

News release

3 July 2009

Concerns as the number of pupils studying modern foreign languages continues to fall

'More needs to be done to encourage and support pupils to study modern foreign languages in secondary schools throughout Wales,' says Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Education and Training in Wales.

In a report published today, 'Improving modern foreign languages in secondary schools in Wales', inspectors highlight that there has been a substantial decrease in the number of pupils choosing to study modern foreign languages for GCSE from 41% (1999) to 28% (2007). There has also been a slight decline at 'A' Level.

Although standards of achievement are generally good for those that continue to take these courses, the attainment gap between boys and girls is greater than in other subjects with girls getting much better results on average.

In the schools visited for this survey, standards of teaching were much higher than for most subjects and at times they were outstanding. In these instances pupils show concentration, enthusiasm, confidence and willingness to participate and 'have a go' even when the work is difficult. Lessons were creative and fun with clear teaching strategies in place designed to challenge pupils through a range of activities. Pupils also demonstrated an enjoyment for learning and using the language with good language strategies and a thorough grasp of grammar.

Dr Bill Maxwell, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector said "This report clearly shows that the quality of teaching is vital to developing good standards and encouraging pupils to study a modern foreign language."

"Although there is some evidence of good practice at work across secondary schools in Wales more needs to be done at all levels to encourage both boys and girls to study a modern foreign languages."

The inspectorate is calling on secondary schools throughout Wales to improve standards by:

- providing a minimum of 2 hours a week at key stage 3,
- arranging better collaboration between the English, Welsh and Modern Foreign Language departments,
- providing opportunities for teachers to observe good practice and attend training courses and;
- promote modern foreign languages to both parents and pupils.

In addition, local authorities should provide specialist advice and support to schools in helping them to raise standards as well as arrange specialists to visit departments to observe teaching techniques.

The inspectorate also recommends that the Welsh Assembly Government should work with awarding bodies to ensure that more foreign language elements are included in vocational courses, continue to encourage and support the development of modern foreign languages in primary schools through their successful pilot programme and continue to promote school links with foreign countries as well as continuing to facilitate CILT Cymru's work to support modern foreign languages.

To read the full report visit the Estyn website at www.estyn.gov.uk

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Interviews are available with the author of the report, Steffan James (HMI) and Dr Bill Maxwell.

Notes to Editors:

The survey

- Estyn's report '*Improving modern foreign languages in secondary schools in Wales*' was commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government and is available in full at www.estyn.gov.uk
- A questionnaire to over 50 secondary schools, almost all of them chosen because they had high numbers at key stage 4 or were known to have a lot of good practice. Replies were received from about two-thirds of these schools and their responses were analysed. In addition, HMI visited 14 of these schools to observe lessons and talk to teachers and pupils. A questionnaire was sent to all 22 local authorities in Wales about their support for modern foreign languages and responses were received from each of them and analysed. A further questionnaire was sent to all four of Wales' initial teacher training institutions that train new modern foreign language teachers. All these institutions sent responses.

About Estyn

- Estyn is the education and training inspectorate for Wales. Estyn commissions independent inspectors (registered, team and lay inspectors) and Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training to carry out inspections across the full range of education and training providers.
- Estyn inspects nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local education authorities (LEAs), primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, independent schools, further education, adult community-based learning, youth support services, local education authorities, teacher education and training, work-based learning, offender learning, careers companies, and the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.