



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS  
IN EDUCATION

**INSPECTING SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS 11-18**

**MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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# INSPECTING MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

## INTRODUCTION

As an inspector of modern foreign languages, you need to find out how good the pupils are at the subject, to what extent they understand what lies at its heart, and whether it captures their interest. You are likely to be able to explain your findings largely by evaluating the rate at which they progress and judging how stimulating and effective the teaching is.

## WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

These are the main questions which your inspection should answer.

- How high are the standards in modern foreign languages, and are they high enough?
- How well are pupils progressing?
- How well are the school's modern foreign languages taught?

### Before you begin your inspection in the school

- Revise your knowledge of the *Handbook* and associated guidance.
- Where necessary, make sure that you are familiar with the particular course objectives and examination syllabuses used by the school.

*You should already have a good knowledge of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for modern foreign languages and the level descriptions.*

- Analyse performance data to form a view of the standards achieved in recent years and any trends, and to establish hypotheses about strengths and weaknesses in modern foreign languages.
- Study any departmental documentation which has been made available, and evaluate its potential contribution to the quality of teaching and its coverage of curricular requirements.

### When you are in the school

- Use the first-hand evidence from observation of lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking with them to assess what the current pupils are like at the subject, what they do well, and where they could do better. Focus mainly on the pupils in the year groups in which they will become 14, 16 and 18. Refer to the records of teachers' assessments of pupils' work. Assess what progress pupils are making through the school - how rapid it is, on how wide a front and in what depth.
- Observe teaching, talk with teachers about their work, look at their plans and records, and judge how effective the teaching is - how it contributes to pupils' attitudes to learning and to their progress and standards. See which approaches work well and which are unsuccessful.

- Take stock of any other factors which affect the teaching of modern foreign languages and the standards achieved. In particular, assess how effectively the subject is led and managed.
- Make sure that your observation forms contain enough evidence to support your judgements; telling examples are needed for your subject report.

### **Literacy and information technology**

- Judge the contribution of modern foreign languages to pupils' general reading and writing skills.
- Evaluate any contribution which the subject makes to pupils' capability in information technology.
- Where information and communications technology is used to support pupils' learning in modern foreign languages, evaluate the extent to which it enhances the pupils' standards of work. Whilst the pupils may be working below their competence in information technology, this may still be appropriate to the modern foreign language task.
- Record your evidence and evaluations in the 'Other significant evidence' section of the observation form.

### **Feeding back your inspection findings**

- Feed back your findings clearly and helpfully to the head of modern foreign languages and to the individual teachers by:
  - identifying the most important strengths and weaknesses in the teaching, and supporting your assessments with illustrations from the lessons you have seen;
  - giving convincing reasons for what you judge to be successful or otherwise, making clear how the teaching affects what is achieved;
  - showing the head of department how other factors, particularly leadership and management, affect the quality of teaching and the standards achieved;
  - ensuring that there is opportunity to discuss the findings and that points for development are identified.

### **Writing the subject section**

The modern foreign languages section of the report should tell a coherent and convincing story. It should explain why the standards achieved are as they are. In particular, you should evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the teaching. The following questions will help you to check the quality of your reporting.

- Are test and examination results interpreted so as to give a clear view of the standards attained, to show how they compare with other subjects in the school, and to identify any trends over time?

- Are there clear judgements of what is currently achieved by the pupils in the year groups in which they become 14, 16 and 18? Are the strong and weak features identified in the different aspects of the subject?
- Is there a convincing explanation of any significant differences between what is seen and what results indicate?
- Are variations in the progress of different groups or in different years evaluated and explained?
- Does the evaluation of teaching spell out how it affects the pupils' response and what they achieve? Is it clear which teaching methods are successful and which are not? Is there an explanation of any other factors, such as leadership and management, which are significant in affecting standards?
- Is it clear how far standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection and are reasons given?
- Are the main judgements supported by the most telling examples?
- Is it clear what needs to be done to improve standards in modern foreign languages?

## ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS

Your judgements on attainment and progress in modern foreign languages will be based on performance **data** and direct **observations** in the school. Any differences between these judgements **must be explained convincingly**.

### Interpreting data

- For pupils aged 16:
  - compare the school's GCSE results with:
    - the results achieved in schools nationally;
    - the results for schools of 'similar type' (comprehensive, selective or modern);
    - the results achieved in other subjects in the school;
  - compare the proportion of pupils failing to achieve a GCSE grade in modern foreign languages with the national proportion.

*The comparisons with other subjects are indications whether standards are as high as they should be. If there are any value-added analyses, these should provide clues to the progress which pupils make over time. In interpreting results, you may need to refer to contextual matters, such as a change in the syllabus, the nature of the year group and the department's approach to improving the results of boys. You should also be alert to the school's curriculum and entry policies. In particular, you need to take account of the proportions of pupils who follow different modern foreign language courses such as a short course GCSE or GNVQ Language Units.*

*Where the first modern foreign language is not French, you should exercise caution when comparing the results with national averages, since the national results for (say) German include a large proportion of more able pupils for whom it is a second modern foreign language.*

- Evaluate the A-level and GCSE results, comparing them with the national results, including those for schools of a similar type. Look at results over several years and take account of performance in GCSE and any value-added measures.

*In making judgements, you will need to **exercise caution** because of the various factors at play, such as the numbers involved and the nature of the students and courses.*

### **Using evidence from observations**

- Evaluate the attainment of pupils by the age of 14 according to what is typical performance in relation to the National Curriculum Programme of Study and the level descriptions for the skills in modern foreign languages: listening and responding, speaking, reading and responding, and writing.
- Evaluate the attainment of pupils by the age of 16 in relation to the requirements of the course which they follow and to the National Curriculum Programme of Study.

*It is important to remember that the National Curriculum Programme of Study applies not only to the stage from 11 to 14 but also to the stage from 14 to 16.*

- Evaluate the attainment of pupils by the age of 18 in relation to the requirements of the course which they follow.

**Significant weakness in any aspect compared to others means that standards overall cannot be high enough.**

*In the first or only modern foreign language, deemed to be the National Curriculum modern foreign language, the national expectation for pupils by age 14 is level 4/5. In a school where pupils are taking two equal modern foreign languages, both should be judged against expectations for a first modern foreign language, unless the school has designated one of the two as the National Curriculum modern foreign language.*

*Where pupils are taking a second foreign language, and this is not deemed to be the National Curriculum language, the standard reached is a matter of professional judgement in relation to what is typical attainment. However, it is important to emphasise progress in relation to the provision made for the course. This is because arrangements for second modern languages vary considerably in terms of the time provided and the year in which the study of the language is begun.*

- Judge the **progress** which pupils make in each year, referring to any significant differences between particular groups, such as able pupils, those with special educational needs, and boys and girls.

*The evidence comes from talking with pupils, looking at their written work and seeing how they get on in lessons - how much do they learn and at what rate?*

*For pupils with special educational needs, judgements of standards, particularly progress, should be made by taking into account their best means of communicating - for example, by computer or other form of technology. There may be a need for pupils to do work pitched at levels lower than is normally associated with their age.*

- **Listen** to pupils as they work in groups and participate in class activities.

*This will help you to find out how well pupils use their knowledge and understanding of modern foreign languages to help them cope with unfamiliar situations, and how well they understand and can apply the linguistic structures being taught.*

- **Talk** with pupils to learn what they know and understand.

*Discussions with selected pupils in English about their work are helpful in filling gaps in evidence. It is also informative to ask them questions in the foreign language during group work to judge their oral competence. For example, with pupils in the year in which they become 14, 16 or 18, you should ascertain whether they have a firm grasp of grammatical structures and vocabulary, and know how to use skills beyond those being taught in the topics covered during the inspection. Questions which involve a range of tenses, for example, allow pupils at or approaching the age of 16 to show their understanding and ability to apply their knowledge.*

*Opportunities to talk with pupils whose work has been included in a structured work sample will help you assess how well the work is understood, how it has contributed to developing a grasp of key structures, the extent to which it is dependent on support, the range of writing they manage and the range of reading they have undertaken.*

- Study evidence from any **recordings** which the school has made of pupils speaking in the target language.
- **As you look at pupils' work, observe them in lessons and talk with them**, use evidence of the extent to which they can:
  - understand, and use appropriately, a range of vocabulary and expressions;
  - apply accurately the basic grammatical rules of the language in speaking and writing;
  - speak fluently and with good pronunciation and intonation;
  - understand and adapt language to suit context, audience and purpose;
  - apply their knowledge of the target language to unfamiliar situations and to express their own experiences and views;
  - speak and write at increasing length;

- express and justify their opinions;
- demonstrate independence in carrying out tasks, using reference sources effectively and choosing material for study;
- demonstrate their awareness of the countries and peoples whose language they are learning.

*These attributes will help you to shape your analysis of strengths and weaknesses in modern foreign languages as well as the overall judgement about attainment and progress. Remember that in your reporting you need to go further than citing the attributes; draw on the most telling evidence which exemplifies them.*

## **PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO LEARNING**

- Look out for the following characteristics:
  - how well pupils listen - with what degree of concentration and perseverance - to the teacher or whoever is speaking;
  - how ready pupils are to work in the target language: whether they accept its use by the teacher as the medium of classroom business, and spontaneously use it themselves to seek help or explanation and to speak in situations for which they have learnt the appropriate language, avoiding the unnecessary use of English;
  - how closely they try to imitate good models of pronunciation and intonation;
  - how much pupils strive to express new notions in the target language, re-using previously learnt language;
  - whether they extend their response beyond the minimum required;
  - how systematically pupils note new language and commit it to memory;
  - how systematically they correct their mistakes and seek to improve their subsequent performance;
  - how effectively they use reference sources.

## **TEACHING**

- Judge the quality of teaching by weighing its strengths and weaknesses according to the criteria in the *Framework*, and assess its **effect on educational standards**. Effective teaching in modern foreign languages is founded on the teacher's secure command of the target language and fluency and confidence in using it in the classroom.

*Teaching cannot be satisfactory where pupils, or a significant minority of them, learn less than you would expect considering what they already knew. The same is true if they do not firmly consolidate their learning.*



- Inform your views by reference to the characteristics of effective modern foreign languages lessons, in which the teacher:
  - uses the target language skilfully, aware of the limited competence of the learners, but also of their need to be challenged with increasingly demanding language (*subject knowledge; planning, assessment*);
  - takes an active role in presenting new language and in providing a framework in which pupils can continue to practise productively, in pairs, small groups or individually, and gain increasing independence (*planning, methodology*);
  - through a combination of study and practice, enables pupils to acquire sufficient understanding of the grammar, and sufficient skills in applying it, so as to achieve increasingly accurate expression in speaking and writing (*planning, methodology, homework*);
  - is consistent in requiring and encouraging pupils to use the target language themselves in every situation for which they either learned appropriate language or could use their existing knowledge to cope (*planning, methodology, expectations*);
  - ensures that pupils have frequent opportunities to exercise initiative in applying their skills in realistic situations (*planning, methodology*);
  - increasingly requires pupils to produce more extended and complex responses (*expectations*);
  - expects pupils to develop their understanding of the countries where the language is spoken and provides a range of opportunities for them to do so (*subject knowledge, planning, expectations*);
  - maintains a good pace throughout the lesson so that it does not slow when pupils are working individually, in a small group or with a partner, and pupils can consolidate their skills in the target language (*methodology*);
  - chooses material which matches the needs of all pupils in the class and draws on authentic sources, including tapes, videos and native speakers, books and other written materials (*resources*);
  - in supporting pupils' learning, makes wise use of technical equipment such as over-head projector, audio and video recorders, information and communications technology, satellite television, language laboratory (*resources*);
  - makes effective use of any native speakers present (such as foreign language assistants) to enhance the development of listening and speaking skills and the presentation of the foreign culture (*planning, methodology*).

- Make sure that you are alert to teaching which:
  - involves good use of the target language by the teacher in presentation and practice but allows pupils insufficient opportunities to use language - for example, by not expecting them to ask as well as answer questions;
  - covers the topics in Part 2 of the Programme of Study but not the range of understanding and skills set out in Part 1;
  - appears to cover a lot of ground but focuses on the accumulation of vocabulary (particularly nouns) at the expense of developing the pupils' grasp of grammatical structures;
  - explains grammatical structures out of context so that pupils are unclear how to apply their knowledge;
  - allows pupils to become over-dependent on written prompts and does not expect them to commit to memory the key elements which they will need to cope with unexpected or unfamiliar situations;
  - revisits topics without pitching expectations higher to match the pupils' growing linguistic maturity;
  - employs questioning which demands a one-word answer or a short phrase, and does not challenge the pupils to attempt longer utterances;
  - provides trivial and time-consuming tasks which do not help pupils to make progress in their understanding of the target language - for example, by spending too much time on drawing and illustration;
  - uses worksheets which limit pupils' responses to closely controlled situations without providing the opportunity for them to adapt and use language;
  - provides an experience of information and communication technology which is limited to mechanical exercises using commercial packages unmatched to pupils' needs.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF PROVISION OR MANAGEMENT

### Curriculum and assessment

- Be alert to factors which contribute to standards in modern foreign languages and, in particular, assess the extent to which:
  - the planning of work, for pupils aged 11 to 14 and also for those aged 14 to 16, is based on **both** parts of the Programme of Study;
  - the content of the modern foreign languages curriculum includes planning for work which is increasingly more demanding;

- pupils' progress in the target language is assessed continuously, using both testing and routine observation, and considering both their ability to speak and write the language and the extent to which they do so;
- teachers show awareness of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in the four language skills, and plan appropriate work to help them to improve;
- homework is regularly set and supports work in the classroom by including preparation for oral tasks and learning key structures and vocabulary by heart.

### **Staffing and learning resources**

- Judge the contribution to standards by paying attention to the extent to which:
  - a range of specialist materials is used and integrated into pupils' work - for example, an up-to-date textbook for each pupil to keep, authentic newspapers, magazines, maps, pictures, posters, games, graded reading books in the foreign language, and video and audio recordings;
  - sufficient time is allocated to the subject, and lessons are distributed evenly on the timetable;
  - the school is committed to providing opportunities to refresh or develop the linguistic proficiency of teachers;
  - overseas contacts are used, including visits and exchanges, postal and electronic communication.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

- Evaluate the extent to which pupils gain insights into the way of life, cultural traditions and moral and spiritual values in other countries.
- Judge how pupils' social skills develop through working co-operatively in small groups on communicative activities.

### **Literacy, numeracy and information technology**

- Judge the contribution which modern foreign languages makes to the development of **literacy**.
 

*For example, how far do pupils copy phrases and sentences accurately, think about the conventions of language (such as formal and familiar forms of address), understand basic grammatical terminology, and use it in identifying patterns in language use?*
- Judge the contribution which modern foreign languages makes in reinforcing pupils' skills in **numeracy**.

*For example, do pupils develop their speed and accuracy in counting, indicating times and dates, doing currency conversions, talking about percentages and proportions, and interpreting statistics presented graphically?*

- Judge the contribution which **information technology** makes to learning in modern foreign languages.
- Also judge the contribution which modern foreign languages makes to the consolidation and development of skills in information technology.

*For example, consider the use of word-processing in drafting, databases to pursue surveys, E-mail for contacts with other countries, and the Internet for access to cultural information.*

## **OBSERVATION FORMS**

There follow two sample observation forms for modern foreign languages. These are intended to show how evidence and judgements contribute to a coherent picture of attainment in these modern foreign language lessons. In one lesson, the teaching is judged to be 'very good' (grade 2) and in the other it is considered 'satisfactory' (grade 4).

**MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE YEAR 8 HIGH SET - Very good teaching****CONTEXT:**

Set of 1 of 4, FL1. 14b, 16g. Hwk returned and its assessment explained. Topic: home life. Objective: to revise related vocabulary; extend the range of verbs in the perfect which pupils can use orally through whole class practice, games, writing and reading. AT1, 2, 3, 4. PoS I (1 a, c; 2 f; 3 f); PoS IIA.

**TEACHING:**

V good command and use of TL. Effective assessment technique - positive feedback about hwk with good explanation of how ps could have achieved the next highest level in AT4. Flash cards and whiteboard used well to explain particular phrases in perfect tense. Good planning and high expectations evident in the imaginative choice of games which motivate pupils well to use the perfect tense correctly and engage them fully in reading activities. Class managed well to achieve good discipline throughout the range of activities. Good use of FLA to converse with individuals and to do 5-point structured conversation with each pupil. Grade 2

**RESPONSE:**

Concentrate well on listening to the TL. Enthusiastic participation in oral work and willing to go beyond minimal utterances. Fully engaged in whole class repetition and strive to emulate model of teacher's spoken FR. Respond well to T's humour. Work well with partner and remain on task throughout. Relationships with teacher, FLA and between pupils are supportive and relaxed. Most books well presented with completed homework tasks. Grade 2

**ATTAINMENT:**

All pupils know and use a good range of phrases and structures accurately when talking about what they did at home at the weekend and able to sustain conversation over several exchanges. Good pronunciation. Written work demonstrates AT 4 level 4/5; pupils use accurately the perfect tense of several verbs with both 'avoir' and 'être', and a range of expressions and phrases in a letter written from memory. Grade 3

**PROGRESS:**

Ps make real progress in assimilating this challenging lesson content, and work productively to use the perfect tense of the new verbs confidently and accurately so that they can handle a far wider range of situations by the end of the lesson. Their grasp of grammar and their fluency are developing very well in this their second year of study. Grade 2

**MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE YEAR 11 LOW SET - Satisfactory teaching****CONTEXT:**

Set 3 of 3. 12b, 9g. Topic: tourist office (PoS IIE). Objective: to introduce and consolidate the use of topic-related vocabulary. Oral presentation and copying from board. Then role play in pairs; Ps write short sentences from written prompts; new vocabulary/expressions to be learnt for hwk. Four on SEN register (one statemented). PoS 1 (1a, 2a, 2b, 2f, 2k)

**TEACHING:**

T shows sound knowledge and use of TL. Lesson has a clear plan and objectives are well explained. Firm but encouraging manner ensures good rapport and class control. Slowish start and class not pushed v hard. Mixed expectations: strength is insistence on Ps' use of FR for most of time; weakness is that basic mistakes not always corrected. Range of tasks well chosen to support learning topic-related vocabulary and enable practice of simple writing skills. Learning travel vocabulary is an appropriate hwk task to consolidate work in class. Grade 4

**RESPONSE:**

Ps rather slow to settle but most make reasonable effort and are willing to listen and show some interest in both written (copying) and oral tasks (repetition). Some boys prone to come off task and resort to EN unless closely supervised in pair work. Unproductive use of time limits learning. Grade 4

**ATTAINMENT:**

On course for grades E-G in GCSE. Able to recall tourist vocabulary and understand basic sentences. Can use basic phrases in controlled situations but still dependent on written prompts in role play. Copying often inaccurate. Much anglicized pronunciation. Grade 5

**PROGRESS:**

Useful consolidation of phrases and vocabulary some increase in confidence in using them eg to make simple requests. Reasonable amount of work evident in exercise books showing steady progress over time in writing in controlled situations. Grade 4

## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This is one of a set of booklets which make up *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*. The set consists of:

- an introductory booklet, *General guidance*, which is for all inspectors who evaluate the work of secondary age pupils - it is mainly about inspecting subjects;
- separate booklets on inspecting specific subjects and aspects; the contents page of *General guidance* shows the subjects and aspects which have booklets.

The main points in the *General guidance* are summarised in each subject, but if you are inspecting the work of secondary age pupils you should read the introductory booklet so that you are fully in the picture of what you have to do.

The contents of all the booklets are on the Internet and can be accessed from OFSTED's website [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>]. This will allow you to obtain guidance for individual subjects or aspects.

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