



# Estyn

*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

## Improving modern foreign languages in secondary schools in Wales

Advice and guidance on good practice  
for schools and local authorities

Hablo español y francés

J'habite à Prestatyn, au pays de Galles

¿Hay un supermercado por aquí por favor?

Ho un fratello e due sorelle

Die Sprachen sind sehr wichtig

Soy galesa



BUDDSODDWR MEWN POBL  
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



JULY 2009

**The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:**

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities (LAs);
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ adult community-based learning;
- ▲ youth support services;
- ▲ youth and community work training;
- ▲ LAs;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies;
- ▲ offender learning; and
- ▲ the education, guidance and training elements of the Department for Work and Pensions funded training programmes.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

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Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk)

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## Introduction

- 1 This report has been produced in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Assembly Government in the Minister's annual remit to Estyn for 2008-2009.
- 2 The Welsh Assembly Government published *Languages Count*, the national strategy for the promotion of modern foreign languages in Wales, in April 2002. The strategy was written against a background of a continuing fall in numbers studying modern foreign languages in key stage 4, and set out an agenda for modern foreign language learning that has been taken forward by the Welsh Assembly Government with partners across Wales over the ensuing years.
- 3 To support this strategy, Estyn published *Aiming for Excellence in Modern Foreign Languages* in the same year. This consisted of practical advice for secondary schools on improving the quality of teaching, learning and provision. In *The Learning Country: Vision into Action, 2006*, the Welsh Assembly Government made a commitment to refresh *Languages Count* in the light of new developments, including the revised National Curriculum, the key stage 2 modern foreign languages pilot project, and 14-19 Learning Pathways.
- 4 To complement the refreshment of *Languages Count*, this report updates Estyn's advice and guidance on good practice for schools and local authorities, taking account of recent inspection evidence and new curriculum requirements.
- 5 As part of this survey, Estyn sent 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. HMI visited 14 of these schools to observe lessons and talk to teachers and pupils. Estyn also sent a questionnaire to all 22 local authorities in Wales about their support for modern foreign languages. 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.

## Main findings

- 6 There has been a steady increase in recent years in the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above in modern foreign languages at the end of key stage 3. Although the rate of increase has been faster than in other non-core subjects, the percentage of pupils achieving this expected level is still significantly lower than in other subjects, except Welsh as a second language. The gap between boys and girls is greater than in most other subjects.
- 7 Pupils who study modern foreign languages in key stage 4 get good results. The proportion of A\*-C grades at GCSE was 76% in 2007, compared with 67% in 1999, and was better than in all other National Curriculum subjects, except separate sciences and music. During the same period, however, the proportion of 15-year-olds entering at least one GCSE in modern foreign languages fell each year, from 41% to 28%. About three-fifths of entries are by girls.
- 8 Results at A level are also good. The proportion of entries gaining grades A-C has improved steadily since 2001 to 78% in 2007, higher by 3% than the average A-C score for all subjects combined. There has been a slight decline in entries, though not as marked as at GCSE. In 2007, the percentage of 17-year-olds entering at least one modern foreign language was 10.7%, compared with 11.7% in 2001. About three-quarters of entries are by girls.
- 9 Standards of achievement, as judged by inspectors in Section 28 inspections, are generally good in modern foreign languages, and similar to those in other subjects. In the schools visited for this survey, standards were much higher than the average for Section 28 inspections. Where standards are outstanding, pupils show concentration, enthusiasm, confidence and a willingness to participate and have a go, even when the work is difficult. They are not worried about getting things wrong, and enjoy using language. They also have good language learning strategies and a thorough grasp of grammar. These aspects are specifically taught and encouraged by teachers.
- 10 The quality of teaching is a very important factor in developing good standards and in encouraging pupils to continue to study a modern foreign language. In the lessons visited for this survey, outstanding teaching was characterised by careful planning and preparation, with clear and challenging objectives achieved through a wide variety of demanding activities. The most skilful teachers enable pupils to move from simple repetition and internalisation of vocabulary and structures to using language independently and creatively. Good teachers also ensure that language learning is fun, use information technology increasingly well, and adopt active teaching strategies that appeal to boys.
- 11 Apart from good teaching, departments with high numbers in key stage 4 usually have strategies to promote further language study. A few schools have a policy to encourage pupils to study modern foreign languages, but most schools do not have a policy to promote languages more than any other subject.

- 12 Many of the successful schools involved in this survey provide at least two hours a week for a modern foreign language in key stage 3, while departments that have less than this find it difficult to help pupils make good progress. Many of the successful schools also offer a second foreign language, often to the more able linguists only. Schools that offer a second foreign language to all pupils sometimes find that this hinders progress for many.
- 13 School option systems have a strong influence on pupils' choices for key stage 4. The extension of option choices through 14-19 Learning Pathways can provide opportunities to expand language study, but widening choice may also decrease the average numbers of learners studying each option. There is very little foreign language learning within vocational courses, even in those for which languages are relevant, such as courses dealing with tourism. Some schools provide good language experiences in the 20-hour module which is part of the compulsory core of the Welsh Baccalaureate. However, not all schools make good use of this opportunity to expand pupils' skills or develop their knowledge in modern foreign languages.
- 14 Good modern foreign language departments organise a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. These include visits abroad, though a few departments have, for a variety of reasons, given up organising these.
- 15 There is still too little collaboration in schools between the English, Welsh and modern foreign language departments. When these departments work together there are a number of benefits.
- 16 Foreign language learning in primary schools, which is usually provided as part of the Welsh Assembly Government's pilot project, is having a positive effect on pupils' attitudes and achievement in secondary schools.
- 17 Local authorities' support for modern foreign languages is variable. Half do not have regular access to specialist advice, while few of the rest can monitor the work of departments. Only five authorities have targets or objectives about increasing the number of pupils studying modern foreign languages in key stage 4. The availability of continuing professional development for modern foreign language teachers also varies considerably across Wales, although most schools have access to a small number of courses. A small number of authorities provide a continuing professional development programme. CILT Cymru, the National Centre for Languages, provides an extensive programme of training courses, but not all teachers can obtain release or funding to attend these. Schools receive very good support and advice from subject specialists if they participate in CILT Cymru's Compact scheme, which is designed to improve practice in schools. On the whole, however, too few modern foreign language departments receive regular advisory visits from subject experts.
- 18 The overall number of applicants for initial teacher training in modern foreign languages in Wales has remained fairly stable over the last four years, but providers have experienced fluctuations in applications and have had difficulty in meeting their recruitment quotas. The number of trainees educated in the United Kingdom has decreased, but there has been an increase in the number of trainees who are foreign nationals. Without this, it would be even more difficult for providers to train enough teachers to meet schools' future staffing needs.

## Recommendations

19 To improve standards and key stage 4 numbers in modern foreign languages:

### **secondary schools should:**

- R1 provide two hours a week of modern foreign languages in key stage 3;
- R2 support the development of modern foreign languages in partner primary schools and agree a common usage of linguistic terms across primary and secondary sectors;
- R3 ensure that the language element of the Welsh Baccalaureate is a worthwhile experience for learners and provides progression where possible;
- R4 develop common practices between the English, Welsh and modern foreign language departments to improve pupils' understanding of language concepts;
- R5 evaluate the modern foreign language department against the good standards, teaching and provision described in this report;
- R6 arrange opportunities for modern foreign language teachers to observe good practice and attend training courses; and
- R7 promote modern foreign languages better to parents and pupils, by:
  - o making sure that pupils receive good advice about careers in which modern foreign languages are useful;
  - o pointing out that GCSE results in modern foreign languages are good;
  - o providing able linguists with an opportunity to study a second foreign language in key stage 3; and
  - o encouraging able linguists to benefit from increased opportunities in collaboration with other providers to study additional languages after key stage 3.

### **Local authorities should:**

- R8 arrange regular visits for a specialist to observe the work of modern foreign language departments; and
- R9 provide greater challenge to modern foreign language departments to improve standards and take-up, and to copy the best practice described in this report.



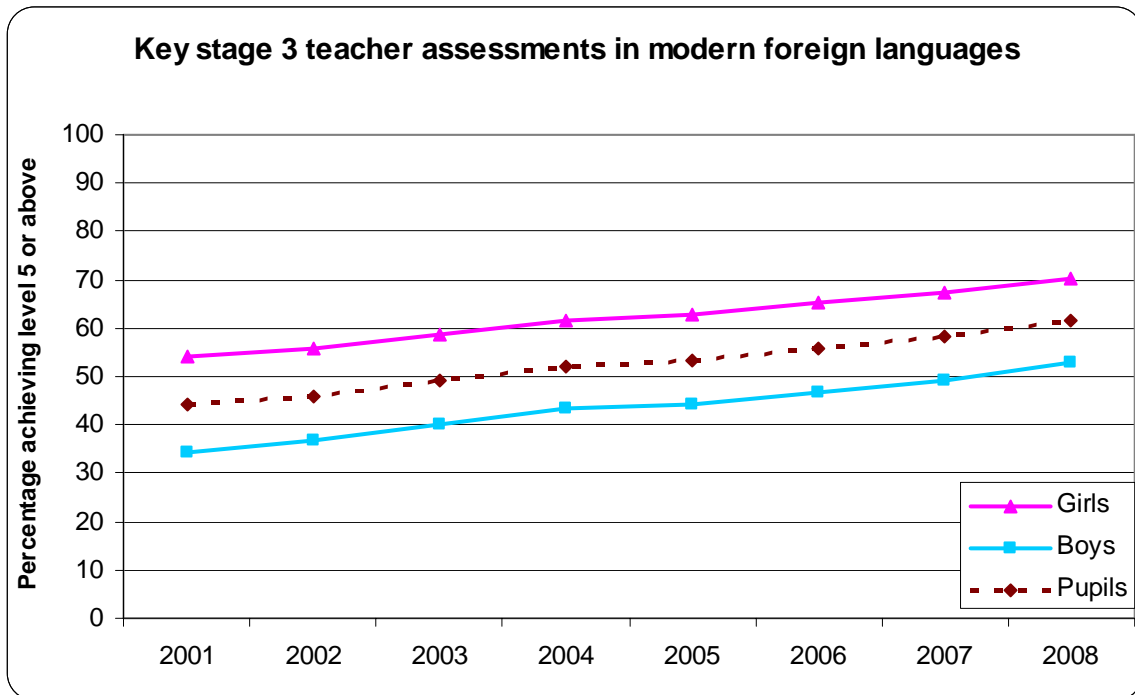
**The Welsh Assembly Government should:**

- R10 work with awarding bodies to ensure that more foreign language elements are included in vocational courses, where appropriate;
- R11 continue to encourage and support the development of modern foreign languages in primary schools;
- R12 further promote school links with foreign countries and publicise awards such as the British Council's International School Award; and
- R13 continue to facilitate CILT Cymru's work to support modern foreign languages.

## Standards in schools

### Examination and assessment results

- 20 In key stage 3, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected level (level 5) or above in teacher assessments in modern foreign languages was 61.6% in 2008.



Source: National Curriculum Assessments Database, Welsh Assembly Government

- 21 The steady increase in attainment over the last eight years has been greater than in any other National Curriculum non-core subject, and significantly greater than in more than half of them. Despite this improvement, many pupils in key stage 3 find modern foreign languages difficult.

- 22 The percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above is still significantly lower than in all other subjects except Welsh as a second language. This is shown in the following table.

### Improvement in key stage 3 teacher assessments, 2001-2008

	2001	2008	% point improvement between 2001-2008
English	63.2	69.5	6.3
Welsh	70.5	72.3	1.8
Mathematics	64.6	72.5	7.8
Science	63.3	73.7	10.4
Art	67.9	75.3	7.4
Design and technology	66.2	75.1	8.9
Geography	63.3	71.9	8.6
History	63.6	71.8	8.2
Information technology	62.2	76.4	14.2
<b>Modern foreign languages</b>	<b>44.2</b>	<b>61.6</b>	<b>17.4</b>
Music	58.4	71.5	13.1
Physical education	60.9	72.0	11.1
Welsh 2 <sup>nd</sup> language	40.2	54.1	13.9

Source: National Curriculum Assessments Database, Welsh Assembly Government *SDR 132/2008*

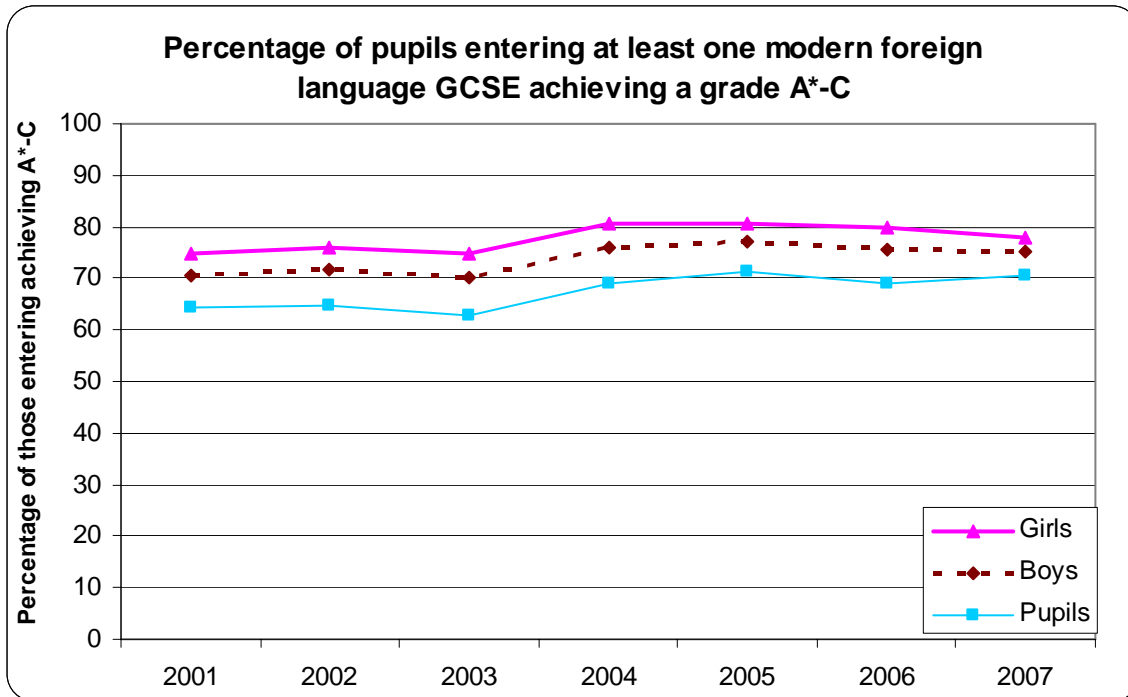
- 23 Boys achieve much less well than girls. The gap in attainment between boys and girls is 17.4 percentage points, which is greater than in most other subjects.

### Performance in key stage 3 teacher assessments by gender, 2008

	Boys	Girls	% point difference girls/boys
English	61.9	77.3	15.4
Welsh	64.4	79.6	15.2
Mathematics	70.9	74.1	3.2
Science	71.6	75.9	4.3
Art	66.3	84.6	18.3
Design and technology	68.0	82.4	14.4
Geography	66.9	77.1	10.2
History	65.7	78.1	12.4
Information technology	71.4	81.6	10.2
<b>Modern foreign languages</b>	<b>53.0</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>17.4</b>
Music	63.8	79.3	15.5
Physical education	72.1	71.8	-0.3
Welsh 2 <sup>nd</sup> language	44.3	64.3	20.0

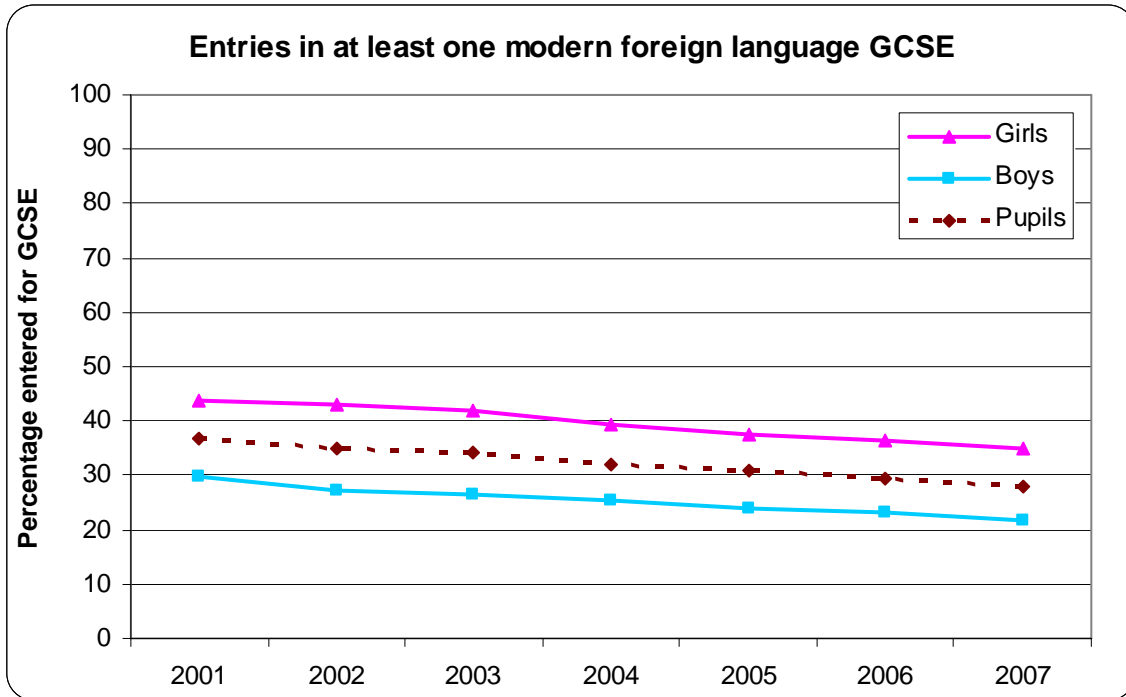
Source: National Curriculum Assessments Database, Welsh Assembly Government *SDR 132/2008*

- 24 Pupils are more likely to choose modern foreign languages in key stage 4 if they are doing well in key stage 3. Once they opt for a modern foreign language at examination level, they tend to do well. Results at GCSE are good, and have improved steadily in recent years. The proportion of GCSE entries resulting in grades A\*-C was 76% in 2007 compared with 67% in 1999, and was better than in all other national curriculum subjects except separate sciences and music.



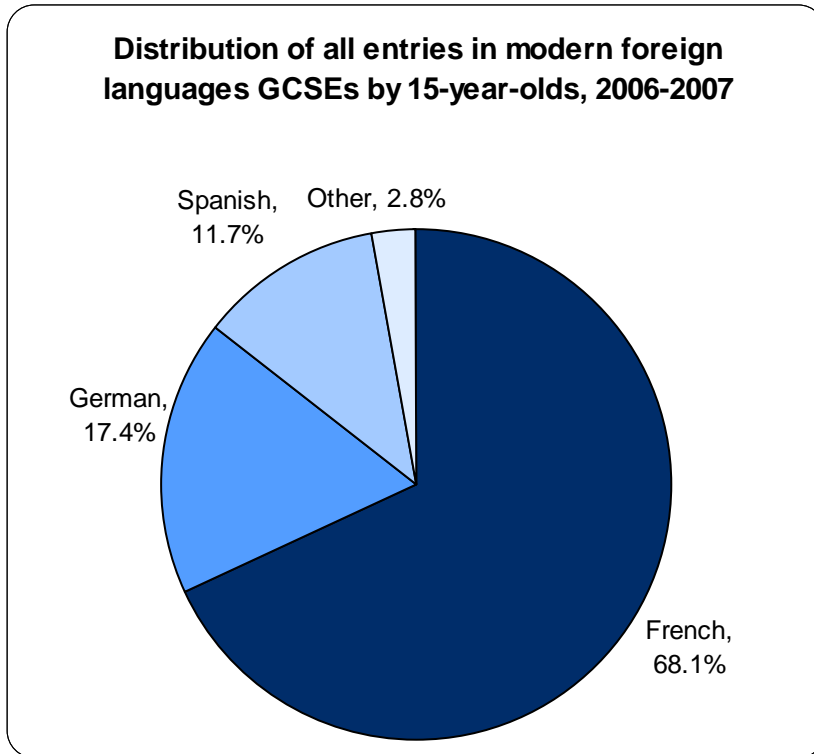
Source: *Modern Foreign Languages in Schools in Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, 2007

- 25 This good performance may well reflect the fact that, in many schools, key stage 4 language classes contain an increasingly high proportion of more able pupils as overall numbers go down and less able pupils tend to opt for other subjects. The proportion of 15-year-olds entering at least one GCSE in modern foreign languages fell each year between 1999 and 2007, from 41% to 28%. Figures for 2008 are not confirmed yet, but early indications are that there was a further fall. More girls enter for GCSE in modern foreign languages than boys, and three out of every five GCSE entries are by girls.



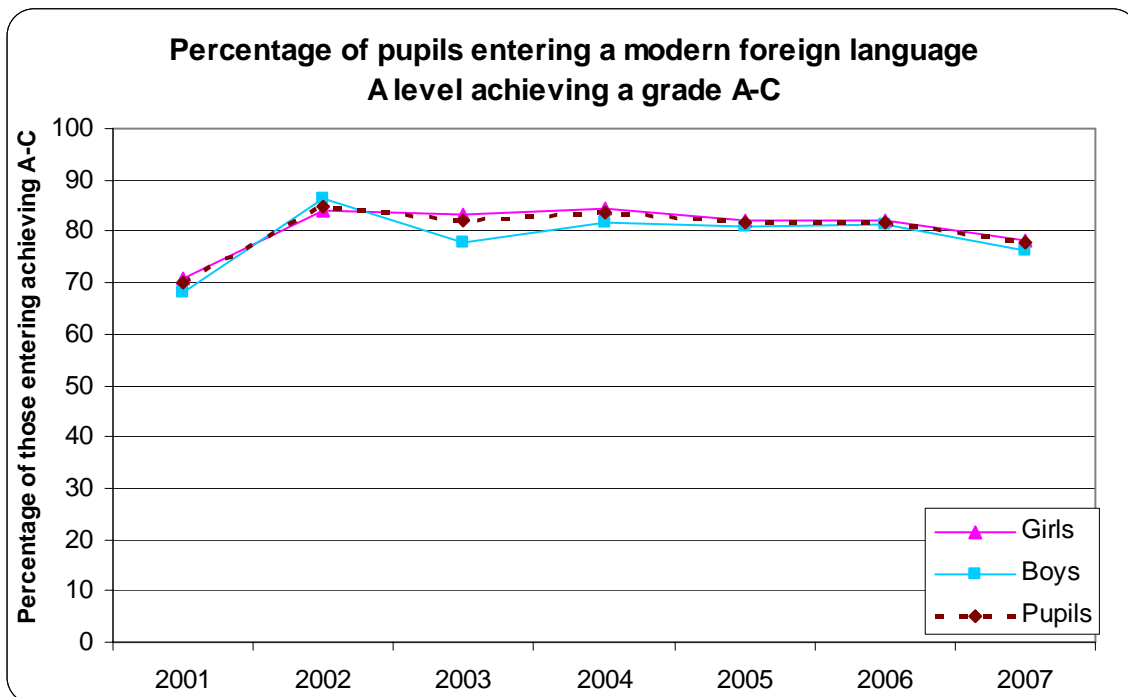
Source: *Modern Foreign Languages in Schools in Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, 2007

- 26 French continues to make up the majority of GCSE modern foreign languages entries, though there has been a relative increase in other languages. In 2007, French accounted for 68% of all foreign language entries compared to 73% in 1999. German continues to be the next most popular language, with 17% of entries in 2007, but has been in gradual decline from 1999 when it accounted for 21% of entries. Spanish, on the other hand, has seen an increase from 5% of entries in modern foreign languages in 1999 to 12% in 2007. Entries for other languages are relatively insignificant and each has less than 1% of all modern foreign languages entries.



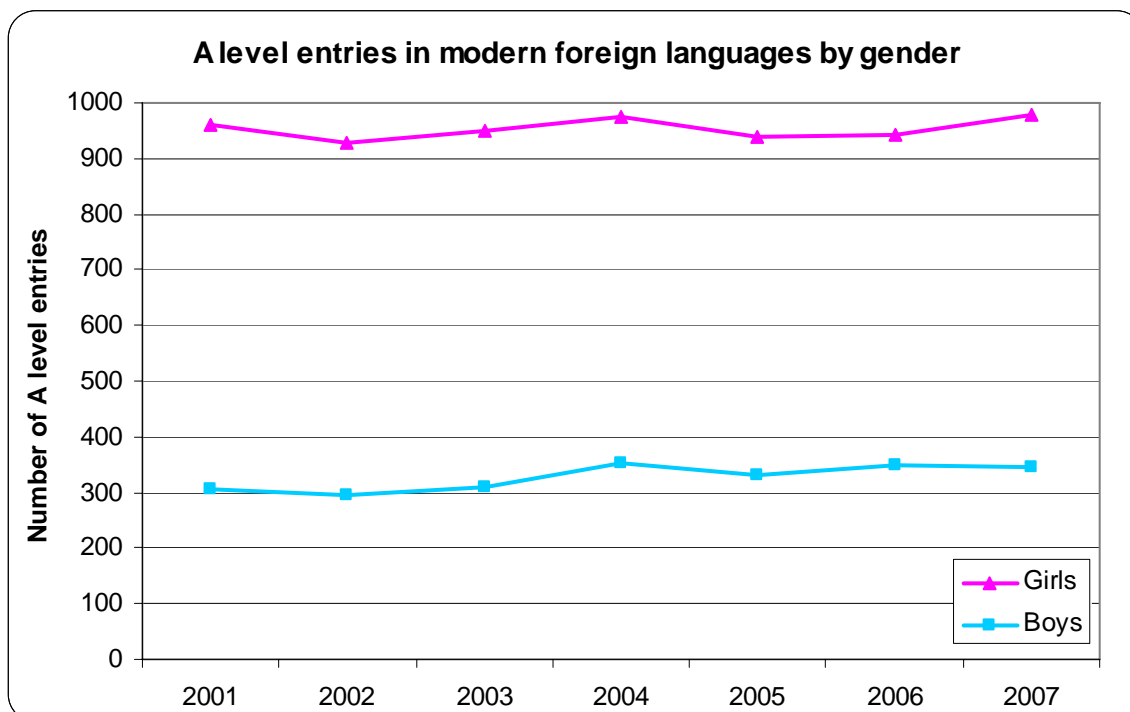
Source: *Modern Foreign Languages in Schools in Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, 2007

- 27 Results at A level are also good, and on a par with most mainstream subjects. The proportion of A level entries in modern foreign languages gaining grades A-C was 78% in 2007 compared with 70% in 2001. This was higher by 3% than the average A-C score for all subjects combined.



Source: *Modern Foreign Languages in Schools in Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, 2007

- 28 Here too, however, there has been a decline in entries, though it has not been as marked as at GCSE. In 2007, the percentage of 17-year-olds entering at least one modern foreign language was 10.7%, compared with 11.7% in 2001. The difference in entry rate between boys and girls is greater than at GCSE. In 2007, 74% of A level modern foreign languages entries were by girls, compared with 61% for GCSE.



Source: *Modern Foreign Languages in Schools in Wales*, Welsh Assembly Government, 2007

- 29 The popularity of different foreign languages at A level reflects GCSE entries. In 2007, the majority of entries for languages were in French, with 63%, followed by German with 21% and Spanish with 12%. The percentage of entries has declined in French and German, but has risen slightly in Spanish. Only 0.5% of all 17-year-olds attempted A level in languages other than French, German or Spanish, although this percentage has risen slightly over the decade.

### Variations in GCSE entries across Wales

- 30 There is significant variation across different parts of Wales both in achievement and in the numbers choosing languages in key stage 4. In 2007, more than 30% of pupils entered at least one modern foreign language in only seven out of the 22 local authorities in Wales, the highest percentage being in Monmouthshire with 37%, followed by Newport with 35%. By contrast, three authorities had fewer than 20%, the lowest being 17%.
- 31 There is a strong correlation between the level of GCSE results and percentage entry figures. Those authorities with the highest entry percentages generally have the highest percentages of the whole cohort achieving grade A\*-C, and vice-versa. The highest cohort percentage of A\*-C in modern foreign languages was 24.9%, in Neath

Port Talbot, which also had the fourth highest percentage of entries. The lowest cohort percentage of A\*-C was 11.7%, and the four weakest authorities in terms of passes were also the four weakest in terms of entries<sup>1</sup>.

- 32 There are two main factors that appear to contribute to these variations. One factor is disadvantage. There is a correlation between low take-up of modern foreign languages and the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (the most commonly-used proxy measure for disadvantage). The three authorities with the lowest percentages of pupils entering for modern foreign languages at GCSE also have the highest percentages of pupils receiving free school meals. However, there are exceptions – a few authorities with relatively low percentages of free school meals also have low modern foreign languages numbers. The second common factor in authorities with particularly low modern foreign languages entries is rurality. Overall, the nine lowest authorities in terms of GCSE entries are either predominantly rural or have a relatively high percentage of free school meals.
- 33 For individual schools, however, the most important factors that influence pupil choices are the standards that pupils achieve, the quality of provision and pupils' experiences. Other important influences are pupils' perception that modern foreign languages are difficult and that they are making slower progress than in other subjects. All these factors are addressed in this report.

## Standards of achievement

### Section 28 inspections

- 34 Over a three year period, standards of achievement, as judged by inspectors, in modern foreign languages lessons have been generally good, and very similar to those for other subjects. This is shown in the table below.

*Percentages of modern foreign languages lessons at each grade in Section 28 inspections 2005-2008*

	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Grades 4/5</b>
<b>KS3 over 3 years</b>	<b>7 (8)</b>	<b>59 (60)</b>	<b>30 (28)</b>	<b>4 (4)</b>
<b>KS4 over 3 years</b>	<b>11 (11)</b>	<b>63 (56)</b>	<b>24 (30)</b>	<b>2 (4)</b>
<b>Sixth form over 3 years</b>	<b>17 (16)</b>	<b>62 (67)</b>	<b>21 (15)</b>	<b>0 (1)</b>
<b>All ages over 3 years</b>	<b>9 (10)</b>	<b>60 (60)</b>	<b>27 (27)</b>	<b>3 (3)</b>

Total lessons: 557

Figures in brackets show percentages for all subjects (2007-2008 only).

### Lesson visits for this report

- 35 In the schools visited for this survey, standards in key stages 3 and 4 were at grade 1 in 18 (44%) of the 41 lessons inspected and at grade 2 in a further 16 (39%). The percentage of lessons at grade 1 is much higher than in Section 28 inspections as a whole, and reflects the fact that almost all the schools visited were known to have high standards and a lot of good practice in teaching.

<sup>1</sup> Further detail about the statistics referred to above can be found in Welsh Assembly Government publications SDR 184/2007, SDR 129/2008, SDR 132/2008 and SB 45/2008.



## **Pupil perceptions**

- 36 Despite the fact that inspectors have found standards in individual modern foreign languages lessons to be generally good, pupils themselves do not always think they are doing well. One reason they give for not choosing the subject after key stage 3 is that they find it difficult, or have achieved a lower National Curriculum level than in other subjects. Even if they achieve a similar level, pupils often still feel that they do not have a good enough grasp of the language studied. This perception is understandable, as a period of study of only three years does not enable them to reach as high a level of competence as in other subjects that they have been studying previously in primary schools.

## **Aspects of good standards**

- 37 In order to raise achievement, and also increase the numbers opting for further study in key stage 4, schools should aim to achieve the aspects of high standards described below. These are present to a significant degree in schools visited for this report. They are also present in lessons and departments that receive high grades in Section 28 inspections. They are often common across age and ability groups, although their extent, and the complexity of language, increase among older and more able pupils. The factors are therefore not described separately for key stages 3 and 4, but some additional features are provided for the sixth form.
- 38 Among the main features of lessons in which standards are outstanding are pupils' concentration, enthusiasm, confidence and willingness to participate and have a go, even when the work is difficult. They are not worried about getting things wrong, and enjoy using language. This attitude is often found among more able pupils, but it does not necessarily come about because of high ability. It depends above all on the atmosphere in the classroom, the encouragement of the teacher and the quality of teaching. Such attitudes were seen, among less able pupils as well as the more able, in most lessons that received high grades.

## **Listening and reading**

- 39 Good skills in listening and reading are related to an understanding of content, especially if this is challenging. However, outstanding features related to these skills consist of more than this. When listening or reading are outstanding, pupils do not merely understand language that they have encountered before. They also use a range of techniques to work out the meaning of new language, and go on to learn and absorb some of the language that they read or hear, to internalise it, and to re-use it in speech and writing.
- 40 Other outstanding or very good features are when pupils:
- match sound to print from the start of their language learning, and then attempt to copy correct sounds;
  - recognise previously encountered language in new contexts;

- listen or read attentively with real understanding, picking out detail as well as gist;
- understand increasingly complex spoken language in a growing range of contexts;
- work out the meaning of new words, for example by comparing with other words or another language;
- use dictionaries effectively;
- manipulate questions to form answers; and
- work out others' opinions and then offer their own, with reasons.

### **Speaking**

41 Where standards are very good or outstanding, pupils:

- develop a good accent;
- start manipulating language from Year 7, adapting what they hear or read to produce speech;
- speak in sentences from a very early stage, for example when conducting short conversations of at least two or three exchanges;
- give extended answers to questions with confidence, in complex sentences, often giving reasons or opinions;
- ask for explanations;
- by Year 9, conduct quite long conversations based on a model, varying sentences and changing elements;
- as they learn more language, conduct free-ranging unscripted conversations, often adapting language and taking the initiative;
- cope with gaps in vocabulary by finding another way to say something; and
- discuss contemporary issues.

42 A key feature of higher standards in speaking is the ability to produce sentences or long phrases from an early stage, and as language skills develop further to express ideas and opinions, with reasons. With training, pupils become accustomed to doing this and take pride in speaking at length. Examples from lessons are provided on the next page.

## Examples of good practice in speaking

In one school, in only their seventh modern foreign languages lesson, Year 7 pupils in a mixed-ability class confidently described people seen on screen in full sentences and with a range of adjectives. They also used negatives accurately.

In another mixed-ability Year 7 class, pupils learnt colours by saying 'my favourite colour is...' Other classes in the same school learnt about everyday objects using phrases such as 'In my pencil case there is/not' or 'It is/not'. When learning about places in a town they did so by asking how to get to them.

In a low-ability set in Year 9, pupils accurately repeated phrases from a CD. With written support on screen they were able to say something was good or bad using a range of adjectives, and were then able to join sentences together using 'because'.

In another low-ability class, pupils used dictionaries well at the start of a lesson to check meanings of words they would hear later.

A Year 10 German class showed very good oral competence. They confidently dealt with challenging questions from their teacher. They always answered in sentences, accurately using irregular verbs. They listened carefully to the questions and used some of the structures provided in the questions to help form the answers, understanding what they might need to change, such as the person of the verb.

A Year 10 class of weak students, aiming for GCSE at foundation level, could say what sort of film they liked or disliked. They understood a soundtrack about types of films and answered basic questions, then wrote sentences that, though inaccurately, communicated the correct information.

When pupils reach high standards in speaking they can depart from a script and create language. One Year 11 class showed great confidence in speaking the target language in unscripted sketches.

## Writing

- 43 Where standards are high, pupils begin to write paragraphs and short letters at a very early stage in their language learning. By Year 9 they can use a variety of structures to write extended narratives or descriptions, not only from models but also by using their imagination and with original content. They redraft and refine written work (sometimes on computers) and know how to extend written work with a range of tenses, conjunctions and subordinate clauses.
- 44 The best key stage 4 pupils can write much more fluent and longer pieces than are needed for a good GCSE grade, and have a good grasp of grammar. They use an increasing range of vocabulary and structures, and are able to find and also correct errors.
- 45 In several schools, less able pupils produce good sentences. Sometimes they need help to do this, for example through using sentence frames. Boys in particular are motivated by kinaesthetic activities in which, for example, they move word cards around on their desk to create sentences or a narrative.

- 46 The following extract from a Section 28 inspection report on modern foreign languages in one school, referring to Year 10 pupils, provides a good summary of what can be achieved in writing:

*“The vast majority of pupils write with remarkable fluency. They vary the style and scope of their factual or imaginative pieces using a wide range of apt vocabulary and structures with great precision. They manipulate the languages creatively to express clearly their own intentions.”*

- 47 Some of the main characteristics of high standards in writing are the same as for speaking. In summary, the most notable are when pupils:

- recycle or adapt previously learned language;
- express opinions in detail, giving reasons;
- use verbs well, from Year 9, in several tenses;
- try out new structures; and
- produce increasingly complex sentences, using conjunctions and subordinate clauses.

- 48 As an overall summary of what can be achieved in key stage 4, here is an abridged extract from one school’s Section 28 inspection report last year:

*“Pupils speak at length, correctly and with great confidence. They show an outstanding mastery of linguistic forms and patterns. They are willing to experiment creatively with the language. They read and understand extended authentic materials in familiar and unfamiliar language.”*

### **Developing language learning strategies**

- 49 The recently revised National Curriculum orders for modern foreign languages place a strong emphasis on developing language learning strategies. Where standards are high in the schools visited, the most significant skills are:

- re-use or adaptation of language from one context for use in another;
- a thorough grasp of grammar and an understanding of how the language works;
- ability to draw analogies with other languages;
- use of a range of strategies to learn and remember a new language;
- ability to use dictionaries and reference materials effectively; and
- willingness to ask for guidance.

- 50 Most of the above skills are specified in the revised National Curriculum programmes of study for modern foreign languages. It is important to note that they often need to be taught and encouraged by teachers. Helpful exemplification of high standards in key stage 3 is provided in *Modern foreign languages Guidance for Key Stages 2 and 3<sup>2</sup>*, published by the Welsh Assembly Government.

### Standards in sixth form lessons

- 51 The following is a list of very good features from the small number of lessons seen and from Section 28 inspection reports. Students:
- analyse factual content in depth;
  - paraphrase, summarise and adapt structures;
  - give extended spoken answers;
  - initiate and take part in sustained discussion on a range of topics, including contemporary issues;
  - produce accurate extended writing with complex structures, idiomatic language and colloquial expressions;
  - discuss grammatical points; and
  - make notes in class without prompting.

- 52 The following extract from a Section 28 inspection report provides a useful benchmark:

*“Students are articulate and can freely express their opinions and thoughts on topical issues, justifying their viewpoints with appropriate examples accurately. They can write at length on a range of contemporary themes in accurate French. They demonstrate excellent knowledge of idiomatic French; they can operate in the full range of tenses, including the subjunctive, and discuss statistical information confidently.”*

### Common shortcomings in standards

- 53 In the schools visited for this survey there were very few important shortcomings in standards. Shortcomings often consist of the absence, or the opposite, of the very good features described above. The following list derives from a small minority of lessons seen in the survey and from reports from Section 28 inspections.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills](http://www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills)  
<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/?skip=1&lang=cy>

54 The most common shortcomings are when pupils:

### **Listening and reading**

- are not used to hearing the target language and do not understand it at even a very basic level;
- cannot cope with familiar language in new contexts;
- do not identify basic words, including basic question words, in speech and writing;
- read a limited range of material and do not read independently;
- lack strategies when faced with unpredictable language;

### **Speaking**

- do not manipulate or recycle language, and cannot adapt questions to form answers;
- give single word answers or, at best, very short responses;
- lack confidence, initiative or spontaneity in speech;
- have poor accents or intonation;

### **Writing**

- do not write full sentences or extended pieces;
- write very inaccurately with many basic errors, including spelling;
- do not spot all their errors and do not recall some basic grammar points;
- use a very narrow range of structures and vocabulary (also applies to speaking);

### **Language learning skills and activities**

- waste time on banal written work such as drawing and copying;
- do not learn language by heart;
- do not understand or apply basic grammar, such as the parts of a verb; and
- do not use glossaries, dictionaries and grammar reference sources.

## Factors affecting achievement and pupil numbers

### Quality of teaching

55 In Section 28 inspections, the quality of modern foreign languages teaching is predominantly good, with good features and no important shortcomings in three-quarters of lessons and outstanding features in one lesson in every 10. In the schools visited for this survey, the quality of teaching was higher than this, and there were outstanding features in 21 (51%) out of 41 lessons. A further 14 (34%) lessons had mainly good features. As with the grades for standards, this very high percentage of grade 1 teaching is a reflection of the schools visited, and helps to explain why large numbers of pupils in these schools continue with language study in key stage 4.

#### Outstanding features

56 The best lessons visited for the survey were lively, energetic, and full of enjoyment for pupils. The rapport between teachers and pupils was always very strong, and pupils expected their modern foreign languages lessons to be fun.

57 In these lessons, outstanding teaching was characterised by several features. These included careful planning and preparation, with clear and challenging objectives that were achieved through a wide variety of demanding activities. Teachers explained tasks carefully and thoroughly, and where necessary provided support for slower learners and additional tasks for the ablest. The most skilful teachers, through a series of well-constructed multi-skill activities, enabled pupils to move from simple repetition and internalisation of vocabulary and structures to using language independently and creatively. Specific features of outstanding or very good lessons are described below.

#### Listening and reading

58 In the best practice, teachers do not merely use listening and reading texts to test how much information pupils can understand. Rather they ensure that, as required in the revised National Curriculum programme of study, pupils respond to texts and use what they read or hear to develop their own productive language. In order to do this, they ask them questions that require extended answers and opinions, rather than use only the exercises provided in many course books. These often do no more than test understanding, albeit sometimes at a high level.

59 Teachers effectively prepare pupils to deal with difficult passages through oral practice of language to be encountered later, supported in writing on the board or screen. In a similar way, teachers sometimes set dictionary tasks to find words to be used later in lesson.

60 When using difficult listening texts, teachers sometimes allow pupils to see the transcript so that they can understand better and learn to link the sounds to the written language.

- 61 In listening exercises, teachers are sensitive to the amount that the class understands, and break the text into manageable chunks. They use the 'pause' function of their media player, so that pupils do not have to cope with too much information at once and have time to write answers or make notes.
- 62 When marking listening and reading exercises in class, teachers go over or refer to the original text or stimulus, so that pupils can understand meaning and see how the answers are formed. Sometimes teachers play or read texts one bit at a time. They provide or ask for explanations for the correct answer, rather than just tell pupils what the answer is. In this way pupils learn some of the language that they encounter. When marking a listening exercise, teachers sometimes provide the transcript. This is a good way of helping pupils to understand, learn and remember what they have heard.

### **Developing speaking and writing**

- 63 Good teachers stress the importance of developing sentences from the start of Year 7. They introduce new vocabulary by getting pupils to repeat new words in one or more set phrases or sentences. This helps pupils to use the words in a context and also to develop extended language. Teachers also insist on full sentences and correct pronunciation when pupils answer questions. They explain and regularly remind pupils how to turn a question into an answer by re-using or adapting some of the language of the question.
- 64 In one school, teachers build up pupils' extended language by regularly reminding them to use the acronym PROFL (Past, Reason, Opinion, Future, Links). By Year 8, as a result, pupils have become accustomed to improving simple sentences by adding further clauses.
- 65 Active learning techniques are becoming more common and appeal particularly to boys. In many schools pupils learn to form long sentences by manipulating cards printed with words and phrases. This is a very helpful technique with less able pupils. In one less able key stage 3 class, the teacher provided slide card 'machines' to help pupils to build up sentences.
- 66 Good teachers also teach pupils to write accurately. In one key stage 3 class, the teacher set pupils a challenging pair activity to find 25 errors in a written text.

### **Appealing to boys**

- 67 A minority of successful schools have specifically set out to increase the number of boys opting for modern foreign languages in key stage 4. A few have included this in a whole-school policy. In a few modern foreign languages departments, teachers have been involved in working parties or have attended external courses about boys' achievement.



- 68 In other schools, while the issue is not the subject of a school policy, modern foreign languages departments have developed a lot of strategies that they believe appeal to boys. These include:
- developing practical, collaborative and kinetic activities;
  - extending the use of ICT;
  - regularly using competitions and games;
  - including in the scheme of work more vocabulary or topics that appeal to boys, such as sport;
  - directing questions to boys and specifically insisting on their participation;
  - increasing the focus on speaking and reducing writing in class;
  - having seating arrangements that help ensure that boys participate fully; and
  - using mind maps and spider diagrams as these correspond well with the thinking strategies used by some boys.
- 69 A small number of schools attribute their high number of boys in key stage 4 to the fact that there are several male teachers in the modern foreign languages department, but few schools are in this position. In all the schools that responded to the survey, there were 11 male and 54 female teachers.

### **Grammar**

- 70 Teachers have high expectations about pupils' understanding of grammar. They explain or revise different structures well, usually in pupils' home language. For example, they help pupils use structures like 'je voudrais' by explaining that if followed by a verb, then that verb has to be an infinitive. They may draw analogies to the home language in order to help pupils understand structures, for example by pointing out when equivalent structures in English and Welsh behave in the same way.
- 71 Similarly, they might provide a literal translation into the home language. For example they might translate the German 'es geht mir gut' as 'it is going well for me', Spanish 'me gusta el fútbol' as 'football is pleasing to me' or French 'j'ai l'intention de' as 'I have the intention to'. By doing this, they help pupils to understand the meaning of the components and also how the structures are used.
- 72 In order to help pupils remember new vocabulary, teachers draw attention to cognates in English or Welsh, and to known related words in the foreign language. Teachers in Welsh-medium schools do not shy away from referring to English cognates to help pupils remember words. Similarly, teachers in English-medium schools are aware of which Welsh cognates pupils are likely to know. They also help pupils understand and remember new words by ensuring that they see them in print as well as hearing them.

73 After explaining new structures and grammatical points, teachers practise them thoroughly in the target language in a variety of contexts.

### **Activities and games**

74 The best lessons are invariably lively affairs and usually contain a wide variety of activities. These often involve action and movement, or desk-based kinetic activities, such as when pupils:

- carry out 'telephone' conversations across the classroom;
- sort cards on the desk to create sentences;
- talk to as many of their classmates as possible in a short time in order to complete a survey; and
- find words on cards hidden around the room in order to complete a cloze (gap-filling) exercise.

75 Pupils enjoy competitive games and competitions. Successful games and strategies include:

- time limits that inject pace;
- giving merits and rewards;
- using personal mini whiteboards for word games;
- word games between teams using 'noughts and crosses' on the board or screen;
- using a fly swatter to be the first to find items on the board;
- games such as 'pass the parcel';
- Chinese whispers;
- elimination games; and
- competitions between the teacher and the class, between individual pupils or between teams.

76 In one class, 'policemen' wearing helmets had to find certain 'suspects' in the room by following spoken clues provided by the class.

## **Assessment**

77 Other outstanding features in language departments relate to assessment. In the best departments or lessons, teachers helped pupils to understand their own progress by:

- sharing assessment criteria with pupils;
- providing well focussed feedback and comments in the target language;
- requiring pupils to routinely correct mistakes;
- getting pupils to assess their own progress; and
- making them set their own targets to make further progress.

## **Display and resources**

78 Good features here include:

- displays that remind pupils of key structures, grammar, question words and similarities with other languages;
- booklets with materials for each topic, including key vocabulary and grammar, which provide pupils with a permanent record of the work covered;
- triple literacy booklets that draw attention to similarities between languages;
- handouts which prevent the need for copying in class;
- additional materials to provide greater support or challenge, such as writing frames or additional versions of a text; and
- mini white boards to allow all pupils to show the teacher their answer to a question with no fear of being seen by their peers to get it wrong.

## **Information technology**

79 Good use of information technology by teachers is now common. Teachers often use an interactive white board, or a computer linked with a projector, to:

- introduce lesson objectives;
- present explanations of grammar or new language;
- provide colour coding to help with genders or adjective endings;
- present exercises, with the answers revealed later;

- show pictures, cartoons and other visual aids; and
  - show extracts from foreign television or films.
- 80 In one lesson the teacher challenged pupils to compose sentences using words produced at random by a computer-generated fruit machine.
- 81 On the whole the use of ICT by pupils in language lessons is limited. In some schools, departments cannot have regular enough access to IT rooms. Some departments show that it is not necessary for pupils to use ICT to achieve good standards. However, if used well ICT can contribute significantly to language learning, and can be highly motivating.
- 82 In some schools where ICT is well used, pupils use computers regularly to read blogs or maintain email links with schools and classes abroad. A few schools also use video-conferencing for this purpose. Other good use of computers by pupils includes:
- games that require understanding and use of language;
  - language-learning programmes and exercises such as gap-filling or text-manipulation;
  - word-processing to draft and re-draft; and
  - searching for information on the internet.

### **Pupils' and parents' attitudes**

- 83 In most of the schools visited, pupils' attitudes to modern foreign languages are positive in key stage 3, particularly in Year 7 and early Year 8 and in higher sets. However, many schools report that, as the subject gets more difficult later in Year 8 and particularly in Year 9, pupils begin to lose interest. This is especially true in lower sets, though in a minority of the schools surveyed, less able pupils frequently opt for modern foreign languages in key stage 4. Boys of below average ability are generally less likely to show a positive attitude than below average girls.
- 84 As with other subjects, pupils tend to lose interest in Year 9 if they have decided to drop the subject for key stage 4. Pupils in key stage 4 are generally enthusiastic about the subject.
- 85 Schools report that parents are generally supportive. A minority have negative attitudes that influence their children, especially if they themselves have had a poor experience of language learning in school. The best schools and modern foreign languages departments explain the value and aims of studying modern foreign languages, for example in parents' evenings. However, few if any provide modern foreign language lessons for parents, perhaps to link with the topics studied by their children in school, or provide evening classes in conjunction with the local further education college.

## Promotion of modern foreign languages

- 86 Successful departments often benefit from a school attitude that promotes study of modern foreign languages. They state that support from senior managers is particularly important. A few schools have a whole-school policy and approach to, the promotion of modern foreign languages, but in most cases, this depends on departments. They use different strategies such as open evenings and careers fairs. Several departments make good use of the promotional DVDs produced by CILT Cymru (see later in this report), whose talks for key stage 3 pupils about careers using modern foreign languages are intended to help to boost numbers in key stage 4. One department has prepared a PowerPoint presentation on the value of languages in later life.
- 87 Schools that responded to the Estyn questionnaire gave information about several other strategies to promote modern foreign languages. Among the most common are:
- a range of extra-curricular activities and visits abroad (see later);
  - funding for foreign language assistants who bring the culture of the foreign country into the school;
  - a notice board in the department corridor featuring adverts for jobs that require modern foreign languages;
  - a Languages Week that involves the whole school;
  - language tasks, cultural quizzes and taster lessons to coincide with the European Day of Languages; and
  - a questionnaire for parents and pupils about their perceptions of modern foreign languages study.
- 88 Examination success is very important. Where the department can show that pupils will do as well, or better, in modern foreign languages than in other subjects, pupils are more likely to opt for language study in key stage 4.
- 89 In a small minority of schools, a careers adviser or teacher is very aware of the value of modern foreign languages study and promotes modern foreign languages as a valuable qualification. In one school, the key stage 4 options booklet lists careers that use modern foreign languages. Another school has a CILT Cymru stand in the Year 9 careers fair. In some schools, careers lessons discuss the value of all school subjects, and one careers department has prepared posters to help every department promote its subject. On the whole, however, too few schools or departments know or check what messages pupils receive in careers lessons about studying modern foreign languages in key stage 4.

## Curriculum arrangements

- 90 Most secondary schools in Wales provide between 100 and 120 minutes per week for modern foreign languages for most pupils in key stage 3. This is usually two 50 or 60 minute lessons per week.
- 91 Departments which have only 100 minutes per week state that this is not enough time to make good progress. The fact that most of the good practice schools involved in this survey provide at least 120 minutes per week supports this view, although a small number of departments do well with less time.
- 92 Although a few schools set by ability in Year 8 or 9, key stage 3 classes are often mixed ability. This sometimes poses problems in terms of challenging the ablest pupils as well as meeting the needs of the least able, and in some departments slows progress for all pupils. A lack of teaching capacity also prevents many schools from providing more than one class, or grouping pupils by ability, in key stage 4. As a result, language departments often have to cope with a sometimes wide range of ability in one class at a time when pupils are learning more complex language. This may well act as a disincentive to some departments to increase numbers in key stage 4. Increasing collaboration between providers may help to provide extra groups.
- 93 One or two schools suggest that modern foreign languages numbers have dropped since Welsh as a second language became compulsory. One modern foreign languages department in a predominantly English speaking area reports that a compulsory full course GCSE in Welsh has had a big negative impact, because pupils often think of Welsh as the equivalent of a foreign language and think that one language is enough. On the whole, however, most modern foreign languages departments do not think that compulsory Welsh in key stage 4 has a strong negative impact on pupil numbers.

## School option schemes

- 94 The structure of the key stage 4 curriculum, and the option system, have a significant effect on the number of pupils who opt for each optional subject. In most schools, pupils can choose only four option subjects in key stage 4, and in a few they can only choose three.
- 95 Some schools have a policy to advise all pupils to take a good balance of subjects. As part of such advice, a small minority of schools expect all but the least able pupils to study at least one modern foreign language. One school options booklet, for example, states: "Pupils will still be encouraged to follow a broad and balanced curriculum as this will prepare them for the range of opportunities available at age 16. It is expected that the majority of pupils will continue to study a subject in humanities, technology, modern foreign languages and creative arts".
- 96 Where option blocks are fixed in advance, the school is in effect guiding pupils' choices to some extent. In such a system modern foreign languages may be included in the same option block as one or more other very popular subjects. This limits numbers for all these subjects. A few of these schools help to encourage

modern foreign languages numbers by including languages in more than one option block. One school prevents most pupils from taking more than one vocational option, with a view to sustaining more 'traditional' subjects.

- 97 Increasingly, however, all subjects are treated equally in many schools and have to compete for pupils as the requirements of 14-19 Learning Pathways lead to a common set of experiences that all learners follow (the 'Learning Core'), accompanied by options designed to meet individual needs and aspirations. This often results in a free option choice without a restricted set of option blocks. An increasing number of schools already give pupils a totally free choice of subjects outside the compulsory core, then create option blocks that accommodate pupils' choices as closely as possible.
- 98 A few schools state that the greater availability of vocational subjects does not generally affect the numbers opting for modern foreign languages. In many cases this is probably because, in many schools, vocational subjects are still perceived as intended only for average or less able pupils, while modern foreign languages are perceived as a subject for the more able. As 14-19 Learning Pathways develops further, the first of these perceptions is changing, whilst the second one needs to.
- 99 14-19 Learning Pathways is significantly increasing the number of key stage 4 options. Some schools are already providing 30 subjects, and in future all schools will have to do so. The growing availability of vocational subjects and other 'new' subjects, which in the past few schools could provide, has increased choice for all. As pupils typically choose four from these, this is likely to affect numbers in all 'traditional' subjects, and may well contribute to a further reduction in the numbers taking modern foreign languages in key stage 4. A number of modern foreign languages departments responding to the survey express concern that the increasing number of option choices is already causing further decline in key stage 4.
- 100 On the other hand, the extension of Learning Pathways can also provide opportunities for modern foreign languages. The greater choice of subjects through consortium arrangements should enable pupils to study new languages that they cannot study in their own school, or to take language courses that might not otherwise have been available because the class numbers were too small. One 14-19 network in North Wales, for example, provides GCSE twilight courses in languages which pupils cannot take in their own school.
- 101 When it comes to choosing modern foreign languages in key stage 4, pupils' quality of experience in key stage 3 will be increasingly significant. If pupils have been successful in modern foreign languages, or have become convinced of their value, they are more likely to opt for further study, but many of those who drop modern foreign languages do so because they perceive that other options are easier or more relevant. In a similar way, departments with a good track record at GCSE are more likely to encourage high numbers.

## **Second foreign language**

- 102 Many of the successful schools included in the survey offer a second foreign language. The time in key stage 3 is usually found from the first foreign language, and occasionally from Welsh. There is a variety of provision, including:
- one period per week in Year 8 and 9, or Year 9 only, either for all pupils or for the top sets;
  - taster lessons in Year 9, so that pupils who opt for further study start almost from scratch in Year 10; and
  - one lesson per week of second foreign language in the summer term for most pupils, with less able pupils receiving extra literacy lessons.
- 103 There are conflicting views about providing a second foreign language for all pupils in key stage 3. One school, in an area where pupils learn modern foreign languages in key stage 2, states that this develops pupils' language skills so well that they can all start a second language in Year 8. Another school, however, believes that study of a second language by the top set in Year 9 limits their progress in the first foreign language because they have less time for it. As a result, they eventually achieve GCSE results in the first foreign language that are no better, or even worse, than the two ability sets below. This is not a common view as far as higher ability pupils are concerned, but many departments would agree with it for pupils of average or below average ability. The consensus is that a second foreign language should be offered to abler linguists only in key stage 3.
- 104 In key stage 4, fewer than 10% of pupils in Wales take a GCSE course in a foreign language other than French. Most of these study one foreign language only, and the percentage of pupils studying more than one foreign language is very low. As 14-19 Learning Pathways develop further, schools should encourage able linguists to pursue increased opportunities to study a second language in key stage 4 and the sixth form.

## **Alternative language courses**

- 105 Not many schools offer qualifications in modern foreign languages other than GCSE and A level. A few schools do not think that National Curriculum level descriptions provide enough incentive or reward, and would like an additional key stage 3 qualification to cater for pupils who lose interest in languages in Year 9. A small minority use CBLC (Certificate of Business Language Competence) or Asset Languages for this purpose, or to accompany vocational courses in key stage 4, where a few also use Open College Network courses.
- 106 On the whole, there is very little modern foreign language learning within vocational courses in which it would be relevant to develop language skills, such as Business or Leisure/Travel and Tourism.



107 The Welsh Baccalaureate includes a 20 hour language module within the Wales, Europe and the World element of the compulsory Core for each of the Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced diplomas. This provides schools with a good opportunity to encourage a small amount of further modern foreign languages study. HMI did not look specifically at this module as part of this survey, but there is some evidence that it has not stimulated much expansion of foreign language learning. There is potential to make better use of it.

108 Among the good practice for this module are:

- a five-day intensive initial course in Year 12, using published BBC self-study programmes in a choice of four European languages;
- a course in a new language for sixth formers;
- a course in British Sign Language; and
- French lessons as part of a trip to France, which also covers other aspects of the Core such as problem-solving and team-enterprise activities.

### **Extra-curricular activities**

109 Modern foreign languages departments often demonstrate outstanding energy in their commitment to enabling their pupils to experience foreign cultures. Many arrange a lot of trips. Typically these are day trips in key stage 3 and longer trips, occasionally exchanges, in key stage 4 or the sixth form. A few of the latter include an element of work experience. One department, for example, organises three or four trips each year to France and Germany for different age groups. Such activities help to stimulate and maintain pupils' interest in learning modern foreign languages, and can make an important contribution to education for sustainable development and global citizenship.

One energetic department organises a Year 8 trip, a German exchange and a French exchange every year. They also arrange a Fasching (German Shrovetide carnival) day for Year 7 German learners, a Year 7 modern foreign languages Spellathon competition, and a day for more able and talented students in Year 9 to work on articles for a language magazine. They sometimes take the sixth form for study days, whilst A level French students can do work experience in primary schools in France during the exchange visit.

110 A few modern foreign languages departments have given up organising visits abroad. Various reasons given include the worry about personal responsibility, the burden of risk assessments and the loss of holiday time for teachers.

111 Among other extra-curricular activities arranged by modern foreign languages departments are:

- a café at a new pupils' evening;
- residential language revision courses at universities;

- out-of-hours GCSE revision classes;
- theatre trips;
- lunchtime or after-school clubs with quizzes and films;
- competitions such as CILT Cymru's 'Getting to know your FLA' (foreign language assistant);
- contributions to the school magazine; and
- pen-friends, sometimes through electronic links.

### Collaboration between departments

- 112 The survey responses from schools indicate that generally there is still too little collaboration between English, Welsh and modern foreign language departments.
- 113 Between 2005 and 2007, CILT Cymru ran a Triple Literacy Action Research Project with a group of schools to follow up the suggestions in ACCAC's 'Making the Link' (2003). Departments in these schools, as well as in other schools where departments have worked together, state that their work has benefitted. Some improvements to department practice include:
- sharing the content of key stage 3 programmes of study to find common areas;
  - collaboration on schemes of work so that departments are aware of the topics covered at different times in the different subjects;
  - increased awareness of how to help pupils learn through comparing cognates, structures, tenses and word-order rules;
  - agreement to use the same terminology;
  - development of common projects on thinking skills and language awareness;
  - display of important grammatical terms in each class; and
  - sharing of teaching ideas.
- 114 In one school, the heads of the Welsh and modern foreign languages departments teach English to Year 7 classes with a view to seeking ways to further links between the languages. Another school has organised a Year 7 lesson called 'Language' in which pupils are taught French for the first half and Welsh for the second half of the lesson, with both teachers remaining in the lesson. This is done with a view to seeking ways to collaborate further in future.

- 115 One school ran a Language Awareness project that drew on pupils' experience of Welsh second language to help their learning in modern foreign languages. One bilingual school created a cross-departmental bank of lesson starters and plenaries, with the aim of raising awareness of parts of speech and pointing out similarities in sentence structures in French, German, Welsh and English.
- 116 A Welsh-medium school put on a tri-lingual show called 'Mae Iaith yn Agor Drysau', with the aim of raising awareness among pupils of the importance of languages. Year 7 pupils performed the show in all the cluster primary schools to encourage positive attitudes towards language learning among pupils even before they reached secondary school.
- 117 Some Welsh-medium schools are reluctant to refer to English in modern foreign languages lessons, but one modern foreign languages department in a Welsh medium school specifically compares key grammatical structures of the modern foreign languages with English rather than with Welsh if this is more helpful.
- 118 One Welsh-medium school, through a questionnaire for pupils, has found that almost all of the pupils responding think that being bilingual in Welsh and English helps them to learn a modern foreign language.

### Links with primary schools

- 119 As part of its 'Languages Count' strategy the Welsh Assembly Government launched a pilot project in 2003 to introduce modern foreign languages in primary schools in Wales. The intention of the project was to "develop experience of how language learning can complement and enrich the statutory key stage 2 curriculum and benefit pupils when they move on to key stage 3". Among the aims are "to evaluate whether pupils' subsequent progress and attainment in a modern foreign language are increased, and to monitor the effect on pupils' attitudes towards the modern foreign language and subsequent take-up in key stage 4" (Welsh Assembly Government Circular 41/02).
- 120 The project tries out different models for the delivery of modern foreign language teaching in key stage 2, most models involving one secondary school working with as many as possible of its associate primary schools. The project is managed and supported by CILT Cymru.
- 121 In those secondary schools involved in the project that were visited for this report, the outcomes so far are encouraging. Among the reported improvements are:
- Year 7 pupils are more confident and better motivated;
  - pupils are making faster progress, achievement has improved and the number gaining higher levels at the end of Year 9 has increased;
  - the project has raised awareness of modern foreign languages in the community and acted as a good marketing tool; and
  - transition links with primary schools have improved.

- 122 The project also appears to be having an effect on numbers in key stage 4. By now two cohorts of pupils from primary project schools have reached Year 9 and made their option choices. Initial findings from the evaluation of the project suggest that, overall, the secondary schools involved have increased numbers in key stage 4.
- 123 Many of the modern foreign languages departments visited for this report, whether or not they have been involved in the key stage 2 pilot project, have established good transition links with their primary schools. A few provide taster lessons in the primary schools or when Year 6 pupils visit the secondary school. One school has developed a bridging topic, while sixth formers from another school attend a primary after-school language club.
- 124 Despite the good links mentioned above, there is on the whole little awareness in many secondary modern foreign language departments about primary pupils' language learning in Welsh and English. Usually they do not, for example, know what grammatical terms pupils learn in primary school.

### Continuing professional development

- 125 The availability of, and attendance at, in-service training courses vary considerably between schools and authorities. In most schools, one member of the modern foreign languages department usually attends one of the annual meetings held by the WJEC. Schools consider these to be very useful, but necessarily they focus closely on issues arising from GCSE and A level examinations, and not on teaching methods. A minority of schools send teachers to courses provided by private companies. Not all schools can afford these, though funds are available from the GTCW. Otherwise the main sources of continuing professional development are local authorities including provision made available for modern foreign languages through the Welsh Assembly Government's Better Schools Fund and CILT Cymru.

### Local authority support

- 126 Local authorities vary considerably in the support they provide. Overall, relatively few modern foreign languages departments in Wales receive regular monitoring or advisory visits from a modern foreign languages specialist who can provide advice based on classroom observation.
- 127 At the time of writing, 11 authorities in Wales employ six modern foreign languages specialist advisers between them, in most cases through a collaborative arrangement between two or more authorities. For most of them modern foreign languages is one of several other responsibilities. The other 11 authorities have no adviser for modern foreign languages, but a few of these sometimes buy in the services of an adviser from another authority.
- 128 Even in the 11 authorities which employ specialists, the amount of school visiting and monitoring varies. In just four authorities, an adviser makes a formal annual monitoring visit to the modern foreign languages department of each school, usually as part of a full review or as a contribution to the school's self-evaluation process. In a few other authorities, schools are entitled to a specific amount of advisory time, but this may be as little as half a day each year. Alternatively an adviser will visit individual schools in response to a specific request from the school or the authority's

school improvement service. This will often be for a pre-inspection check or because the school improvement service has concerns about the school. In half of the 22 authorities, schools do not receive any kind of regular visit from a modern foreign languages adviser.

- 129 Most authorities therefore do not consistently and regularly address weaknesses in modern foreign languages departments, though they will buy this in for departments that have received low grades in a Section 28 inspection. Although many schools have very good arrangements to review individual departments as part of their whole-school self-evaluation process, the unavailability of subject specialist advice limits thorough evaluation of what goes on in the classroom.
- 130 The picture is better regarding courses. Few authorities, or consortia, provide an extensive programme, but many arrange some form of CPD, sometimes by buying support or buying into other authorities' programmes. Six authorities have not provided any form of CPD in recent years, but two of these have begun to provide support through CILT Cymru. A majority of authorities arrange some form of regular meeting, either for all modern foreign languages teachers or for heads of department. A few authorities have begun such meetings only this year, with the support of CILT Cymru.
- 131 Overall, authorities' knowledge about the state of modern foreign languages in their authority is variable. A majority of them have at least some information on the quality of language departments, though their knowledge is often based only on examination results and Estyn reports on schools in which the subjects inspected included languages. Most authorities were able to nominate at least one good department for this survey, though a few were unable to do so. Although a majority of authorities know the overall percentage of pupils in the whole authority studying modern foreign languages in KS4, only half of them know how their figure compares with other authorities. Only five authorities have targets or objectives for entries in key stage 4.

### **CILT Cymru**

- 132 One outcome from 'Languages Count' was the establishment in 2002 of CILT Cymru, the National Centre for Languages in Wales, which receives financial support from Welsh Assembly Government. As one element of its work CILT Cymru provides an annual programme of specialist in-service training for all schools across Wales. Modern foreign languages departments state that these are invariably of good quality and contribute to improvements in their teaching. However, departments cannot always obtain release or funding to attend.
- 133 Through its Compact scheme, CILT Cymru also provides specialist advice and support to schools. This aims to:
- raise standards;
  - Improve the quality of teaching;
  - improve pupil numbers in key stage 4; and
  - foster links between primary and secondary schools and capitalise on language skills acquired in the primary phase.

134 Over 60 secondary schools have participated in the Compact scheme at some stage. Those that were involved in this survey state that the support provided is extremely useful, and contributes significantly to maintaining or improving high standards of teaching.

### **Links with teacher training institutions**

135 Most initial teacher training providers include some teaching methodology training in mentor training sessions. However, the main focus of the training is how to train and assess trainees' teaching. Many mentors find this training helpful, not only for their work with trainees, but also in helping them to improve their own teaching and self-evaluation of the department.

136 Many of the schools surveyed state that their links with teacher training institutions can help to improve the quality of their provision, but a minority do not feel that they or their pupils benefit enough.

### **Teacher supply**

137 In the four years between 2005 and 2009, Welsh initial teacher training providers recruited 214 trainees to train to teach modern foreign languages. Nearly half of these trainees were qualified in two modern foreign languages at degree level or equivalent. A little over a third of the trainees were foreign nationals who trained to teach their mother tongue.

138 Overall, the number of applicants for initial teacher training in modern foreign languages has remained fairly stable over four years. However, all providers have experienced fluctuations in applications. They have generally had difficulty in meeting the recruitment quota, set by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, which is based on estimates of recruitment needs in Welsh schools. Reasons for this include:

- the reduction in the number of sixth formers taking A level languages and hence progression to degrees; and
- applicants not being able to find enough financial support.

139 Fortunately, the number of trainees who are foreign nationals has increased. Without this increase, it would be even more difficult for providers to meet their recruitment quota.

140 Most providers have developed good strategies to recruit trainees to train to teach modern foreign languages. These strategies include:

- establishing a website link and a co-ordinator in France;
- open days;
- taster courses; and
- participation in the recruitment activities of the Teacher Training Recruitment Forum.

- 141 Providers judge that trainees' overall linguistic abilities range from satisfactory to, in a very few cases, exceptionally good. Those trainees with only satisfactory language skills often speak the language fluently, but do not always pay enough attention to accuracy. On occasions, trainees' grammatical knowledge is weak. Most providers require trainees to audit their linguistic skills and to improve deficiencies by the end of the course.
- 142 On average, each provider has a partnership with 30 school modern foreign language departments where trainees undertake the school experience part of their course. Providers are confident that most of the departments in which they place trainees provide them with good training, while a few departments provide very good experiences. Some of the characteristics of the best departments are that mentors:
- have high expectations of trainees, and challenge their thinking and practice;
  - have good interpersonal skills and are able to motivate trainees;
  - ensure that trainees receive good experiences;
  - provide effective models of good practice, while allowing trainees to be creative and to develop their own teaching style;
  - provide clear and precise feedback with appropriate targets that refer to the standards for qualified teacher status; and
  - have a good awareness of educational research and policy.
- 143 In a very few cases, modern foreign language departments do not provide a good training experience. In these circumstances institutions provide extra support for trainees and review the partnership with the headteacher and the department.

## **Appendix 1: List of schools visited**

Ysgol Aberconwy, Conwy  
Bishop Hedley RC High School, Merthyr  
Bryn Hafren Comprehensive School, Vale of Glamorgan  
Caereinion High School, Powys  
Cefn Saeson Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot  
Crickhowell High School, Powys  
Cwmcarn High School, Caerphilly  
Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Caerphilly  
Ebbw Vale Comprehensive School, Blaenau Gwent  
Ysgol y Gader, Gwynedd  
Olchfa School, Swansea  
Porthcawl Comprehensive School, Bridgend  
Prestatyn High School, Denbighshire  
Treorchy Comprehensive School, Rhondda Cynon Taff

## **Appendix 2: The remit author and survey team**

Steffan James HMI  
Penny Lewis HMI