

## MAXIMISING ATTAINMENT

### NOTE ON PREREQUISITE SKILLS

We have found, in our recent work, that one of the issues most in need of deeper consideration is the question of prerequisite skills. By this we mean the basic learning skills that teachers, in secondary schools in particular, tend to assume that pupils have already acquired. The discovery that some pupils lack these basic skills gives rise to many staff room moans.

Bemoaning their lack is understandable, but not enough. Professionalism requires that we initiate action to recover the situation, so that the barriers they present for pupils are removed, or at least reduced, as far as possible.

If only one or two pupils are 'affected', perhaps Support staff can help by withdrawing those pupils temporarily. Some deficiencies are quickly remedied (e.g. learning to tell the time, when the pupil in question proves to have been in hospital when 'time' was taught in her primary school). Others may be more long term and may require on-going support within the MFL class.

There are some prerequisite skills, however, that hinder the learning of many pupils, and these may need to be explicitly taught or re-taught in order for the pupils to master the skills and then progress as we would hope. Examples we have come across include:

- insecure understanding of analogue v. digital time formats which inhibits ability to tell the time
- lack of language awareness generally
- only a vague understanding of sound-symbol correspondence
- poor alphabetic skills
- unfamiliarity with dictionary conventions
- lack of social skills needed to undertake effective co-operative work
- no experience of learning 'by heart', etc.

Where such deficiencies are common, the missing skills need to be taught in class. Support staff may be able to help with this, but the responsibility falls to the class teacher. Either way, the advantage of teaching these skills in the MFL class is that they will be taught in a context in which they can be immediately practised and progress can be evaluated alongside progress in target language skills.