

Promoting modern languages in the Senior Phase

Case Study: Kilwinning Academy

Kilwinning Academy - North Ayrshire Council

School Roll: 820

Context of the department:

Principal Teacher: Lynne Robinson

Head of Faculty of English and Modern Languages since May 2013

Staff:

The department comprises three full time teachers:

One teacher of French and German

One teacher of French and Spanish

One teacher of French and Italian

This year, the department have access to a Spanish modern languages assistant who is shared amongst three schools in the authority.

Curricular structure:

The school operates a 33 period week and has a structure comprising a broad general education phase from S1 to S3 and a senior phase from S4 to S6. Some choice is offered at the end of S2 to allow learners to specialise, or choose an additional subject. At the end of S3, all young people choose seven subjects to take as National Qualifications in S4.

Prior to the principal teacher taking up post, the curricular structure for languages comprised two language periods a week. As a consequence, teachers and learners spent most of their time overtaking essential experiences and outcomes, with little or no time available for enrichment activities. The principal teacher felt that this was impacting negatively on the uptake in languages in S4. Following a curriculum review with the senior management team, it has been agreed that in session 2015-16, provision for all language learners in S1 to S3 will move to three x 50 minute periods per week of language learning. In S4, learners have four periods per week of languages.

In S2, learners choose either an additional period of French and/or Spanish. This allows them to have the grounding necessary to proceed to N4 and 5 in French.

Uptake:

Uptake for National 4 French has increased significantly: in session 2014-15, numbers increased from eight to 28. Numbers in Spanish remain low, with nine candidates to be presented for Spanish in 2015. The number taking both French and Spanish is four.

In addition, a small group of young people in S3 with specific additional support needs, work towards a 'Languages for Life and Work' award.

Enrichment:

In S2, learners can opt for an elective course which combines French and drama. They study a film, work on creating a media story board in French and script, then film, a 'missing scene' from the film.

There is also an option for learners to work in French on cake design within the Home Economics department. A pastry chef from a local hotel works with this group to design and make their cake.

Approaches to Assessment:

Each learner in S1 to S3 has a portfolio with information on their performance in a variety of assessments, allowing staff to track progress through the experiences and outcomes. Learners are encouraged to use ICT at regular intervals to record themselves talking in the modern language and to listen and give feedback to their peers on accuracy and accent.

Learner voice

The department makes use of 'SurveyMonkey' to evaluate key elements of their teaching. Questions are adapted from 'How Good is Our School?' quality assurance questionnaires. Learners are asked to comment on various aspects of their language learning experiences, including for example, the methodologies used throughout the department, how they feel their language learning is progressing and whether the skills they are building in the modern language are impacting on any other subject areas. Their views are analysed and action points added to the department improvement plan as appropriate.

Raising the profile:

The department recently hosted a modern languages careers event involving cultural organisations (French Institute, Spanish Consulate) and local businesses to help raise the profile of modern languages.

They have made successful links with the Scottish Football Association (SFA) and the SFA museum of Scotland, to link language learning and sport. They have also made links with a French catering company which provides hospitality for the SFA.

Languages staff organise and run an annual visit to France for S2, allowing them to put their language learning to use in real-life contexts.

Cluster working:

Kilwinning Academy has five associated primary schools. The faculty head is involved in the authority 1+2 working group and works with the associate primary schools on planning for L2 (French). Primary Language Learning (PLL) training is led by local authority development officers and supported at cluster level by members of the modern languages department who offer twilight language learning sessions. The cluster plans to have Spanish as L3, building on expertise in both primary and secondary establishments. A specialist teacher visits the associated primary schools to deliver a block of Spanish lessons, in accordance with L3 guidelines.

Learner Voice:

The focus group consisted of three boys and five girls.

Four from S4, two from S5 and two from S6

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:

All said that their language learning is enjoyable. They appreciate an active approach to language learning and that staff in the department are positive in their approaches to language teaching.

Reasons for continuing a language into the senior phase:

Reasons given by most learners for continuing with languages into the senior phase were based on future career opportunities. Many were enthused by the change in ethos of the department and the support offered by staff both in the classroom and after school. For almost all, the enjoyment of language learning had influenced their choice to continue with languages into the senior phase. A number were considering continuing with a language as part of their studies at university. Some wanted to work abroad and felt that the ability to speak another language was essential for this. For some, the ethos of using the modern language in class (and staff communicating

with each other in the modern language) encouraged them to try and speak more fluently and confidently. Many said that their language learning had a positive impact in their understanding of English and on their communication skills as a whole. All felt that the languages staff were passionate about their subject and that the learning experience was 'more than just aiming for a good examination pass'.