

EXCEPTIONAL WITHDRAWAL FROM MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

Considerations

The decision to withdraw a pupil from modern language learning should not be made without reference to senior management, parents and pupil.

As a matter of principle, all pupils are entitled to a foreign language course which suits their needs, and this provision should normally be made within an integrated classroom setting.

Any decision to withdraw a pupil from modern languages in an integrated setting, or from modern language learning altogether, should be taken at whole school level and in consultation with parents.

Before a pupil is withdrawn from modern language learning the following points should be considered.

- **Steps already taken**

The modern languages department should detail the steps that have been taken to meet the pupil's needs in the classroom and these should be evaluated. If no steps have been taken, or if those taken are deemed to be insufficient or inadequate, support should be provided for the modern languages department so that appropriate measures may be implemented. Only if the best efforts of the modern languages department fail to enable the pupil to make progress in class should other measures be considered.

- **Alternative measures**

The pupil's entitlement to foreign language learning does not prescribe mode of delivery, although Circulars 1178 and 2/90 do advise that pupils should *normally* study Standard Grade where it is available. If the pupil fails to thrive in the classroom despite the best efforts of the teachers involved, then alternative ways of providing for the pupil's entitlement should be considered.

- **The feelings of the pupil.**

Motivation to learn is crucial, especially when difficulties are to be expected. A pupil who is keen to learn a foreign language should not be denied the opportunity to do so. Sometimes a pupil may be unwilling to try to learn, perhaps because of previous experiences of failure. In these circumstances, and they would be exceptional ones, then the pupil could be withdrawn provided the parents agree.

- **The severity of the pupil's difficulties**

Experience suggests that some pupils who are experiencing significant difficulties with language and literacy may find foreign language learning very difficult. If it is not possible to make the necessary adaptations to the modern languages course, and if all attempts to provide a suitable alternative language learning experience fail, then the pupil may be withdrawn. If the decision to proceed *is* taken, the situation should be monitored closely to ensure that the pupil continues to be able to make progress.

- **Languages for all**
Modern Languages is now one of the core subjects, along with English, Mathematics, Science and a Social Subject, and therefore compulsory for all pupils aged 12-16. Universities and colleges, increasingly, expect all pupils to have studied a foreign language at school, and some are aiming to make language study a compulsory part of every course. Although to be monolingual is not unusual amongst the adult UK population at the moment, this situation is changing. Today's pupils may be embarrassed in later life to admit that they were amongst the very few considered incapable of learning even the rudiments of a foreign language.

- **The availability of modern languages and learning support staff with sufficient time and skills to design and deliver a modern language course which will meet the learning needs of the pupil.**
Very few modern language teachers will have received recent training in catering for the needs of learners now being integrated into mainstream schools. For most departments the help of the Learning Support department will be crucial if they are to come to terms with these new demands. As well as providing support for the pupil, schools should aim to provide modern languages teachers with whatever initial support is necessary to enable them to deliver the course effectively.

- **The level of support available to the pupil outwith the modern languages classroom.**
This will include the existence of a parent/sibling who knows the language and is willing to help, and the opportunities the pupil will have to visit the country of the language being studied (eg. on holiday, or to visit relatives who live there). These considerations should also help to determine *which* language the pupil should learn.

- **The range of languages on offer**
All other things being equal, there is some indication that Italian, Spanish or German may be easier than French for some pupils to learn, since the spelling of these first three languages tends to be more consistent with their pronunciation. However, this should not override the other considerations mentioned. Many people find they have a closer affinity with one language than with another; how much choice will the pupil have?

- **What long term alternative is available?**
Before long, almost every pupil in Scotland will be starting foreign language study in P6, and, in some cases, earlier. At whatever stage the question of whether to exclude the pupil is raised, the adults involved in making the decision should be fully aware of the long term implications for the pupil. Once the pupil 'drops out' of language learning it will be difficult, if not impossible, to re-integrate her at a later stage.

If, after consideration, the pupil goes ahead with foreign language study, that decision too should be subject to regular review, to ensure that she continues to make progress.

This extract is taken from "Europe, Language Learning and Special Educational Needs" (pages 3A.9–10) compiled by McColl, H. Hewitt, C and Baldry, H. The compendium of advice was published by SOEID and distributed to all local authorities in 1997 for distribution to maintained secondary and special schools.

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