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# 'You don't know at the time how useful they'll be...'

Implementing modern foreign languages entitlement in Key Stage 4

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**Better  
education  
and care**

<b>Age group</b> Secondary	<b>Published</b> June 2005	<b>Reference no.</b> HMI 2481
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Document reference number: HMI 2481

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## 'You don't know at the time how useful they'll be...'

### Implementing modern foreign languages entitlement in Key Stage 4

A report from Ofsted commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

#### Key findings

- ❑ In 2004, there were 1,514 secondary schools in Free School Meal (FSM) bands 4 to 7 (ie with more than 13% of pupils entitled to free school meals). In 104 of these schools 90% or more of Year 11 pupils took a full GCSE in at least one modern foreign language (MFL) and achieved results which compared well with their results in other subjects. In spring 2005, inspectors visited 11 of these schools, as well as two schools in FSM band 3 (ie where between 9% and 13% of pupils were entitled to free school meals). (paras 31–33.)
- ❑ In twelve of the 13 schools there is an explicit expectation that all or almost all pupils should study MFL as part of a broad and balanced Key Stage 4 curriculum. An average of 92% of Year 10 pupils continues with one MFL. In one school where MFL is now an option following achievement of specialist school status in another subject, this figure drops to 40%. (paras 3–4.)
- ❑ In schools visited, pupils achieve at least in line with national figures for MFL GCSE passes at the higher grades and much better than national figures for schools in similar circumstances. This is a significant achievement because national figures are for a much smaller percentage of the total 15-year-old cohort. Even more significantly, pupils achieve better in the main MFL than in their other subjects. (paras 8–9.)
- ❑ Provision is predominantly good, but rarely outstanding. The proportion of good or better teaching and assessment is similar to that found in Section 10 inspections. There is insufficient use of ICT in eight schools. Although very high numbers of pupils continue with one MFL, almost none do two. No survey schools include a vocational MFL course at Key Stage 4 and no non-GCSE accreditation is used. However, teachers support pupils well in their MFL learning. (paras 14–16, 18, 20–24.)
- ❑ The leadership provided by heads of MFL is good or better in all but one of these schools, and outstanding in five. Senior management team support for MFL is very strong in all these schools and effective whole-school leadership and management create the right conditions for MFL to prosper. (paras 25–26.)
- ❑ Survey schools are committed to preventing MFL becoming an elitist subject and to making it a successful experience for pupils of all abilities

and backgrounds. This results in virtually all pupils entered obtaining a classified grade each year in a full GCSE. (para 28.)

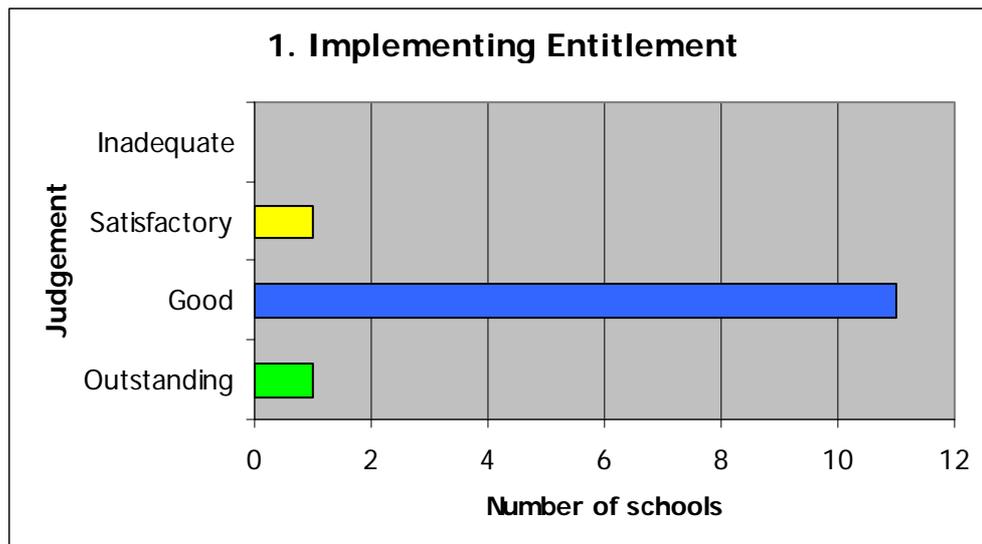
- Successful implementation of Key Stage 4 MFL entitlement depends on a symbiosis of good whole-school leadership and management, strong senior management team support for MFL, and effective MFL provision. (paras 4, 6, 15, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28.)

## Recommendations

1. The DfES should consider:
  - monitoring the impact on MFL Key Stage 4 numbers of specialist school status in another subject, in particular as these schools develop a wider range of vocational courses
  - bringing to schools' attention the new arrangements for alternative routes to GCSE, and the achievement and attainment points these qualifications attract
  - promoting the effective whole-school leadership models described in this report.
2. Schools should consider:
  - how to ensure that a wider vocational offer in other subjects at Key Stage 4 does not preclude pupils from continuing with MFL
  - how to improve pupils' use of ICT in their MFL learning and increase their access to recent authentic materials
  - how to offer a wider range of MFL courses and accreditation at Key Stage 4, including vocational qualifications
  - ways to enable larger numbers of pupils to study two MFLs in Key Stage 4.

## Implementing entitlement

3. In 12 schools visited, MFL Key Stage 4 entitlement is implemented well (see graph 1).



4. In these schools, there is a very strong commitment to MFL by the headteacher and the senior management team (SMT). It is expected that all pupils continue with a first foreign language to age 16, and pupils are only allowed to choose a course which does not have a language element following an interview. One pupil said:

*'If I'd been given the choice, I'd have given up languages but I'm glad I didn't. You don't know at the time how useful they'll be.'*

This approach appears to be crucial in retaining high numbers of pupils in Key Stage 4. In the one school where the study of a foreign language became an option in September 2004,

*the take-up dropped to under half of the current Year 10 studying French or German, despite a record of very good provision and pupils' achievement. The rationale for the school's decision about MFL provision at Key Stage 4 included the difficulty of recruiting staff of quality, particularly staff with high levels of language skills in two languages, and the broadening of the curriculum to include a wide range of vocational subjects following the school achieving specialist college status in engineering.*

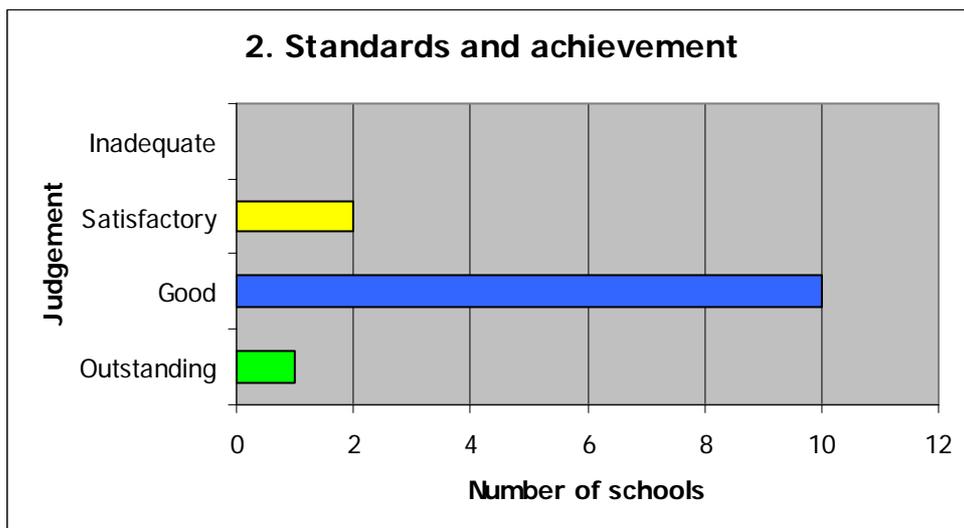
This example highlights the dilemma of schools which wish to broaden their vocational offering in Key Stage 4, in this case after achieving specialist status in another subject.

5. The retention of MFL as part of the core curriculum in Key Stage 4 is based on the belief that languages should be part of a broad and balanced curriculum for all pupils. MFL is seen as economically important for future European citizens and there is also a conviction that learning a language helps pupils to understand and communicate with those who come from a different culture.

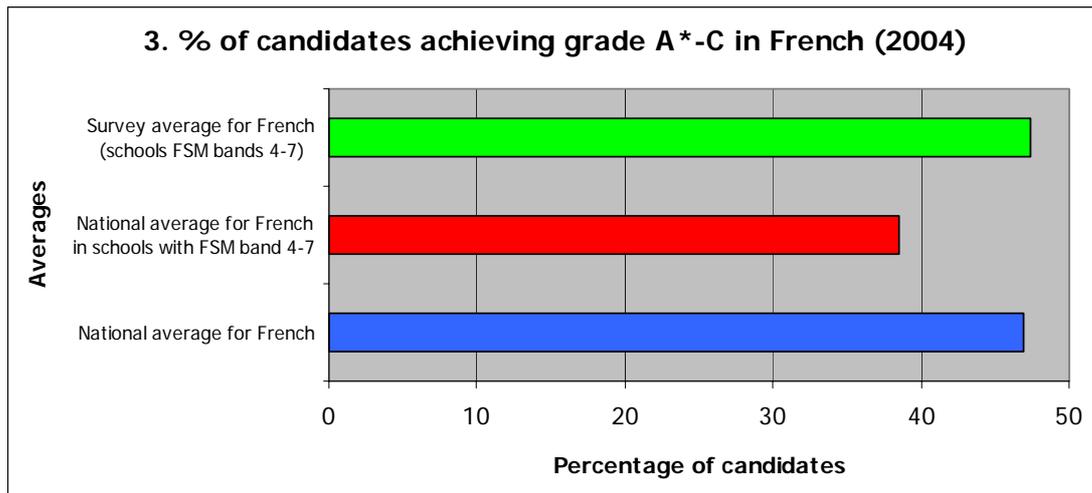
6. A significant feature of these schools is that the school ethos supports the effective teaching and learning of MFL. School leadership teams have established an orderly environment based on mutual respect between teachers and pupils, where it is 'cool to learn' and where behaviour management systems operate effectively. Other features of SMT support for MFL include:
- realistic time allocations in Key Stages 3 and 4 (10% of curriculum time for the first MFL)
  - effective monitoring of the quality of MFL teaching and learning
  - involving pupils, staff, parents and governors in a shared commitment to the importance of languages and the international dimension of education.

## Pupils' standards and achievement

7. In 11 of the 13 survey schools, pupils' standards and achievement are good or better (see graph 2).



8. Very high numbers of pupils (generally over 90%) are entered for at least one MFL at GCSE and they achieve at least in line with national figures at the higher grades. In 2004, in the 11 schools where more than 13% of pupils were entitled to free school meals, 47.4% of candidates entered achieved A\*–C for French (the main language taken at GCSE). This is much higher than the average of 38.5% A\*–C passes in French for schools in similar circumstances (FSM bands 4 to 7). (See graph 3.)



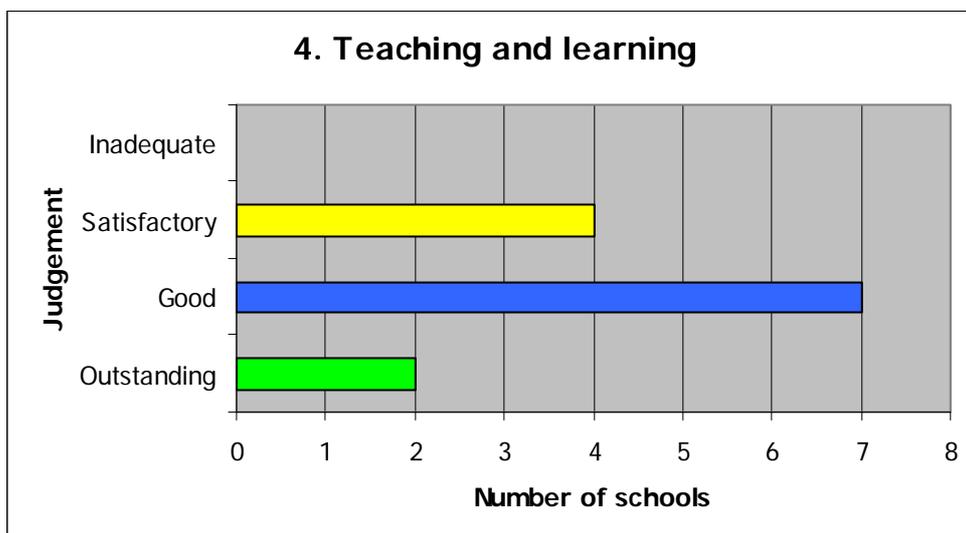
9. This is a significant achievement because national figures for A\*-C passes in French are for a much smaller percentage of the total 15-year-old cohort. Even more significantly, pupils in survey schools achieve better in the main MFL than in their other subjects.
10. In six of the schools visited, the difference in performance between boys and girls at GCSE is less than national figures, mainly because boys perform better than usual. In four schools where the difference is greater, this is due to exceptional performance by girls in almost all cases. In four schools, fewer pupils achieve the highest A\*/A grades than is the case nationally. This is sometimes because of a lack of challenge for higher attaining pupils, and in one instance inadequate preparation for the oral part of the GCSE.
11. Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 3 makes a strong contribution to Key Stage 4 standards in just under half of schools. Where standards are improving, schools report the positive impact of the Key Stage 3 Strategy and MFL Framework. Pupils' standards and achievement in MFL frequently influence decisions taken about the position of MFL in Key Stage 4, as the following example illustrates:
- The headteacher is totally committed to languages, as are other members of the senior management team, and has continued to make MFL compulsory at Key Stage 4, following a philosophy of 'languages for all'. He recognises MFL as one of the most successful departments in the school and is keen to retain high quality teachers. MFL 'sets the standards for other subjects'. Pupils do better in French than in any other subject. No parent has requested that their child drop MFL in Key Stage 4.*
12. None of the survey schools reports adverse reactions from parents or pupils to their decision to retain MFL as a compulsory subject in Key Stage 4. Several headteachers report that not only is MFL successful in its own right, but that it has a significant impact on learning in other subject areas, in that pupils have improved self-confidence and listening and

speaking skills. MFL's contribution to pupils' social and cultural development is also recognised, though in two schools there are no visits or exchanges or contact with native speakers through foreign language assistant schemes or use of ICT.

13. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good in all survey schools, although half are affected by below average attendance. A major factor in pupils' positive attitudes to MFL is the status the subject enjoys in the school and pupils' awareness that it is a high performing subject in which they will get good results if they meet their teacher half way.

### The quality of provision

14. Provision overall is predominantly good, but rarely outstanding. Teaching and learning are good or better in nine of the 13 survey schools (see graph 4). This is similar to the proportion of good or better teaching and learning found in Section 10 inspections.



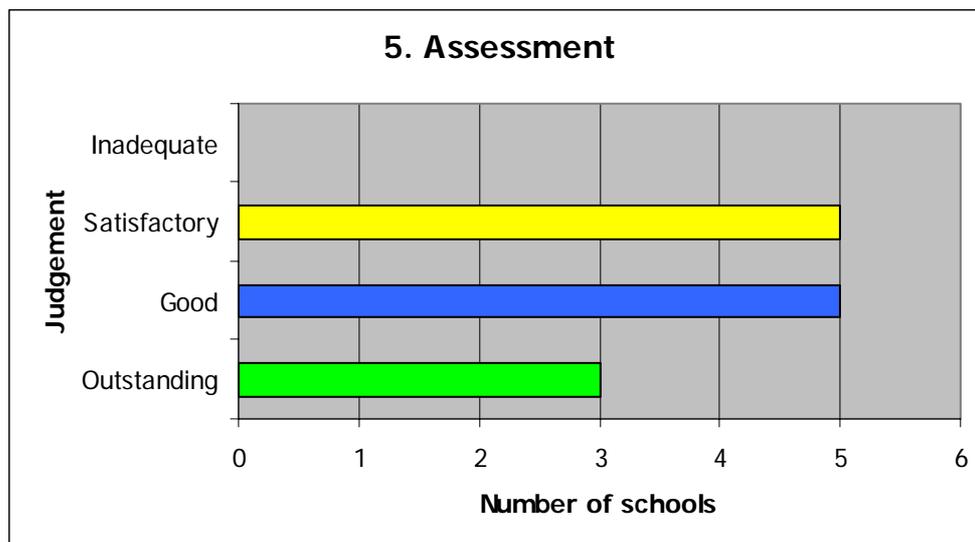
15. Features of effective teaching in Key Stage 4 include: teachers' good subject knowledge, the use of Key Stage 3 Strategy techniques, and a greater focus on the teaching and learning of grammar. Planning is carefully linked to GCSE specifications. This can lead to the content of lessons being topic-dominated, but three schools are moving away from teaching topics to a method based on teaching structures. Pupils respond well to this, especially boys and higher achievers. Pupils also like MFL when:

- it is taught in an interactive way
- activities are fun but challenging
- teachers make things clear and are available for help
- pupils know how well they are doing in each skill
- they know exactly what the exam will be like
- their work is always marked

- coursework is well organised, with manageable steps.
16. In five schools there is a lack of readily accessible authentic reading materials and pupils' imagination and interest are not fired by the content of their course book. This is compounded by insufficient use of ICT in eight of the 13 survey schools. However, even when the content of lessons fails to stimulate them, the large majority of pupils concentrate well and make progress. Some lower achieving pupils struggle and would not have chosen MFL had it been an option. However, there is some effective planning of provision for SEN pupils as in the following example:

*Individual education plans contain suggested strategies, such as praising and rewarding achievement, setting clear targets for completion of tasks, planning appropriate seating arrangements to avoid disruptive influences and encouraging oral answers to questions.*

17. In ten of the survey schools there are sufficient staff to teach MFL to all pupils in Key Stage 4. Recruitment and retention problems in three schools have led to lower quality provision and standards in German.
18. Assessment is a slightly weaker feature, although it is still always at least satisfactory and mostly good or better (see graph 5).



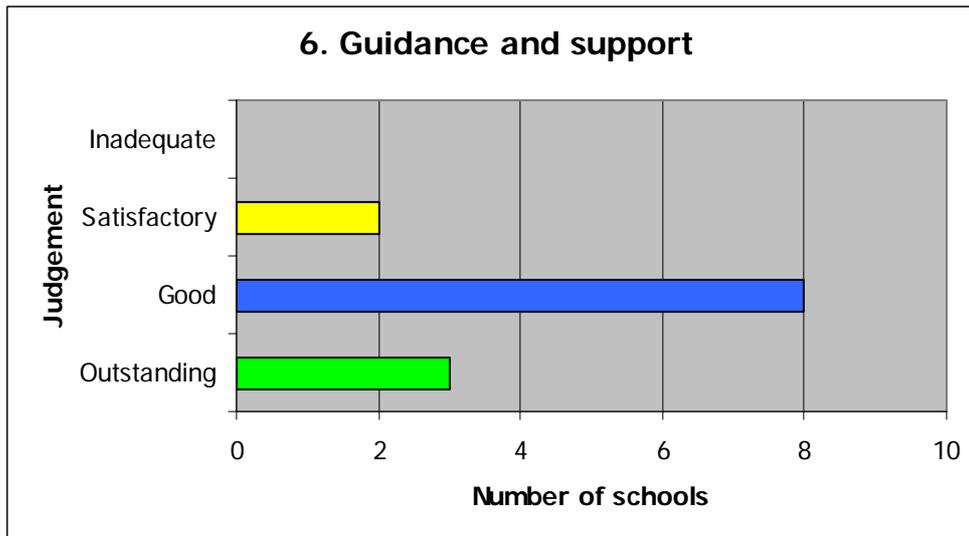
19. Teachers know GCSE specifications well and in most schools it is made very clear to pupils what they have to do to achieve success at GCSE. One girl commented:

*'I need to increase the range of tenses as I tend to stick to the present ... I need to look at my adjective endings really, my spelling is a bit dodgy too, so I'm going to make a list of words I never get right and try to learn them before May.'*

The following example illustrates the impact of effective GCSE preparation:

*The head of department has a very good grasp of GCSE examinations and uses this to very good effect in Key Stage 4. She has trained her team well and this knowledge is a major influence on the good results which the department secures. The introduction of written coursework has led to further improvement as pupils get frequent and good feedback on their writing over Year 10 and early in Year 11, and are then involved in selecting the pieces of coursework they wish to put forward for the exam. This approach has led to a more structured experience for pupils and the necessity for moderation amongst teachers.*

20. There is growing use of Key Stage 3 data to set targets for pupils in Key Stage 4. However, in a small minority of cases, the targeting of C/D borderline pupils, and the work which goes into motivating lower achieving pupils results in a lack of challenge for the higher achievers. GCSE data are not sufficiently well analysed to reveal the performance of different groups of pupils, or their performance in the different language skills. GCSE is the only accreditation offered, mainly because schools view this as having greater currency than alternative schemes. There is, however, growing interest in the new applied GCSE, although no survey schools are involved in the pilot.
21. Key Stage 4 curriculum organisation ensures that very high proportions of pupils continue with one MFL: 92% in Year 10 and 94% in Year 11. However, in nine of the 13 schools, no pupils study two MFLs, and where they do, numbers are very low. All schools offer a range of languages in Key Stage 4, normally French, German and Spanish. There is no fast tracking of gifted and talented pupils to early GCSE entry, and consequently opportunities to provide a wider curriculum offer for these pupils are lost. In five schools, small groups of lower achieving pupils drop MFL to follow vocational courses either within school or at a local FE college. No survey schools include a vocational MFL course at Key Stage 4.
22. Support for pupils in their MFL learning is a strength (see graph 6), and helps ensure an almost 100% success rate for pupils at GCSE grades A\*–G.



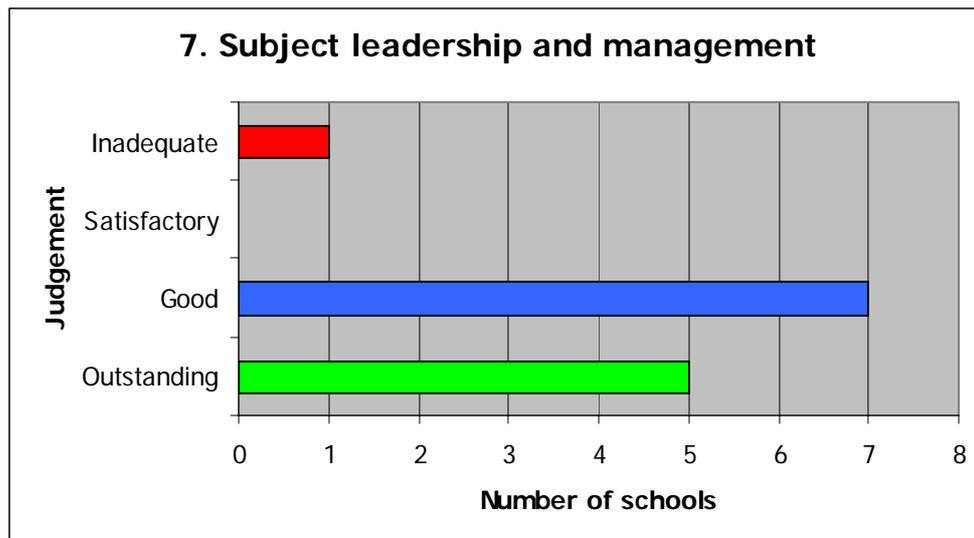
23. Features of effective provision include:

- using learning support assistants who speak the MFL to work with SEN pupils
- using foreign language assistants in and outside lessons with pupils of all abilities, for example to help with coursework
- providing enrichment activities and extra sessions for gifted and talented pupils
- GCSE revision clubs
- catch-up support for pupils who have been absent
- regular setting, marking and following-up of homework
- trips to France, Spain and Germany.

24. In one school, parents are seen as an important motivator and are given a booklet about 'How to help my child through GCSE', as well as being invited to a Spanish taster session.

### **Subject leadership and management**

25. The leadership provided by heads of MFL is at least good in all but one of these schools and outstanding in five (see graph 7).



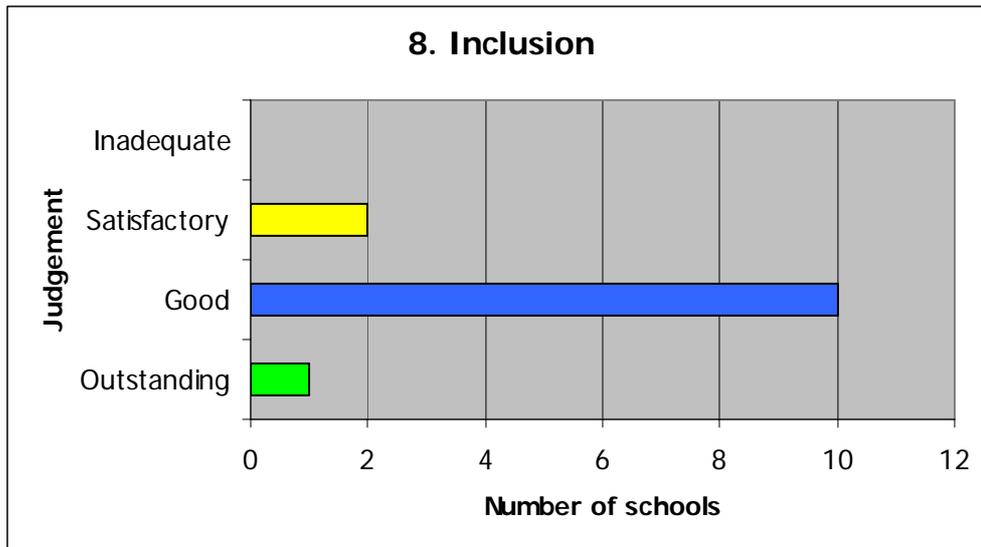
26. Significantly, senior management team support for MFL is very strong in all these schools. There are in addition features of effective whole-school leadership and management which create the right conditions for MFL to prosper. In particular, there are:

- well established systems for monitoring and evaluation which include regular lesson observation and careful monitoring of data
- effective development planning
- regular dialogue between subject leaders and SMT about whole school and subject priorities
- mentoring and coaching of new or inexperienced staff by SMT line managers
- whole-school initiatives which support MFL, such as a focus on tackling poor behaviour.

27. In nine of the 13 schools, self-evaluation operates very effectively in MFL, with use of a wide range of mechanisms to provide evidence and accurate identification of strengths and areas for development. In one school, there are plans to involve pupils in evaluating the work of the MFL department.

## Inclusion

28. Survey schools are committed to preventing MFL becoming an elitist subject and to making it a successful experience for all pupils (see graph 8). They ensure that very high numbers of pupils of all abilities and backgrounds study MFL in Key Stage 4, with virtually all pupils entered obtaining a classified grade each year in a full GCSE. Boys perform well in comparison with boys nationally and with their performance in other subjects in the school, as do girls. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards MFL are good, though in three schools some lower achieving pupils are less committed because they find MFL hard and not relevant to their immediate needs.



29. Pupils' success in MFL is attributable to good leadership and monitoring at SMT and department level, and the commitment of teachers who know their pupils well and who are keen for all to succeed in the subject. Examples of good practice include:

- regular monitoring of individual pupils' performance
  - effective use of data to track performance of all groups
  - mentoring of gifted and talented, and borderline C/D candidates
  - language-specific LSA support for SEN pupils.
- (See para 23 for further examples.)

## Notes

30. With effect from September 2004, it was no longer a statutory requirement that all pupils study a modern foreign language at Key Stage 4. Ofsted Section 10 evidence from over 600 schools inspected in 2003–04 indicated that many schools had anticipated these developments: only seven in ten Year 11 pupils in these schools were studying one foreign language. Ofsted consequently conducted a telephone survey of schools with low MFL Key Stage 4 numbers during autumn 2004. Following this, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned Ofsted to conduct a small-scale survey to identify, evaluate and describe examples of good practice in implementing MFL entitlement in Key Stage 4. This report contains the findings from that survey.

31. The criteria used for selecting survey schools were that in 2003–2004:

- 90% or more of Year 11 pupils sat a full GCSE in at least one MFL
- GCSE results in MFL compared well with results in other subjects in the school
- More than 13% of pupils were entitled to free school meals (FSM bands 4 to 7).

31. A total of 104 schools met these criteria, out of 3,416 secondary schools nationally and 1,514 within FSM bands 4 to 7.
32. In spring 2005, HMI and additional inspectors (AI) visited 11 of these and a further two schools which met the performance criteria, but where the number of pupils entitled to free school meals was between 9% and 13% (FSM band 3). The survey schools included nine 11–18 schools, four girls' comprehensives, three Voluntary Aided schools, three specialist schools (not language colleges), and one Beacon school. They were located in rural, suburban and inner city areas across the midlands, east, south and south-west of England.
33. Inspectors spent up to two days in schools, observing lessons, looking at a range of documentation, talking to headteachers, senior managers, and MFL staff, as well as sampling pupils' work and discussing it with them. Schools were sent the following prompts for self-evaluation ahead of the visit.

## **KS4 MFL entitlement: prompts for self-evaluation**

### **Achievement and standards**

#### **How high are standards in MFL in KS4 and how have these affected, and been affected by, MFL KS4 entitlement implementation?**

- GCSE results in MFL, including % entered, % A\*–C, overall RPI: how does performance in MFL compare with whole-school performance and performance in other subjects?
- Performance of different groups (eg boys/girls, ethnic heritage, socio-economic)
- If the gap in performance in MFL between girls and boys at GCSE is greater or smaller than 15.8% for French and Spanish and 12.9% for German (2004 averages), what factors account for this?
- Are any alternative qualifications used and with what results?
- How well does pupils' achievement in KS3 contribute to standards in KS4 (eg % achieving NC level 5 greater or smaller than 2004 average of 50%, boy/girl gap etc)?
- Have pupils' achievement and standards in KS3 and KS4 been a significant factor in the school's approach to MFL KS4 entitlement?
- Has the school's implementation of MFL KS4 entitlement had any impact on pupils' attitudes and standards in MFL?

### **Quality of provision**

#### **What is the impact on provision of the school's implementation of MFL KS4 entitlement?**

**i) Teaching, training and learning**

- Are there sufficient MFL teachers to staff KS4 MFL for all pupils?
- How well are MFL teachers deployed (match to languages etc)?
- How well does the content of lessons engage pupils' interest and promote their ability and readiness to use the FL?

**ii) Assessment**

- How effectively is MFL KS3 assessment information used to guide pupils in their KS4 choices?

**iii) Curriculum, programmes and activities**

- Do all pupils study MFL in KS3?
- What % of each of the current Y10 and Y11 study 1 FL; and 2 FLs?
- Do KS4 option arrangements enable all pupils to study at least one MFL if they so wish?
- Are there significant differences in take-up between girls and boys?
- Does the school provide any alternatives to GCSE in MFL at KS4?
- Is the school offering any accelerated programmes (fast tracking, early entry etc) in MFL?
- Is there any specific provision for disaffected or underachieving pupils?
- Has the staying on rate for courses in MFL post-16 increased or decreased?

**iv) Guidance and support**

- How well are pupils guided and supported when making decisions about MFL in KS4 (quality of options information, open or guided choice, encouragement to continue etc)
- How effectively does the school ensure that SEN pupils access the opportunities offered by MFL in KS4?

**Leadership and management****How effective are leadership and management in implementing MFL KS4 entitlement?**

- What is the rationale for the school's decisions about MFL KS4 provision? How well founded are they?
- How well has the school planned and implemented any changes to MFL KS4 provision?
- Does the SMT monitor the impact of its decisions on take-up and provision in MFL? How effective is any ensuing action?
- How effectively does the SMT monitor and evaluate MFL standards and provision in both key stages?
- How strong is SMT support for MFL?

*Case study*

<b>Type of School:</b> Mixed Foundation (11–16)
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**FSM %/Band: 4****Languages offered:** French, German, Spanish, Panjabi.

*The commitment to MFL entitlement in Key Stage 4 is very strong: 'languages for all' is a firm policy fully supported by the headteacher and the governing body. The policy of diversification is reflected in the fact that pupils have a choice of one MFL from French, German, Panjabi and Spanish. There is a clear rationale for the place of MFL in the curriculum.*

*The school performs well overall compared with similar schools and the performance of MFL compares well with that of other subjects within the school. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school are good. Almost all pupils in Key Stage 4 take a modern foreign language. The proportion of the cohort entered for GCSE French has been over twice the national average and virtually all pupils obtain a classified grade.*

*The time allocation for MFL is realistic in Key Stages 3 and 4 and this provision contributes to the success of the subject. Resources and accommodation are good; there is good display in the faculty relevant to the subject and this is drawn upon in teaching and learning.*

*Lessons are well planned and based on realistic and explicit objectives. There is clear presentation of new material and appropriate strategies are used for the reinforcement of previous knowledge and understanding. Relations between teachers and learners are good. Pupils make progress during lessons and are on course to reach their targets.*

*Assessment targets are based on a thorough understanding of examination requirements. Oral feedback to pupils and frequent checks on understanding in lessons are significant strengths in the assessment process. It is made very clear to pupils what they need to do to improve.*

*Leadership and management are strong in the school and provide good support for the head of faculty who leads the subject with commitment and personal example. The school has well established and effective processes and procedures for self-evaluation backed up by a range of data. Practice in the faculty is consistent with this.*

## **Further information**

Department for Education and Science. *An Enquiry into practice in 22 comprehensive schools where a foreign language forms part of the curriculum for all or almost all pupils up to age 16*, Report by HM Inspectors, DES 1987.