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22 November 2010

Mrs Y Brennan  
Headteacher  
St Augustine's Catholic High School Specialist Science College  
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Dear Mrs Brennan

### **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 8 and 9 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, students and a representative of the local authority; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons, including joint observations with senior leaders.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is satisfactory.

- Students enjoy learning languages and make satisfactory or better progress in lessons. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly average.
- Although the number of students choosing to study a language in Key Stage 4 is average, very few choose to study two languages. Numbers in the sixth form are very small, but those who do pursue an A-level course in modern languages achieve in line with expectations.
- Most students are willing to contribute in class but speaking is the weakest skill. Students cope well when listening to the language either in recordings or when used by their teachers to manage the lessons. Though they read well for comprehension, their accents are poor when reading aloud. The level of written language in their books is broadly average for their ages. Post-16 students said

that they appreciate the strong emphasis on writing in Key Stage 5 which is raising both their attainment and their confidence.

- Students cooperate well in lessons with the teacher and with each other. They exhibit good behaviour and attitudes. Students' inter-cultural awareness is good. Independent study skills are developed well through the use of dictionaries and techniques for deciphering meaning. Students have insufficient opportunities to use information and communication technology in lessons, but the internet is used well for research in homework tasks.
- Very few students with special educational needs and/or disabilities take a language in Key Stage 4, but those who do achieve in line with expectations.
- Students understand the usefulness of learning a language and this is supported well by input from local businesses with links in the countries where the two languages are spoken.

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

The quality of teaching in languages is satisfactory.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and good classroom management skills. They plan carefully to ensure that their lessons include a variety of activities. The students particularly appreciate games and activities using the interactive whiteboard that enhance their enjoyment. Occasionally, some activities that are mainly led by the teacher run on for too long and the pace of learning declines.
- Teachers' use of the language being studied for managing the lessons and for communicating directly with the students is variable. They do not have high enough expectations of students using the target language to respond.
- Assessment is used satisfactorily in planning and to enable teachers to target additional support effectively. Teachers do not use a wide enough range of assessment techniques in lessons in order to assess the progress being made as the lesson proceeds and adjust their teaching accordingly.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly and provide feedback on how to improve. Although students generally know their predicted grades, references to levels and how to move to the next level are not a regular feature of teaching and learning.

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

The quality of the curriculum in languages is satisfactory.

- The curriculum builds satisfactorily on the work done in the feeder schools in Years 7 and 8. There is good coverage of all four skills. The approach to language learning is founded on recognised good practice in language teaching and the new subject leader has a good understanding of the most recent developments.
- Students have opportunities to learn both French and German in Year 9 and those who have English as an additional language are supported effectively to study their home language.
- Good use is made of foreign language assistants in each language, especially in the sixth form. This enhances both students' confidence in speaking and their cultural awareness.

- Although accommodation for the department is satisfactory, displays could be used better to create a feeling of being in the country where the language is spoken and to support students' use of French or German for routine communication.
- As part of a diploma course in engineering, students can gain an alternative vocational qualification in French.
- Enrichment opportunities through visits, some in collaboration with other subjects, are good and contribute well to students' inter-cultural understanding.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in languages is good.

- Standards are rising and the new subject leader has made substantial improvements since her appointment. The department has a positive, collegiate feel and you and your senior leaders support the development of the subject very strongly.
- Monitoring activities are regular and areas for development are identified accurately. The school uses the data on performance to identify accurately areas for improvement. Priorities are clearly focused on outcomes and raising standards.
- The strong leadership at whole-school level is having a positive impact in further strengthening the capacity of leadership at departmental level. Already students have very positive attitudes and the take-up in Key Stage 4 is rising. The new subject leader is using her skills and knowledge gained as an advanced skills teacher well to drive further improvements in teaching.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:**

- increasing the range of assessment techniques for teachers to use in lessons to ensure that the correct level of challenge is maintained for all groups
- extending the use of the language being studied to make it the predominant means of communication for teachers and students in lessons
- offering more opportunities in lessons for students to use ICT to develop their language skills.

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

**Elaine Taylor**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**