given the opportunity to perform at assemblies in front of the whole school community including their parents and to celebrate their learning.

6. SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The quality of education provided through the Programme is good. The Programme has important strengths in most of its provision. The inspection has identified areas for improvement which the schools and the Partnership Management Board have the capacity to address.

6.2 Main Findings

○ Over one-quarter of all primary schools were participating in the Programme at the time of the evaluation, 231 schools in Spanish and 58 in Irish.

○ More than 13,000 children are benefiting directly from the Programme.

○ Sixty-four tutors are providing peripatetic tuition in Spanish and Irish, most travelling to more than one school in the same day.

○ All of the children visited during the evaluation are enjoying the Programme and are experiencing success in their language learning.

○ Principals and teachers in all participating schools are very enthusiastic about the Programme and about teaching modern languages generally in primary schools.

○ Schools report that parents are very supportive of the Programme and would like it to be expanded.

○ Almost all tutors are highly skilled, motivated and enthusiastic.

○ Tutors and teachers do not have sufficient time to liaise and plan together.

○ There is a need to develop effective structures to monitor and evaluate classroom practice and children's progress.

○ There have been problems recruiting sufficient tutors to meet the demand.

○ Tutors need more training in the use of a wider variety of teaching approaches including group and paired work.

○   There is a need to build capacity in schools and to ensure the sustainability of the Programme.

6.3   Among the strengths of the Programme are:

○   the enthusiasm of all schools visited for the Programme and the teaching of modern languages;

○   the high levels of motivation and enjoyment of all the children;

○   the good progress made by children;

○   the lively, engaging approach of most tutors;

○   the positive response of parents, principals and teachers; and

○   the effective management of the Programme by the PMLG.

6.4   The areas for improvement include the need:

○   for schools to ensure there is time for teachers and tutors to liaise and plan for the Programme together;

○   for tutors to develop further their teaching approaches to include provision for the children to learn through group and paired activities;

○   for all class teachers to participate fully in the language activities to support the children's learning;

○   for the PMLG and schools to develop and disseminate effective procedures to monitor and evaluate classroom practice and the children's progress; and

○   for schools to demonstrate a clear commitment to building their own capacity to deliver modern languages.

6.5   Recommendations

	In developing the programme, stakeholders should give due consideration to the following recommendations	Action should be taken by:
1	There is a need for further differentiated resources, strategies and teaching approaches to support teachers with modern language work. This should involve specialists in the revised primary curriculum as well as linguists.	ELBs
2	Opportunities should be provided for existing primary teachers to develop their modern language competence.	ELBs
3	Schools need to be supported to build their own capacity to provide modern languages.	PMB, schools
4	There should be collaboration with providers of Initial Teacher Education, to ensure that schools have access to a growing number of primary teachers who have the competence to teach a modern language.	DE
5	Efforts should be made to align or integrate other modern language provision in primary schools with the Programme.	PMB
6	There is a need for a coherent modern languages strategy.	DE
7	Following the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, a small dedicated team should be created to manage and develop the Programme.	ESA

6.6   The Programme has made a very positive start and is contributing significantly to the teaching of modern languages in our primary schools. For the first time modern languages have been introduced to the primary curriculum in a coherent manner in line with the best practice across

the countries of the European Union. Awareness of language teaching in primary schools is at a high level and the expectations of schools and parents have been raised. Schools need to be supported to develop their own capacity to provide modern languages. The pending Modern Languages Strategy has the potential to provide further impetus and ensure that the current momentum is not lost.

SCHOOLS VISITED BY INSPECTORS

Belfast Education and Library Board

Euston Street Primary School

St John the Baptist Boys' Primary School

St John the Baptist Girls' Primary School

St Joseph's Primary School, Holland Drive

St Michael's Primary School, Ravenhill Road

St Therese of Lisieux Primary School

North-Eastern Education and Library Board

Acorn Integrated Primary School, Carrickfergus

Ballyhenry Primary School, Glengormley, Newtownabbey

Ballynure Primary School, Ballyclare

Bushmills Primary School

Carrickfergus Model Primary School

Kilcoan Primary School, Islandmagee

Landhead Primary School, Ballymoney

Mount St Michael Primary School, Randalstown

St Brigid's Primary School, Ballymoney

St John Bosco Primary School, Ballynease

Straidbilly Primary School, Ballymoney

Victoria Primary School, Carrickfergus

South-Eastern Education and Library Board

All Children's Integrated Primary School, Newcastle

Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, Castlewellan

Cumran Primary School, Clough

Killowen Primary School, Lisburn

Lisnasharragh Primary School

Riverdale Primary School, Lisburn

St Aloysius Primary School, Lisburn

St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick

St Colman's Primary School, Lambeg

St Joseph's Primary School, Carryduff

St Joseph's Primary School, Crossgar

St Joseph's Primary School, Killough

St Macartan's Primary School, Loughinisland

St Mark's Primary School, Twinbrook

St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle

Southern Education and Library Board

Blessed Patrick O'Loughran Primary School, Castlecaulfield

Hart Memorial Primary School, Portadown

Moneydarragh Primary School, Annalong

Rich Mount Primary School, Portadown

Seagoe Primary School, Portadown

St Mary's Primary School, Granemore Road, Tassagh, Armagh

Western Education and Library Board

All Saints' Primary School, Omagh

Brookeborough Primary School, Enniskillen

Donemana Primary School, Strabane

Gaelscoil na gCrann, Ballynamullan, Omagh

Knocknagor Primary School, Trillick, Omagh

Maguiresbridge Primary School, Enniskillen

St Columbkille's Primary School, Carrickmore

Tummery Primary School, Dromore, Omagh