

Promoting modern languages in the Senior Phase

Case Study: Linlithgow Academy

Linlithgow Academy - West Lothian Council

School Roll: 1200

Context of the department

Principal Teacher: Elizabeth Knox

Faculty Head of modern languages and social subjects.

Staff:

There are five full time and one part time teacher of modern languages in the department.

Five teachers offer French and Spanish.

One teacher offers French.

The modern language is spoken widely across the department both within and outwith the classroom. Stimulating modern language information and classwork are displayed in classrooms and corridors.

The department operates an 'open door' policy, encouraging learners to drop in to the staff base and ask questions or seek help. Young people view asking for help outwith class time as part of their learning.

Curricular structure:

The school has a 33 period week and operates a structure comprising a broad general education phase from S1 to S3 and a senior phase from S4 to S6.

French is taught in S1 with an allocation of three x 50 minute periods per week. In S2 learners have two periods of French and two of Spanish. Classes are taught in mixed ability groups. At the end of S2, young people can choose to continue with one or two languages. At the end of S3, young people choose six subjects to continue to National Qualifications.

Uptake:

In the current S4 session, approximately 40% of the cohort is continuing with a modern language. There are two classes each in French and Spanish.

Over the past two years, a change to school policy has meant that learners are able to bypass National 5 in S4 and proceed directly to Higher in S5. As a result of this,

numbers in modern languages in S5 remain high, with only a small number opting to sit National 5 in S4. In session 2014-2015, 47 candidates studied Higher Spanish and 32 studied Higher French.

In session 2014-2015, four young people studied Advanced Higher French and four studied Advanced Higher Spanish, with most of this group focused on continuing their language studies at university.

Courses:

Course content is designed to be coherent and purposeful, linking skill development and depth of learning. Homework tasks complement the courses and contain tasks such as small projects and pieces of research which allow staff to identify and encourage wider achievement in languages. The courses contain relevant film content, linked to the countries where French and Spanish are spoken. There is a whole school focus on developing skills; accordingly, schemes of work for modern languages also contain experiences and outcomes for the areas of the curriculum which are the responsibility of all.

Modern languages courses contain innovative approaches designed to challenge learners to use their language skills, for example by solving puzzles through decoding unknown language and applying their skills in an unfamiliar context. In one such activity, the learners are given clues to uncover the school 'thief' by decoding clues in the modern language. All four skills are used to work out the thief's identity. Activities such as these are valued by learners and help to increase motivation in language learning.

Strong links have been made with the social subjects department, creating opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. In S3, all learners undertake a unit on human rights across modern languages and social subjects.

Approaches to Assessment:

In S1 to S3, the courses and assessments have been designed through careful groupings of the experiences and outcomes. Staff use a 'traffic lighting' system with agreed tasks and success criteria. Learners are encouraged to self-assess on a regular basis using the same traffic-lighting system and progress is discussed regularly. The tasks assessed also recognise wider achievement activities in modern languages.

Since the majority of learners bypass National 5 and work towards to Higher, assessments are tailored to ensure that candidates overtake the milestones for N5 units as well as creating 'prelim style' assessments. Attainment in Higher French and Higher Spanish is well above the national average, which in turn helps encourage positive uptake of languages in the senior phase.

Using feedback:

Learners in S1 to S3 note their progress in their jotters and comments are reviewed regularly by staff. Each member of the department takes responsibility for holding focus groups with their classes. The areas for discussion are agreed at department meetings. The feedback from these groups informs action points which in turn feed into the department improvement plan.

Other activities in school:

The department offers a variety of supplementary language learning experience to celebrate the European day of Languages, there are language-based quizzes, and the school canteen offers European dishes. In S1, one of the homework tasks asks the learners to research a well-known European, dress up as the famous person, and deliver a short presentation about them in the modern language. At senior level there is a 'languages challenge cup' which involves writing a poem or a rap in the modern language, which is then displayed across the school.

Activities outwith the department :

There is an annual visit to Paris and Normandy for S2 classes; for Spanish learners in S4 and S5, there is an annual visit to Madrid . These visits are designed by the department to contain a strong language element as well as offering an authentic cultural experience.

The school maintains strong links with former pupils, including the establishment of a Twitter link to a former pupil on a gap year in Ecuador.

Other factors influencing uptake:

Staff feel that the modern languages Baccalaureate award has been instrumental in raising the profile of languages and the stand-alone unit has proved attractive to those young people wishing to continue with their language studies at an advanced level. Regular opportunities for language learners to hear from visiting speakers about how they use their language skills in the world of work are built into course plans.

Cluster working:

Linlithgow Academy has nine associated primary schools and runs a well-established transition programme. Children in P6 and P7 learn French.

Learner Voice:

The focus group consisted of three boys 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, although there was some revision from their primary language learning. Some felt the mixed ability classes slowed down progress at times and all felt much more positive about their language learning in S4 when they were in set classes. All enjoyed the innovative approaches to learning including the use of ICT and the project work. The visit to Paris and Normandy was also a considered a motivating factor.

Reasons for continuing a language into the senior phase:

All in the group were hoping to bypass National 5 and proceed to Higher and all stated that they felt motivated to continue with their language learning. Some said that a modern language was a desirable academic subject to study, as it was 'intellectually challenging' as well as enjoyable. All agreed that in the amount of learning and homework in modern languages exceeded that needed for other subjects, but found this interesting, rather than overwhelming. Many learners said that having 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.