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Reference number: HMI 316

The post-16 subject guidance series currently comprises: art and design; business education; classics; design and technology; drama and theatre studies; engineering and manufacturing; English; geography; government and politics; health and social care; history; information and communication technology; law; mathematics; media education; modern foreign languages; music; physical education; religious studies; science; sociology.

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Introduction

This booklet aims to help inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in modern foreign languages for students post-16. It complements the *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* (1999), the supplement *Inspecting School Sixth Forms* (2001) and the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* (2001). It replaces the earlier guidance *Inspecting Subjects and Aspects 11-18* (1999).

This guidance concentrates on issues specific to modern foreign languages. General guidance is in the *Handbooks*. Use both to get a complete picture of the inspection or evaluation process.

This booklet is concerned with evaluating standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and other factors that affect what is achieved. It outlines how to use students' work and question them, the subject-specific points to look for in lessons, and how to draw evaluations together to form a coherent view of the subject.

Examples are provided of evidence and evaluations from college and school sixth form inspections, with commentaries to give further explanation. These examples are included without any reference to context, and will not necessarily illustrate all of the features that inspectors will need to consider. The booklets in the series show different ways of recording and reporting evidence and findings; they do not prescribe or endorse any particular method or approach.

Inspectors and senior staff in schools and colleges may need to evaluate several subjects and refer to more than one booklet. You can download any of the subject guidance booklets from OFSTED's website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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OFSTED's remit for this sector is the inspection of education for students aged 16–19, other than work-based education. In schools, this is the sixth form provision. In colleges, the 16–19 age-group will not be so clearly identifiable; classes are likely to include older students and, in some cases, they will have a majority of older students. In practice, inspectors and college staff will evaluate the standards and quality in these classes regardless of the age of the students.

The primary focus in this phase will be on the work of students entering for the General Certificate of Education (GCE) at Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced level (A level). There may also be students working for the Advanced Extension Award (AEA). You may also see extended provision in modern foreign languages for this age-range. This may include starter courses in minority languages, leading to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), or continuation courses with a business bias – for example, Foreign Languages for Industry and Commerce (FLIC), Foreign Languages at Work (FLAW), free-standing General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) units, or Institute of Linguists courses, which focus predominantly on oral competence and comprehension skills. In some institutions, the International Baccalaureate will be offered, with languages taught at a range of levels from beginners to Advanced level.

This booklet concentrates on the most commonly found courses in modern foreign languages for students 16–19. However, the principles illustrated in this guidance can be applied more widely. Reliable judgements on standards in each language course can only be made by someone who is qualified in that language.

Students entering A-level or AS courses will probably have gained a grade A*–C at GCSE, and will bring with them an ability to read, understand, speak and write the language. They will be able to function at an everyday level in the foreign language, but they will be unused to discussing more abstract issues in the language. Their ability to do this accurately will vary widely, and some students will have an incomplete understanding of the grammatical structure of the language they are learning. Good departments of modern foreign languages will be aware of this: many of them begin AS and A-level studies with a course which enables students to bridge effectively the gap between GCSE and the demands of an advanced course. Older students can be expected to have a very wide range of previous experience and expertise in the language.

Common requirements

All inspectors share the responsibility for determining whether a school or college is effective for all its students, whatever their educational needs or personal circumstances. As part of this responsibility, ensure that you have a good understanding of the key characteristics of the institution and its students. Evaluate the achievement of different groups of students and judge how effectively their needs and aspirations are met and any initiatives or courses aimed specifically at these groups of students. Take account of recruitment patterns, retention rates and attendance patterns for programmes and courses for different groups of students. Consider the individual goals and targets set for students within different groups and the progress they make towards achieving them.

You should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of schools and colleges regarding equal opportunities, in particular those defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. These Acts and related codes of practice underpin national policies on inclusion, on raising achievement and on the important role schools and colleges have in fostering better personal, community and race relations, and in addressing and preventing racism.¹

As well as being thoroughly familiar with subject-specific requirements, be alert to the unique contribution that each subject makes to the wider educational development of students. Assess how well the curriculum and teaching in modern foreign languages enable all students to develop key skills, and how successfully the subject contributes to the students' personal, social, health and citizenship education, and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Judge how effectively the subject helps prepare students aged 16–19 for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society.

¹ See Annex *Issues for Inspection arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson Report)* in *Evaluating Educational Inclusion*, OFSTED, 2000, p13.

1 Standards and achievement

1.1 Evaluating standards and achievement

From the previous inspection report, find out what you can about standards and achievement at that time. This will give you a point of comparison with the latest position, but do not forget that there is a trail of performance data, year by year. Analyse and interpret the performance data available for students who have recently completed the course(s). Draw on the school's *Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator* (PICS) report or, in the case of a college, the *College Performance Report*. Also analyse the most recent results provided by the school or college and any value-added information available. When numbers are small, exercise caution in making comparisons with national data or, for example, evaluating trends. For further guidance on interpreting performance data and analysing value added, refer to *Inspecting School Sixth Forms*, the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* and the *National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools*.

Where you can, form a view about the standards achieved by different groups of students. For example, there may be data which enable you to compare how male and female students or different ethnic groups are doing, or how well 16–19-year-old students achieve in relation to older students.

Make full use of other information which has a bearing on standards and achievement, including success in completing courses, targets and their achievement, and other measures of success.

You should interpret, in particular:

- trends in results;
- comparisons with other subjects and courses;
- distributions of grades, particularly the occurrence of high grades;
- value-added information;
- the relative performance of male and female students;
- the performance of minorities and different ethnic groups;
- trends in the popularity of courses;
- drop-out or retention rates;
- students' destinations, where data are available.

On the basis of the performance data and other pre-inspection evidence, form hypotheses about the standards achieved, whether they are as high as they should be, and possible explanations. Follow up your hypotheses through observation and analysis of students' work and talking with them. Direct inspection evidence tells you about the standards at which the current students are working, and whether they are being sufficiently stretched. If the current standards are at odds with what the performance data suggest, you must find out why and explain the differences carefully.

In addition to the performance data you analyse, obtain from the institution any information which is produced by the examination board that breaks down the students' recent results paper by paper. This might, for example, indicate particular strengths and weaknesses in aspects of language teaching or learning. Similarly, if there are results from AS or other modules for the current students, these are likely to give useful information about where strengths and weaknesses lie. For example, the results in the oral examination might be significantly better than in other aspects of the course, and you would wish to investigate why this may be so.

As you observe students in lessons, look at their work and talk to them, you should concentrate on the extent to which students:

- demonstrate their understanding of material written in the foreign language, drawn from a wide range of everyday, topical, technical, business, literary, social and historical sources, and can respond appropriately to it;
- understand language spoken at speed on radio, television, cassette or film, by native speakers or others on a variety of themes and in a range of styles;
- can translate or interpret from one language to another effectively, accurately and idiomatically;

- speak the language accurately, confidently and fluently, and react spontaneously to complex questions and unfamiliar language;
- speak with good pronunciation and intonation and use different registers appropriate to the context of the discussion or dialogue;
- engage readily in conversation, discussion or debate, and present, develop or sustain a logical argument in the foreign language, while taking account of the views of others;
- show extensive knowledge of the countries, customs and culture of the people whose language they are learning;
- have detailed knowledge and understanding of the themes and topics they have studied and the issues facing contemporary society;
- have developed mature and well-informed views on topical or controversial issues, and can present these in a logical, coherent and accurate way in speech or writing;
- write accurately in a variety of styles appropriate to context, using an increasingly wide range of complex, sophisticated and topic-specific language;
- demonstrate a high level of grammatical accuracy;

and particularly for AEAs, the extent to which the students:

- have read widely and use their own initiative to improve their language skills;
- think critically, adapting their knowledge and skills to unfamiliar contexts or situations.

1.2 Analysis of students' work

An analysis of the work of a sample of students is one of the most important activities for you to undertake in making judgements on standards and achievement. It is the primary source of evidence for identifying relative strengths and weaknesses in the quality and range of students' writing. In examining files of work, you can deduce the amount of progress the students make as they move through the course, the demands which the teaching places on them, and whether they achieve well enough.

In addition, you will be able to form a judgement on the content of the curriculum; the frequency, range and appropriateness of tasks; and the regularity, accuracy and helpfulness of marking and target setting. This will add weight to your evaluation of the quality of the teaching. If possible, see samples of complete student files. They often contain very different amounts of work, according to the diligence with which students choose to organise them. The amount of practice students get across the whole range of the syllabus is crucial. Look, too, for any evidence of other written work (often coursework) which has been completed, as this may be the most important example of extended writing available to you. There may be additional evidence of standards – for example, tapes or videos of students speaking in the language.

Example 1: evidence from work of 3 second year students of French in fourth term of A-level course in an FE college; obtained A*, A and B in GCSE.

Extended research and writing on the topic of transport. The most capable student has researched the integrated transport system in Paris and compared it with that of other European capitals. His portfolio also contains the tape of a live interview the student conducted with a driver on the Paris metro. Other students have analysed future transport needs and argued the case for improved public transport.

- *In all students' work, the quality of written French is very good. Writing is accurate, with few grammatical errors, particularly by the highest-attaining student, whose errors occur only when using complex linguistic expressions. The lowest attaining of this talented group is accurate and precise in her use of well-known grammatical expressions, but makes some mistakes when using unfamiliar constructions which she may have looked up in a dictionary.*
- *All students employ an extensive range of vocabulary and expressions, containing topic-specific and technical language. Highest-attaining student makes good use of complex language structures, such as future perfect tense and subjunctive mood. Others have assimilated a wide range of vocabulary related to this topic, but do not show as much initiative in varying their style and register.*

- *Extensive research shows good understanding – for example, of the problems facing transport planners and the needs of a modern society. Wide variety of good-quality information gleaned from books, media and Internet sources; used discerningly to support and illustrate views.*
- *Highest-attaining student has constructed a logical and coherent case for improved public transport in this country, taking good account of conflicting opinions, but using these skilfully to support own argument. This demonstrates both the mature and well-informed nature of the student's views and his ability to organise these effectively into a lively, interesting and persuasive essay. Other students have also argued their cases well and use statistics convincingly to support their views.*
- *Taped interview by highest-attaining student demonstrates his fluency and ability to react spontaneously to unfamiliar language and the strong regional accent of the native speaker. Sensibly seeks repetition and re-phrasing as necessary. Good range of language used actively by student, but under pressure there are some grammatical mistakes, typically in adjectival agreement. Very effective in conveying views, asking questions and seeking further information, with very good pronunciation, although it is clear that student is not a native speaker of French.*
- *Evidence from files shows very good progress through the French course. The students have all worked to extend their familiarity with the language, producing many extended pieces of accurate and thoughtful writing, and achieving well.*
- *The standard of the highest-attaining student's work is clearly grade A at A level, possibly reaching distinction in AEA. The other students are also doing extremely well, and working towards grade A. This suggests considerable achievement for the least-talented student, who obtained grade B at GCSE. She has made very good progress in grammatical accuracy.*

[Attainment very high (1)]

Commentary

The students had high starting points but, because of the effort they make to research the topic and learn from their experience and past mistakes, they also achieve very well. Not only do they know a good deal about the topics they have been researching, they also have clear views, and can organise them into a coherent essay, using a wide variety of language. The highest-attaining student performs very well in spontaneous conversation, even though his spoken French is not entirely accurate and there are traces of his native language in the pronunciation. He is very good all round, being both a confident and fluent speaker and also a creative, knowledgeable and accurate writer of French.

1.3 Talking with students

Talking with students in the language is a primary source of evidence for judging their aural comprehension skills and evaluating their oral competence. It can also give you valuable insight into the content of the course, their enthusiasm for the subject, and the breadth and depth of their topic-related knowledge. It is unlikely that you will be able to do this during lesson time, and, therefore, you should seek a time when a few willing students would be prepared to come and talk to you. Encourage them to see it as an opportunity to practise rather than as a test, and keep the conversation light and focused on their interests and views.

Students in their second year of the course should be able to hold natural and interesting conversations in the language they are studying. They should demonstrate a wide range of detailed and subject-specific vocabulary, mature and well-informed views and an ability to explain and defend them, good pronunciation and intonation and an ability to sustain and develop conversation in accurate language. Ask open-ended questions which seek students' views and prompt them to justify them. Let the conversation take a natural course, but you may wish to cover, for example:

- time spent in the country; differences and similarities; have they lived there? would they like to live there and why/not? any work experience they may have undertaken or time spent studying there;
- work, hobbies and interests (judge level of subject-specific vocabulary and prompt use of different tenses; include topics such as the environment or others that the students feel committed to);
- what they find interesting (or not) about their course;

- where they are going next, what plans and ambitions they have and the reasons for these choices; university life and how they see their lives changing; plans for a gap year; what they would do if it were possible (conditional tense); employment and further training plans;
- views on any current topics in the news.

Example 2: evidence from discussion with 4 Year 12 students in final term of one-year AS-level German course in a school sixth form; 2 grade Bs and 2 grade Cs in GCSE.

After initial pleasantries, the discussion covers environmental issues and future plans.

- *Upbeat and forthcoming initially, but three of the students are quickly out of their depth on a topic covered recently in their course. Lack of basic information on the environment and topic-related vocabulary, such as 'pollution' and 'greenhouse effect'. A few parroted expressions – for example, Bäume sind die Lungen der Welt – but views largely superficial and language too simplistic at this level. One student demonstrates reasonable understanding of the vocabulary relevant to this topic, but is unable to use it actively in discussion, and her performance is barely up to average for this stage in the course.*
- *Highly inaccurate, very insecure grammatical foundations, particularly plurals, accusative, genders, word order and past tense.*
- *Anglicized pronunciation, even by the most competent of the four. Much rephrasing and repetition needed. Hesitant. Long pauses accompanied by hand waving or English denote a lack of German vocabulary.*
- *Basic vocabulary evident in talk about future plans and reasons for their decisions, but little to indicate that these students can move beyond the concrete into a more abstract discussion. They have few ideas or original views.*
- *Little progress beyond GCSE in content or expression for three of the students. Clearly points to unsatisfactory achievement.*

[Attainment below average (5)]

Commentary

These students have not made enough progress, and their achievement in oral work, even given relatively modest starting points, is not as high as it should be for this stage. Their grasp of vocabulary and grammar is weak, they are hesitant, their pronunciation is poor, and they have few ideas. They appear to be barely coping with the demands of an AS course, yet they may be doing better in other areas of language study. If so, you would wish to record unsatisfactory achievement in oral work, and pursue the reasons behind it.

1.4 Lesson observation

Observing lessons is essential for judging the quality of the teaching and learning, but it will also give indications of standards and achievement. If practicable, ask the teachers in advance what the focus of the lessons will be so that you can choose the lessons to visit which will best meet your objectives. Visit a range of lessons but, in the likely event of competing demands on your time, prioritise the lessons you observe, so that you do not waste time sitting through a listening comprehension practice from a tape, when you can look afterwards at a transcript and judge what the students made of it. Choose those lessons where you can see the students participating, for example, in a discussion. This will enable you to judge their comprehension and speaking skills, the depth of their understanding of the topic, their ability to articulate or argue for their point of view, the accuracy of their use of language, the range of their vocabulary, the quality of their pronunciation and intonation, their confidence in speaking the language, their spontaneity and their ability to react to the views of others. Keep in mind the extent to which gender or other inclusion issues affect classroom performance – for example, in the level of participation, or in the quality of students' pronunciation and development of ideas. In mixed-age classes, observe how students' life experiences are used to give depth and substance to discussions.

Example 3: evidence from mixed-ability AS French group in a sixth form college at end of second term; 10 students present; all but two have relatively low previous attainment.

Discussion of two texts: one short article (in English) advocating the British A-level system, the other (in French) in praise of Baccaalaureate. Debate among students. For private study, they are asked to produce written argument in preparation for a writing task.

- All students have mastered key words – now at end of this topic.
- The highest attainers (20 per cent) participate readily, and will 'have a go', even if they later run short of vocabulary. They have a secure knowledge of the topic-related vocabulary and expressions they have covered, and they use them confidently to convey their views in fairly accurate French. They react to others' opinions and can sustain their argument well.
- Majority (60 per cent) have opinions on relatively straightforward issues and can explain their thoughts, albeit somewhat hesitantly, but they are easily beguiled by counter-arguments. They have mastered most of the topic vocabulary well, but their use of language is still relatively concrete and unsophisticated. Some inaccurate use of grammar, particularly in the use of tenses.
- Below-average-attaining students (the only males in the group) are quiet and monosyllabic, despite teacher's attempts to involve them. They show little interest in the topic, although they clearly understand the issues and follow the debate, but their own contribution is minimal: *je suis d'accord, je ne sais pas pourquoi*. Their written work shows understanding of the vocabulary but inaccurate sentence construction.
- Pronunciation of most students is reasonably accurate and has clearly benefited from the college's exchange trip to France, but the pronunciation of the below average students is strongly influenced by their native language.
- Most students have made steady progress since the start of the year and have some views which they are willing to share. They are still hesitant in oral work, but have learnt an appropriate range of vocabulary and expressions to cover this topic. However, considering their previous attainment, this would indicate good achievement for most of the students.
- In written and oral work, they are mostly on course for about grade C.

[Attainment average (4)]

Commentary

The students are most of the way through their AS-level course and the majority will continue next year. They have mastered the requisite range of vocabulary and expressions for this topic. They hold firm opinions and most of them can express these intelligibly, although not always accurately. They react to each other's views. The highest-attaining students exhibit a range of higher order speaking skills such as persuasiveness, spontaneity and the ability to construct and develop an argument. The majority are more hesitant, but nonetheless speak up. Their views are less well developed, and they are less able to defend a point of view. Their use of language is concrete and relatively unsophisticated, but still effective. A couple of students make little contribution to the discussion, maybe through lack of ideas or deficient language skills.

This is an average performance from an AS class. The subject matter and the range of debate are relatively unsophisticated. Interjection from the teacher often helps the discussion along, but the students do participate and have developed a satisfactory range of knowledge and language skills. For most students, this attainment suggests good achievement, in view of their ability and starting point on the course.

2 Teaching and learning

2.1 Evaluating teaching and learning

Interpret the *Handbook* criteria with specific reference to modern foreign languages, and keep in mind the characteristics of effective teaching and learning, in which:

- students see the fascination and relevance of a modern language as a gateway to culture, communication and personal enjoyment, fired by the teacher's knowledge and enthusiasm (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology, students' interest*);
- through competence in the foreign language and the ability to use it skilfully, the teacher enables the students to develop fluent, accurate and confident oral skills (*subject knowledge, methodology, students' acquisition of knowledge and skills*);
- the range, breadth and challenge of carefully selected information and topics for discussion allow all students to develop their awareness and understanding of contemporary issues and express their views on them (*expectations, planning*);
- the teacher uses carefully pitched questions and sensitive discussion techniques to draw out the reticent student, who lacks confidence in speaking the language, while valuing the contribution of more voluble students but not allowing them to dominate (*methodology, expectations*);
- by observing individuals' strengths, weaknesses and interests, the teacher selects carefully tasks and projects which challenge all members of the group and enable them to learn from their mistakes and give of their very best (*assessment, planning, expectations, students' effort*);
- by choosing tasks carefully and practising skills and techniques frequently, the teacher enables students to read or listen for the gist and meaning of a passage (*planning, methodology*);
- through patient explanation and guidance from the teacher, students acquire good techniques for organising their ideas into a coherent and logical spoken or written argument (*methodology*);
- through the teacher's high expectations, clear explanations and rigorous correction of errors, the students learn to appreciate and demonstrate accuracy in their use of grammar, syntax, vocabulary and idiom (*expectations, assessment*);
- by using a wide range of authentic resources, such as Internet, cable or satellite TV, books, maps, newspapers, magazines, realia, tapes and videos, and through regular access to native speakers, students become familiar with the culture of a country and develop a good understanding of its language (*resources*);
- students are exposed to unpredictable situations and trained to adapt the language they know to the unfamiliar context, by reacting spontaneously and 'thinking on their feet' (*methodology, students' thinking*);
- the curriculum provides for students to spend time productively in the country in order to improve the whole range of their language skills (*methodology, resources*);
- the students contribute effectively to their own progress by showing initiative, determination, perseverance, good organisation (look at their files of work or the way they organise and learn vocabulary), enquiry, independent research of coursework/topic, independent reading in the foreign language (ask them what they have read outside the syllabus and what they thought of it), making useful notes and arranging language practice for themselves (*methodology, students' intellectual effort and thinking for themselves*);

Be alert to lessons which may have superficially positive features but which lack the rigour, depth, insight and command of good subject teaching. Examples might be in teaching where:

- the curriculum emphasises the vocabulary areas and content of the topics to be covered, but provides insufficient explanation or practice of grammar (*planning, methodology*);
- the teacher displays fluent, possibly faultless language skills, but does not encourage the students to speak the language (*subject knowledge, expectations*);
- the pace of teaching is brisk, and all students contribute actively, but the level of language they are encouraged to use is pedestrian and the topic of debate is undemanding (*time, expectations*);
- time is spent productively in reading, translating or making notes on a text, but there is no time for students to express their views on it (*time, expectations, students' creative effort*);
- students participate readily in oral work and their contributions are praised, irrespective of mistakes, which go uncorrected and are, therefore, reinforced (*assessment, methodology*).

2.2 Lesson observation

Example 4: evidence from a Year 12 A-level German lesson in a school sixth form, halfway through the year; group of 7 students (5F, 2M, NoR 9) working in ICT room.

Revision of vocabulary and structures associated with Karneval. Grammar points, including adjective endings and use of subjunctive. Further practice using Internet-produced grammar program.

The teacher (a native speaker) is confident and competent: he provides an excellent model of the spoken language. He has a good grasp of grammar and is able to pass this on to the students through clear, lively explanations in German. English occasionally – and judiciously – used to clarify a point which is proving difficult to grasp. The session has been well prepared: moves from whole-class presentation and discussion, supported by good use of OHP, to individual work, group work and reinforcement using ICT. Lesson conducted at a good pace; students' interest sustained by the variety of activity. The teacher is demanding; does not allow incorrect answers or poor accent/intonation to go unchallenged. Good use of humour to engage the interest of the group in an important but potentially difficult area of grammatical study. The lesson is ultimately successful in developing students' grammatical awareness and accuracy. Good attempt made at the end of the lesson to recapitulate and check on what had been learnt. Makes sure that the students have all grasped the lesson's objectives and all know their personal targets for improvement. These are well linked to a range of individual tasks set for homework.

Students respond well to the teacher's skilled, sympathetic prompting. They are eager to answer the questions and do not fear making mistakes, although their linguistic ability varies considerably. Nonetheless, over the course of the lesson each student demonstrates a growing mastery of grammatical structures, and all are able to improve their written accuracy and work with the computer on aspects of grammar which they had personally found difficult. They seek confirmation from the teacher in German and, unusually for students at this level, routinely use German to communicate with each other. They make notes without being reminded to do so and, when working on the computers, show a good understanding of the technicalities involved. They work with unflinching attention over the whole course of the double period. All have taken part in school exchanges to Germany, and this had a positive impact on their confidence and fluency.

[Teaching and learning very good (2)]

Commentary

This lesson is very successful – possibly, partly because the groundwork has been laid in earlier stages of language learning – and the teacher does not have to go back to absolute basics: he is able to take a certain amount for granted. He takes what might have been a rather dry topic and makes it interesting through his

clear, lively and humorous approach and the use of ICT. Students sustain their motivation through their feeling that they are making progress, whatever their previous attainment, in the areas they have personally found difficult. This is because the teacher has carefully planned their individual tasks. The use of visual aids helps memory and increases the impact of the points being made. The students have the opportunity for individual practice of ICT and language skills. The use of German is fairly constant, but the teacher shows good judgement in using English sparingly but effectively to make efficient use of time and clarify points that are proving to be troublesome. The planning of the lesson is detailed, but it does not preclude spontaneous digressions from the established plan. The summary at the end of the lesson and the analysis of what students have learnt, and what they now need to do, contributes to the success of the session. The students have profited well from their time spent on school exchanges – principally, in their willingness to speak the language.

NB Further evidence comes from students' portfolios; these confirm the effectiveness of the teaching.

Example 5: evidence from an AS-level French lesson in an FE college near the end of the year; 10 students (8F, 2M, NOR 10); class includes 2 older (female) students.

The theme of the lesson is the world of work: students discuss possible future employment plans and consider the benefits of working overseas. Practice in the use of the conditional tense.

The teacher is a competent, although not completely confident, speaker of French. Materials from newspapers and magazines have been well prepared for language content, but are chosen without thought for the range of students in the group. All the jobs in the text relate to issues concerning female workers and there is little to engage the interests of the older learners. A lively pace at the outset, although slower later. Good variety of activity (including listening comprehension from taped source). The teacher encourages the higher-achieving female students to be more ambitious in their responses, challenging them to justify their views. However, she does not persevere in drawing into the discussion the male students, who sit apart from the main group and use French only for basic utterances, or the older students, whose needs she has not identified clearly. The grammar work is clear, although the explanations are over-simplified and gloss over difficulties students might encounter. Attempts to use group work are worthy but founder on the inability of the weaker students to contribute effectively. English has to be used frequently to explain difficulties.

The response of the students shows that they are willing but that some are frustrated by their inability to transfer their thoughts into words. The two more confident students persist in using French, not always accurately, but with an encouraging determination to keep going, even when the exact vocabulary and structures fail to come to mind. They are ready to answer direct questions from the teacher – which often have to be re-phrased – but are unable to take the initiative, ask questions themselves, or communicate with each other. The other younger female students are short of the means to express their ideas, and the male students are left to flounder on the edge of the lesson. The older students have interesting views to express, but are not given sufficient time or help to develop them. There have been reasonable gains in learning vocabulary on the topic, although progress is limited in developing the speaking skills of below average students by the end of the session. Only one of the younger students has been able to visit France for more than a brief day-trip.

[Teaching and learning unsatisfactory (5)]

Commentary

This is a lesson which has some strengths, but these are not sufficient to outweigh the weaknesses. There is a clear plan and supporting structure. The materials chosen are interesting for the younger female students and pertinent to the topic, but they hold less relevance for the male students or the older members in the group. There is enough variety of activity to sustain students' interest. The use of recorded tape materials and the OHP provides students with helpful supports to learning. The majority of the students learn more about the language and make progress, but they are hampered by shortage of confidence, an uncertain grasp of grammar, and lack of first-hand experience of France and the French language.

The teacher does not do enough to engage and stimulate all the students. In the end, she concentrates her attention on the higher attainers and largely ignores the male students and the older ones. These four make little contribution to the session and appear to gain little from it. Teaching and learning cannot be satisfactory if 40 per cent of the students gain little from the lesson.

Example 6: evidence from a second year Spanish lesson; 6 students (5F, 1M, NOR 6); mid-year.

The aim of the lesson is to introduce students to the 'tricks' used by advertisers to promote consumer products and to encourage them to discuss the topic with a view to writing an essay.

The teacher starts by using accurate and good Spanish consistently, but frequently finds it necessary to use English, since the response from the students is not forthcoming. A wide range of good-quality, relevant materials has been prepared – OHT, word lists, video, cassette, newspaper articles, textbook – but the students' lack of vocabulary constantly causes the teacher to stop and re-cover very basic ground. It is clear that most of the students have not learnt the range of vocabulary and expressions set for this week's work. The teacher's hard work is frustrated by the students' low level of knowledge and, although her explanations are clear and helpful, she is unable to cover the intended ground.

The students are attentive, but have to be prompted to take notes and are poorly organised. Their level of knowledge is low, they lack confidence in oral work, and they have not prepared adequately for the lesson. The majority are likely to achieve at best very modest results in A level. Relationships are good, despite the teacher's patience being tried by the inability of the students to be more active participants in the lesson. Two of the students have been on exchanges to Spain; their accents are noticeably better than those of the other students.

[Teaching satisfactory (4); learning unsatisfactory (5)]

Commentary

The students make insufficient progress over the course of the lesson, and are hindered, even at this late stage of the course, by their poor command of basic grammar and their lack of Spanish vocabulary. The fact that they have not learnt the vocabulary and expressions set as preparation for this work puts a strain on the teacher, who is working hard with little return. She is a competent linguist, has prepared lively and relevant material for discussion, and explained well the vocabulary and grammatical points, but her efforts are frustrated by the students' lack of commitment. They do little to help themselves and have not done what they were asked to do in preparation for the session. If the students had prepared adequately for the lesson, the learning would have been satisfactory. Since it is a factor beyond the teacher's control which makes learning unsatisfactory, the teaching is satisfactory.

2.3 Other evidence on teaching and learning

Lesson observation is usually the most important source of evidence on the quality of teaching and learning, but the analysis of work and discussions with students can also yield valuable information. This is particularly important when the work includes a coursework component undertaken over time. Under these circumstances, the observation of individual lessons may give a very partial picture of the students' learning experience and of the support provided by teachers.

The work analysis will give you a good feel for the overall rate of progress, and, therefore, the pace of the teaching and learning. It will show the range and depth of the work which the students are required to do. For example, it will indicate whether students have sufficient opportunities to develop their understanding of current issues and write at length about them. To be sure of your evidence, try to look at whole files of students' work.

Discussions with students will give you a sense of their motivation and the range of their experiences. You can ask questions to see whether they understand clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

3 Other factors affecting quality

Other factors are only significant if they have a noticeable impact on the students' learning and standards. Note and evaluate any significant features of the curriculum, leadership, management, staffing, accommodation or resources. There are a number of aspects specific to modern foreign languages which you may need to consider as factors having a positive or negative influence on attainment.

Accommodation

In the teaching rooms, can students see the visual aids being used and hear clearly without the distractions of extraneous noise? Are acoustic conditions in the room good?

Resources

Are teachers and students able to use conveniently a wide range of audio-visual resources? Do students have access to authentic resources – for example, books, maps, newspapers, Internet, magazines, realia, tapes and videos?

Staffing

Are the teachers fluent linguists with qualifications and experience in teaching the age range in question? Are there native speakers/foreign language assistants, and how are they deployed and supported? How well equipped are the teachers to teach the whole range of topics?

Curriculum

How extensive is the range of language offered? How many levels of study are possible? If teaching is shared between staff, how effective is joint planning and collaboration? Is there attention to grammar topics in the scheme of work? Are there extra-curricular opportunities – for example, cinema and theatre visits, play readings, correspondence with people abroad, Internet links, lectures, visiting speakers, reception of foreign guests, visits and exchanges overseas, planned time in the country on work experience, or work-related experience in England?

Leadership and management

Does the department encourage students to be enthusiastic about learning a language and appreciate the importance of languages for personal, social and professional ends? Does it help students (specialists or non-specialists) to seek opportunities to use their language actively? Is there evidence of a wider school/college interest in modern foreign languages, and does the department see the wider application of modern foreign languages as a skill to assist all students in their future lives?

If first and second year students are taught together, how well is the teaching organised to avoid disadvantage to both groups? Are there sufficient lessons in modern languages, spread through the week (the norm is 7 x 40 min or equivalent and a conversation class)? Do the quality and frequency of homework/private study tasks/preparation/research support the course (a good guide is three hours per week)? Is there a good scheme of work which provides a wide range of topics for discussion and language-related tasks, including individually suited opportunities for all abilities?

4 Writing the report

The following is an example of a post-16 subject section from a school inspection report. (It does not necessarily reflect the judgements in any or all of the examples given elsewhere in this booklet.) The summative judgements in these reports use, for schools, the seven-point scale: *excellent*; *very good*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *poor*; *very poor*. For colleges there is the five-point scale: *outstanding*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *very weak*. The summative judgements *excellent/very good* used in school reports correspond to *outstanding* in colleges; *poor/very poor* used in schools correspond to *very weak* in colleges.

Modern Foreign Languages

The focus of the inspection was on French, but work in German was also sampled. German is less popular than French, attracting only a few students. Results in recent years have been consistently above average. Two A-level German lessons were observed; in both the teaching was good.

French

Overall, the quality of provision in French is **good**.

Strengths

- Attainment in Year 12 is well above average; students make very good progress and the highest-attaining students achieve particularly impressively in speaking and aural comprehension.
- All of the teaching is good and some is very good; teachers have high expectations of their students.
- Work experience in France and Germany is effective in building students' confidence and competence in the language.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of students' written work varies considerably, with some students insecure in their knowledge of vocabulary and making basic grammatical errors.

Over the last four years, low numbers of students have been entered for A-level French. Results have varied. In general, they have been in line with the national average for all schools, although the number of higher grades (A or B) has been below average. The most recent results were below average overall and no A grades were obtained. While students produced some coursework of good quality, marks in the Contemporary Society paper were poor, and this represented underachievement of the most able linguists, in particular. Some of this may be attributed to changes in staffing in the department during the year.

The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection shows that standards are now rising – particularly, for the most capable students. Standards are now above average overall, and male and female students do equally well. Standards in French in Year 13 are just above the national average. Students from the whole ability range achieve their potential, and the most capable among them are doing well, including some from minority ethnic backgrounds. They speak French confidently and convey their views and opinions effectively, although with a varying degree of accuracy. Pronunciation and intonation are good. Most are able to gather the gist of spoken or written French at this level, and select important details from it. The quality of students' written work, however, varies unduly. The most able use complex and sophisticated language to construct a well-argued case; the least competent demonstrate an insecure knowledge of vocabulary related to the topic and make basic grammatical errors in their written French.

Attainment in Year 12, by contrast, is well above average. All students make very good progress and achieve standards well above those expected for this stage of an advanced course. The most capable students achieve particularly impressively in speaking and aural comprehension. All students develop a wide range of relevant vocabulary and complex expressions, which they use effectively when speaking and writing. Comprehension skills are good. Students have good research skills and use new technology particularly well to construct the lively and interesting talks which they present to the group.

The sixth-form teaching overall is good. Some lessons are very good. Where this is the case – for example, in Year 12 – students' achievements are high. Similarly, high expectations encourage students to give of their very best, with a constant emphasis on improvement through learning from past mistakes and setting targets for even better work next time. All lessons have clear aims and finish by establishing firmly what the students have learnt. Teachers provide students with good strategies for success in reading and aural comprehension. They give them plenty of practice in examination technique, which is having a beneficial impact, particularly in those parts of the examination papers where performance last year was weak. They plan a rich and varied range of tasks and activities, which encourage students to acquire and practise language skills well. Good use is made of the department's excellent resources, particularly for information and communication technology, and teachers work hard to prepare challenging tasks and ensure that lessons proceed at a good pace.

Students of French are mature and attentive and show interest in the subject. They have been helped to develop good approaches for understanding complex tapes and texts and selecting the important details from them. They use these skills well, and this is having a beneficial effect on their ability to understand French. Most are keen to participate in discussions, and can sustain and develop their views well. They have good research skills, use dictionaries and other reference works well, and are competent in working with information technology. Students make good use of their private study time. They seek help when required and act on the advice given. This aids their progress significantly. The higher attaining students in Year 12 demonstrate a particularly enthusiastic response to their studies, going well beyond the requirements of the course to prepare lively presentations, supported by a wide range of pertinent information, and to write at length in a sophisticated style.

Most teachers teach both French and German and the department benefits from clear policies and procedures set out in a departmental handbook. These policies and procedures were observed in operation in the classroom. The most significant impact of departmental management has been an accurate critical analysis of recent examination results. This has brought effective changes to teaching and learning styles this year, which are improving the quality of students' comprehension skills. A further excellent feature of the sixth-form course is a compulsory work experience for linguists in France and Germany, which raises significantly their competence and confidence in speaking the language and their knowledge of contemporary culture and society.

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