

Pupils' speaking skills in modern languages are a weakness says Ofsted



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Standards and achievements in modern language teaching and learning across England's secondary schools have improved but speaking was the least developed skill among pupils, according to a report published today by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

The report, **'The changing landscape of languages, an evaluation of language learning 2004 -2007'** highlights what needs to improve if standards in modern languages are to rise. It looks at how well primary schools are developing modern languages and the progress they are making to ensure that all pupils in Key Stage 2 are able to study a language. The report also looks at standards and achievements in secondary schools.

GCSE results have improved since 2004 and compare favourably with other subjects. However the number of students taking both GCSE French and German, the most taught subjects has declined rapidly over this period.

The secondary teachers in the survey had good subject knowledge and enabled high attaining students to develop a sound knowledge of grammar. A good range of extra-curricular activities and study visits enhanced learning in most of the schools visited.

Common weaknesses in provision for secondary modern languages included insufficient opportunities to develop good speaking skills or independent speaking and writing. Students' speaking skills were an area of particular weakness in both key stages.

Overall, there was insufficient emphasis on helping students to use the language spontaneously for real life purposes and situations. This meant that few pupils were able to speak creatively and make up their own sentences in an unrehearsed situation.

Notably, pupils' inability to be able to express what they wanted in a new language had a negative effect on their confidence and enthusiasm. In two thirds of the schools surveyed, speaking skills were found to be adequate and in a third of schools they were found to be good.

Just over half the primary schools surveyed were making good progress in implementing languages, although they did not always provide sufficient time for language learning. The teachers were enthusiastic, planned lessons well and used

resources effectively. The pupils enjoyed learning a new language and understood its importance.

Christine Gilbert, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, said:

"Learning a foreign language equips pupils with invaluable skills and can also be a very enjoyable experience. Yet many young people are not reaching their full potential, or are deterred from continuing to study languages, because of the way they are taught.

Schools need to address the areas of concern highlighted in the report, if we are to raise standards in and enthusiasm for learning languages. One of the ways we can do this is to strengthen pupils' speaking skills so that they have the confidence to converse independently not only in the classroom but in other situations too."

Those schools with high numbers of students studying languages in Key Stage 4 (14-16 year olds) were marked by good teaching; good leadership at all levels and offered an excellent climate for learning. From using ICT to enhance speaking and listening skills to conducting lessons partly in French in different curriculum areas, many schools have demonstrated that learning a language should be pivotal to pupils' learning and lives.

In one primary school for example, pupils' enthusiasm for learning increased considerably because they had the opportunity to communicate with twinned schools in Madrid and Mexico. In another school, long standing partnerships in Europe and China supported a wide range of exchanges. This resulted in open and positive attitudes to different languages and cultures among pupils.

Other ways in which schools ensured good take-up beyond 14 and raised pupils' confidence in languages was to ensure that it did not become an elitist subject. Whether this was offering extra-curricula provision and lunchtime language clubs or enhancing lessons with film, music and multi-media facilities, the right conditions for languages were created.

According to the report, common weaknesses in teaching included the overuse of English in language lessons. Lessons were also not always matched appropriately to the needs of lower or higher attaining pupils and teachers did not always utilise opportunities for routine work in the target language. Also, systems for assessment were not well developed so few pupils knew how they could improve.

Inspections highlight that few secondary schools in the survey had made effective provision for students who arrived from primary school with knowledge of another language. Similarly, primary school teachers did not always provide sufficient time for language learning, despite half of the primary schools' surveyed making good progress in implementing languages.

Ofsted's recommendations include:

The **Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)**, should continue to resource the training of primary staff to teach languages, including funding for initial teacher education; ensure that the Open School for Languages proposed in the Languages Review provides extensive support for teachers and learners in a wide range of languages so that language learning is exciting and learners want to

study beyond age 14; and ensure that language tutors of adult learners have access to suitable training and qualifications.

The **Training and Development Agency for Schools** should ensure that professional development programmes help teachers to tackle the key weaknesses found in the report and promote opportunities for primary and secondary initial teacher trainees to work together on transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.

On the basis of accurate self-evaluation, **schools** should tackle the weaknesses identified in the report as required. Providers of language learning for adults should ensure provision is tailored to meet the varied needs of their adult learners.

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Notes for Editors

The report, '**The changing landscape of languages, an evaluation of language learning 2004 -2007**' is published on the Ofsted website, www.ofsted.gov.uk

2. The report uses evidence from Ofsted's 2004-2007 modern languages inspections and whole-school inspections.
3. It also draws on evidence from visits and telephone calls to initial teacher training providers during 2006/07, visits to providers of extension courses, and **Languages for Adults: Overcoming the barriers**, which is the Adult Learning Inspectorate's 2006 report on languages in adult education.
4. In addition to French, German, Irish, Spanish and Welsh, it is possible to study any one of 16 other languages at GCSE and A level: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Dutch, Gujarati, Italian, Japanese, Modern Greek, Modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Persian, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Turkish and Urdu (Appendix 1 in the report). After French, German and Spanish, the most popular languages in terms of the number of GCSE entries are Urdu, Italian and Chinese.
5. Lord Dearing's report is from Languages review (00212-2007/ISBN 978-1-84478-907-8), DfES, 2007.
6. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) has the responsibility for the inspection of adult learning and training, the regulation and inspection of children's social care, the inspection of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service. Ofsted inspects or regulates the following services - childminders, full and sessional day-care providers, out of school care, crèches, adoption and fostering agencies, residential schools, family centres and homes for children, all state maintained schools, some independent schools, Pupil Referral Units the Children and Family Courts Advisory Service, the overall level of services for children in local authority areas (known as Joint Area Reviews), further

education Initial Teacher Training, and publicly funded adult skills and employment based training.