

Evaluation visit to St Modan's RC High School

Title of the project: Languages in the senior phase – an ASN focus

Aims of the project: The key aim was to highlight the accessibility and benefits of learning a modern language for young people with additional support needs.

Discussion of self-evaluation paper: key messages from the school

Background

Saint Modan's High School is a denominational high school with a roll of approximately 900. The modern languages department has seven members of staff and French is the core language. For the current S4 cohort, French is compulsory. Spanish has been a subject choice traditionally from the end of S2 but will move to an option at S3 next session. The department has also delivered Languages for Work Purposes as an alternative in the senior phase for a number of years and will also present young people for this award across a variety of SCQF levels in 2014. The pilot class will be presented for the Languages for Life and Work award in French and Spanish.

Resources/methodology

Each lesson incorporates a variety of methodologies and good use of ICT. Lessons incorporate all four skills to allow for progression and confidence building in each skill. On a recent trip to Café Andaluz, the young people in the pilot class were required to speak Spanish in a real context.

Children's experiences and achievements

Staff feel that young people are making steady progress across all four skills. They are generally very engaged in their learning and are enjoying the exposure to two modern languages. The experiential learning in the Spanish restaurant has motivated them and allowed them to make links to the real world. It has also helped them with their recognition of language and their decoding skills. The course has provided appropriate progression for young people who would not be expected to achieve success at National 4 or National 5 in S4.

Support for learners

Learners have a variety of different needs ranging from global learning difficulties to autism spectrum disorders. Learners' needs are met through a variety of learning and teaching methodologies and the specific requirements outlined in learning plans for those with more complex needs. Support assistants offer further support in class. The expected outcome is for learners to achieve the Modern Languages for Life and Work Award at SCQF Level 3.

Successes of the pilot (from the self-evaluation)

Thus far, the pilot is meeting the original aim. The teachers feel that positive impact can be measured in a variety of different ways:

- Learners of a wide range of abilities are progressing in modern languages

- Learners are enjoying their experience
- Staff have evaluated and improved their own practice for learners with ASN
- Staff are more familiar with the outcomes of the new award and are continuing to develop and evaluate materials to deliver it. The pilot has highlighted the variety of paths open to all learners in modern languages.
- The pilot has also demonstrated the ability of young people to engage in two modern languages at this level. It has shown the motivation and new experiences language learning provides for learners through this course.
- The pilot has given staff an opportunity to evaluate practice, discuss progress with HMI and put in place recommendations. This has been very valuable in ensuring the best possible experiences for learners.
- The partner links, such as those with Café Andaluz, have definitely had a positive impact on learners and this is something the department would like to build on further in the broad general education and the senior phase.

Issues arising (from the self-evaluation)

In terms of the scheme of work, the department would incorporate the Building Employability Skills unit with the French or Spanish for Work unit as this would facilitate delivery in the target language. This unit is currently being completed at the end of the course, during the delivery of the Spanish for Life unit and this does not link well with prior learning. The department would also ensure a French link was established in future since they were unable to secure one this session.

Overall evaluation by Education Scotland based on evidence during the visit

The original pilot had been altered due to a change in staffing at the school. The newly appointed curriculum leader ensured the pilot went ahead despite limited time to prepare for the revised project. The pilot has achieved its aims of providing a worthwhile and motivating experience for young people who might not normally have continued with a language into S4, by using the flexibility of a relatively new award. Moreover, the class studied both French and Spanish.

Originally, the department had hoped to make a link with a French hotel chain to support the work unit. This did not prove possible, despite repeated efforts, and this is something the department wishes to pursue for next session. Commendably, they secured a link with a Spanish restaurant in Glasgow and were able to include a meal there as part of the life unit. This link will continue. The department purchased iPads to access up-to-date materials online. These were used initially by learners to research the countries in which the languages were spoken. While further use was made of these to access useful resources and engage learners, the department sees scope for further use of the flexibility offered by these devices.

HMI observed two lessons, one of which took place during a support visit prior to the evaluation visit. Staff teaching the course have been proactive in preparing their own materials to support the delivery of this course. They have also taken advice on methodology and resources from the support for learning staff in the school. As a result, both teachers enjoy very positive relationships with the class and have been

able to deliver work which is both accessible and challenging for the young people involved.

Overall, young people have enjoyed their learning. The variety of tasks, including a focus on all four skills, and involving independent work as well as working with others, has engaged them in the programme of work. Staff made good use of ICT to make lessons more engaging and used additional resources well to scaffold the learning. For example, learners used 'show me' boards for vocabulary revision and prompt cards with dice to support paired speaking. The class particularly enjoyed the trip to the Spanish restaurant. They spoke with enthusiasm of their experience there and it helped them to remember the vocabulary for food. This new experience created renewed interest in Spanish culture.

Both teachers have high expectations of the class. The target language was used extensively in class and learners were proud that they could understand what was being said. Lessons moved at a brisk pace overall and all four skills were being developed as well as knowledge of the language structures and grammar. For example, pupils learned the words for different foods but also how to give their opinions of them. They used the past tense. A lesson on describing their personality for a CV included a reminder of adjectival agreements. Good pronunciation was stressed, with helpful ways of remembering sounds by linking them to Scottish sounds such as the 'ch' in loch. Learners were able to decode a text giving information about other people and their tastes in food which contained many unknown words. They were learning ways of working out the meaning of words they did not know. They could see a purpose in their learning.

Teachers and pupil support assistants gave young people very good support and ensured that they had the confidence to achieve. Teachers chose themes which were relevant to young people's lives and interests but which expanded their horizons. The culture of Spain was of particular interest. Useful resources have been prepared which will be of use in the future. Teachers agreed that some booklet materials could usefully be updated and made more attractive to learners. This is a work in progress.

Young people said that they had not found it confusing to learn two languages although they admitted they did not want to switch to Spanish at first. Some recognised a similarity between words in French and words in Spanish. They were pleased that they were able to communicate with waiters at the Spanish restaurant. Interestingly, most pupils said they now prefer Spanish, despite their initial reluctance to do it. They have enjoyed the life unit more than the work themes. This will be an area to explore in terms of resources and business links next year.

Young people have been assessed in line with the requirements of the SQA award. There is scope to build in assessment of everyday classroom activities as well as formal tests, to build up a profile of the learners as they progress through the course. Pupils felt they were making progress and that they would now be able to communicate in Spain or France, albeit at a very basic level. One said that languages made sense this year and that they appreciated the smaller class size.

The school intends to continue with this provision as it meets a need. In addition, there is a willingness to look at how this award may be offered in other ways in the senior phase. The pilot has been a very worthwhile project. Staff have expanded their own knowledge of the award and of ways to engage young people with very differing needs. They have supported these young people very well to engage with language learning and to achieve. In addition, it is hoped that the learners will complete the course and be successful in achieving the final award.