

On your bike! Students learn value of French skills from Motorcycle company

English Martyrs Catholic School in Leicester working with Classic Motos Ltd



English Martyrs Catholic School is a mixed comprehensive school for 11 – 18 year-olds, situated in Anstey Lane, Leicester. The school gained specialist school status in Performing Arts in September 2003 and has used the extra opportunities this offers students to enrich the entire curriculum. With an emphasis on how things learnt in the classroom can be used in the world of work, and keen to improve languages uptake, the school contacted the RLN and began working with Classic Motos Ltd in January 2008.

Classic Motos Ltd is a Leicester-based supplier of parts, products and accessories for British motorcycles, specialising in post-war models such as Nortons and Triumphs. The company mails parts all over the world and has a large clientele in France, which means they require French language skills on an almost daily basis. The Classic Motos website is also available in English and French.

After an initial meeting at the school, to discuss possible activities and how to best combine busy work schedules with the school timetable, it was decided that pupils would benefit from hearing about how languages are used within the company and trying out their skills in role playing sessions.

This project is part of the Business Language Champions programme, co-ordinated by the Regional Language Network (RLN) East Midlands. It is designed to bridge the gap between school and the workplace and to reverse the decline in the take-up of modern foreign languages.

Lorraine Harris from Classic Motos visited the school in early 2008 to deliver language based presentations to four Year 9 classes and one Year 10 class.

Lorraine spoke about the importance of languages in the small business environment and how French language skills are used at Classic Motos.

The morning was a big success, as Lorraine said:

"It was an enjoyable and rewarding experience. I received a very warm welcome from the teachers, and the students were enthusiastic. I hope it gave them something to think about, to challenge their misconceptions of languages being 'boring and difficult'."

Lorraine followed up the visits by doing some role playing sessions with the students on her return to the school in March 2008.

The sessions began with brainstorming, where students built up a 'mind map' of useful phrases for buying things over the phone. They were then given a photograph of a motorbike, a shopping list of the parts required and a copy of Classic Motos French mail order catalogue and order form.

Students looked for the parts they needed in the catalogue, completed the order forms in French and used their 'mind map' of useful phrases to create role -playing dialogue, with one student as the sales person and another the client.

This task worked really well with the students and Lorraine commended them for their efforts:

"The students really get into the role playing and I think they are surprised to see that with a limited vocabulary they are able to give information and make purchases over the phone."

The school followed up by talking about the general importance of languages in business and asking students to imagine scenarios where they might need to use their French in a business context.

The uptake of languages has been impressive, with 108 pupils taking a language at Key Stage 4 in 2008-09. New opportunities to study languages are also being introduced, as Head of French, Matthew Purslow, said:

"We have plans to incorporate more business studies into our language curriculum, we have 21 students completing their Applied French GCSE this summer in 'Leisure and Tourism' French; we hope to extend this course and offer the 'Business' GCSE French endorsed by EdExcel. We have also recently introduced Spanish and German into our Year 7 curriculum and are hoping to expand this to the rest of KS3 in the near future; Spanish being recognised as an influential business language in the European community."

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