

Promoting modern languages in the Senior Phase

Case Study: Broughton High School

Broughton High School - City of Edinburgh Council

School Roll: 1050

Context of the department

Principal Teacher: Pamela Tosh

Curriculum leader of modern languages

Staff:

The department comprises five full time and two part time teachers.

Four teachers offer French and Spanish.

Two teachers offer French, Spanish and Italian.

One teacher offers Mandarin. This teacher is also deployed two mornings a week in the cluster primary schools.

This session the department has access to French and Spanish modern language assistants, who are shared across three schools in the authority.

Curricular structure:

The school has a 32 period week and operates a structure comprising a broad general education phase from S1 to S3 and a senior phase from S4 to S6.

In S1 and S2, all learners take French. In S1 learners have a 12 week “Enterprising Edinburgh” course in Spanish, which links business and ICT. The Spanish language element of this course provides sufficient depth of language learning to enable young people to continue with Spanish in S3 and beyond.

In S2, all young people take a 12 week course in Mandarin. The language learning element provides sufficient depth to enable young people to continue with Mandarin into S3 and beyond. Additionally, there is an elective course in Spanish on offer at this point.

At the end of S2, learners can choose to take up to three languages in S3. They are encouraged to choose the subjects in which they are most likely to gain a National Qualification in S4. In S3, a small group of learners works towards a ‘Languages for Life and Work’ Award.

At the end of S3, young people are encouraged by the senior management team, the modern languages staff and the pupil support staff to continue with their language learning into the senior phase.

Courses:

The modern language courses now contain a greater element of ICT to support learners' motivation. At the end of S3, all undertake the Added Value unit at National 4, consisting of a film study (French) and a citizenship focus (Spanish).

Uptake:

In session 2014- 2015, 120 of the S4 cohort chose to continue to National Qualification level in modern languages, with two classes each of French and Spanish and one class of Mandarin. 20 young people took more than one language in S4.

In the same session, 40 candidates took Higher French and 16 Higher Spanish.

Six young people studied Advanced Higher French, with nine taking Advanced Higher Spanish. The department has also consistently presented candidates for the Scottish Baccalaureate award in modern languages since its introduction in 2009, with a small number presented for the interdisciplinary project as a stand-alone unit.

In S5 and S6, young people have the opportunity to resume their language learning from their earlier school career, or take up a new language at National 4 or National 5 level.

The school has a significant number of bilingual learners who may be presented early at N5 or Higher in their mother tongue, where such a National Qualification exists.

Approaches to Assessment:

In S1 to S3, courses and assessments have been designed to incorporate groupings of experiences and outcomes. Each member of staff retains an 'evidence box' for each class, with a departmental spreadsheet, which is completed when the experiences and outcomes have been achieved. Comments about learners' progress are also entered. For the purposes of reporting, staff use the evidence gathered, as well as their professional judgement, to inform parents of progress.

Using feedback:

Young people in S1 to S3 have individual learning logs which provide the opportunity to self-evaluate and comment on the learning experience. Staff take these views into account and modify their practice, responding to learners' views on the pace or focus of lessons. The curriculum leader also uses questionnaires in S2, S3 and S4 to look at particular areas of interest and incorporate the findings into course planning.

Other activities in school:

The department offers a wide variety of learning experiences to complement language studies. To link to the European Day of Languages, the department holds a week of language based activities, such as mini language lessons delivered by young people who are studying English as an additional language, calligraphy lessons in Mandarin, and a 'Translation Duel'.

The school hosts the 'Rencontres Théâtrales' run by the Institut Français each year.

The young people who are learning Mandarin work with Scotland's National Centre for Languages and the Hilton hotel group as part of the Business Language Champions initiative.

Activities outwith the department:

S5 and S6 language classes attend the annual multi-lingual debate at Heriot Watt University.

S3 to S6 Spanish learners attend the Spanish Film Festival at Edinburgh Filmhouse.

The school has pen-pal and Twitter links with French schools.

There are school visits in alternate years to France and Spain.

Young people are also nominated to take part in a visit to China sponsored by Hanban and Scottish Government. The department is currently exploring the possibility of running a visit to China in conjunction with a neighbouring secondary school.

Factors impacting on uptake:

The department regularly invites people from the business world and others to speak to learners about the ways they use their language skills in the world of work. There are close links with cultural organisations, such as the 'Institut Français' and the 'Consejería de España'.

Staff feel that the modern languages Baccalaureate has been instrumental in raising the profile of languages and the stand-alone unit has proved attractive to those wishing to continue with their language studies at an advanced level.

Cluster working:

As part of the 1+2 languages strategy for the cluster, French is delivered to children in P5, P6 and P7 as their L2. This approach is co-ordinated by the authority and a rolling programme of training primary practitioners in primary language learning (PLL) is taking place across the authority. The teacher of Mandarin visits three of the primary schools on a rota and hosts a Mandarin Club in another.

Learner Voice:

The first focus group consisted of one boy and nine girls in S4.

Learners were asked to consider two aspects of their language learning:

- Learning experiences in S1 to S3
- Reasons for continuing a language into the senior phase.

Learning experiences in S1 to S3:

Almost all said that their language learning was enjoyable and demanding in S1, with a particular focus on learning vocabulary. Some felt the mixed ability classes slowed down progress at times and all felt much more positive about their language learning in S3, when classes were set. Their perceptions about language learning were heavily influenced by their teacher.

Reasons for continuing a language into the senior phase:

Most young people said they had chosen to continue with a language in the senior phase to enhance their career prospects by developing their knowledge and gaining a qualification. Many said that having knowledge and a qualification in a modern language would enhance their career prospects. Some intended to pursue their language learning at university and many wanted to travel or work abroad in the future.

The second focus group consisted of one boy and eight girls in S5.

Learners were asked to consider two aspects of their language learning.

- Learning experiences in S1 to S3
- Reasons for continuing a language into the senior phase.

Learning experiences in S1 to S3:

In this group, some said they had enjoyed the learning in S1 to S3 and again felt the greater focus on depth of learning in S3 made the learning experience much more effective. Those who had begun a second or a third language enjoyed the challenge and some felt that the second language was easier to learn. However, some stated the mixed ability classes in S1 and to some extent in S2, held back progress and some believed the pace in S2 was slower than S1. This group also felt that the learning experience in S3 had much more depth than in the previous two years. As with the first focus group, learners said they were influenced by the teacher delivering the courses.

Reasons for continuing a language into the senior phase:

Most of the young people interviewed said that having a language qualification would be useful for university, for travel abroad and for future career prospects. For some, the opportunity to travel to France on the senior visit to Paris was influential, with the chance to speak the language in a real life context. Learners were appreciative of the efforts of staff and were motivated by their commitment and enthusiasm.