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Mr J Spencer  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Spencer

**Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 16 and 17 November 2010 to look at work in modern languages.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages is good.

**Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is good.

- Attainment in French in GCSE at A\* to C grades in 2010 was broadly average. In Spanish and German it was low but all students gained certification in A\* to G grades. Level 1 accreditation was attained by almost all students in listening and reading at the end of Year 9 through Asset Languages: a national recognition scheme for all ages in all four skills, and some students gained Level 2 in French.
- Progress in lessons and as demonstrated in students' exercise books was good.
- Students arrive at Leek High School in Year 9 with a relatively limited background in language learning (French). In Year 9, they take each of

the languages, Italian, German, Spanish and French, for 30 hours each to give them a background in each. The four languages are then offered at GCSE in Key Stage 4. Students showed that they had made good headway in a short space of time in Italian in Year 9 and the languages they had chosen for GCSE. This was also the case in Year 12 French. Year 12 German was not observed.

- They are willing to take risks in their language learning and, despite their relatively short time with most languages, they will have a go at speaking.
- Reading and writing are encouraged by teaching and good marking so that it develops more extensively from early on in school.
- Students know how to use dictionaries and reference material to help them and are beginning to understand grammatical concepts well, such as the effect of using 'weil' in German.
- Students spoken to said that they enjoy learning a language and look forward to lessons.
- Students understand very well why it is important to learn a language and said that their parents and carers were very supportive.

### **Quality of teaching in languages**

The quality of teaching in languages is good overall.

- Teaching ensures that students make good progress because planning is meticulous, leading logically to achieve learning objectives and taking into account all skills equally well.
- Marking is also for the most part outstanding, ensuring that students are aware of what they need to do next to help them improve, and also directing them to some independent work. Good use is made of self and peer assessment and of mini whiteboards so that the teacher can assess progress.
- Lessons are active which students enjoy and respond to well.
- Teaching lower down the school is not sufficiently in the target languages to enable students to have consistent access to role models.
- Reading material is predominantly text book based; limited use is made of authentic material from the countries and communities of the languages studied.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used variably, seemingly dependent on the language and teacher. It has been used for revision and grammatical consolidation as well as research and presentations, but some students reported that they had not used it. Use of the virtual learning environment is underdeveloped.

### **Quality of the curriculum in languages**

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- Students have five hours per fortnight in Year 9 and in Key Stage 4. This is suitable.
- The curriculum is innovative in that the school teaches four languages in Year 9. At the end of each language 'module' they take an external qualification in listening and reading so that all students have certification at the end of Year 9. Although it is in reading and listening, students reported that they do lots of speaking in lessons and observations bore this out.
- Overall, it is proving motivating. At the end of Year 9, they choose from the four languages in the options pathways. The take-up has improved considerably to 41% for this year's Year 10 from 21% last year.
- Post-16 classes are very small with one student taking French and another German, but this in itself is motivating for Key Stage 4 because students know there is a possibility they could stay on. However, such small class size impoverishes the quality of learning post-16 because of the lack of interaction in lessons. The teacher works hard to counteract this as well as the two foreign language assistants (FLAs).
- Schemes of work are satisfactory, based on textbook content adapted to needs for the Year 9 provision, and based on examination criteria for Key Stage 4.
- The department has good aims for language learning and its departmental policies are extensive and good.
- There are numerous trips to the various countries, both language trips and cross-curricular, and the school tries to support students where necessary, for example, those on free school meals. The small staff also support students out of school time, for example through 'The Language Clinic' at lunchtimes. The full International School Award is being pursued this year.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages**

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in languages is good.

- Leadership and management have recently focused very well on improvement and you have supported the department in making quite radical changes to provision in Year 9 and Key Stage 4, and supporting the very small sixth form.
- The departmental self-evaluation form is perceptive and supported by a departmental action plan. The summary of priorities shows how the changes to the Year 9 provision will be monitored.
- There is good analysis of examination results and intervention strategies are clear.
- Language lessons are monitored regularly and a range of professional development is available.
- The head of department is involved with the wider network of local schools and its languages development. He has recently secured money to support a transition project with the feeder, middle school.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- extend the routine use of the target languages in lessons; the provision of authentic resources for developing reading; and ensure a more equitable use of ICT in lessons and beyond to enhance language learning
- continue to improve take-up in Key Stage 4 and post 16.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop languages in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Pam Haezewindt**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**