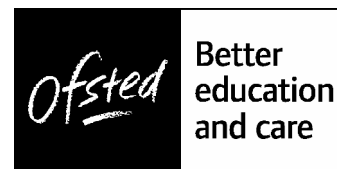


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28 September 2006

Mr D Oliver
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Oliver

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 21-22 September 2006 to look at work in modern languages.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how speaking skills are developing, as well as how information communication technology (ICT) is being used to support the development of languages generally. It also looked at where you are in reaching the benchmarks for provision in Key Stage 4.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

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

The overall effectiveness of modern languages was judged to be good, with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

- Achievement and standards in modern languages are good and improving. Attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 in 2005 was well above average and students made good progress throughout the school in

both French and German. Boys, girls and other groups achieve equally well. This represents a significant improvement on the previous year.

- Students' attitudes to language learning are very positive. They usually respond enthusiastically in lessons and behaviour is excellent.

Quality of teaching and learning of modern languages

- Teaching and learning in modern languages are good overall, with some outstanding features. One of these is the department's strong emphasis on sound-spelling links from the earliest stages, so that students speak very accurately and are confident in listening. ICT is used with increasing skill to engage students and they have many opportunities to develop their ICT skills through modern languages. Relationships are a strength. Teachers and students know each other very well and lessons are characterised by a sense of fun and purpose. Planning is very well matched to students' needs.
- Students enjoy modern languages and there is good take-up of both French and German in Key Stage 4 and post-16.
- The department's analysis of performance data is well used at Key Stage 4 to intervene on any potential underachievement. Students' achievement is monitored at Key Stage 3 by regular module tests, whole school systems and individual guidance. There is some variation in the application of the departmental marking policy, especially at Key Stage 3, so that some students are unsure of precisely how to improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

- The quality of the curriculum is good. All students learn French in Year 7 before choosing to study either French or German throughout Key Stage 3. Curriculum arrangements make it very easy to opt for at least one modern language at Key Stage 4 and 60% of students do so. Each year between ten and 20 students choose to study two languages.
- The deployment of a specialist Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HTLA) to teach languages to vulnerable Year 7 students, prior to them entering mainstream languages classes, is an outstanding and inclusive feature.
- The department does not yet offer alternative or vocational language options at Key Stage 4. Enrichment activities are an outstanding feature, and include study visits, exchanges and work experience in France and Germany for students of different ages across the school. These enjoy very good take-up.
- The department has modern languages assistants in both French and German who work with students throughout the school. Provision for gifted and talented is good.

Leadership and management of subject

- You provide strong support for modern languages. The leadership and management of modern languages are good at all levels with some outstanding features. Small group provision is timetabled where necessary. Specialist support and administrative assistants in modern languages are an outstanding feature. The school's specialist science status has improved capitation and ICT equipment for all subjects. The specialist status also supports continuing professional development as well as science related visits in France and Germany.
- The subject leader has established an open and collaborative ethos within which colleagues are supported and challenged to improve their practice further. Departmental monitoring and evaluation result in a very clear understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.

How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- Currently 60% of students choose to study at least one modern language at Key Stage 4 and the proportion is rising yearly. This represents good progress in take-up over the four years since languages became optional.

The development of speaking skills

- The development of speaking skills is a strength of the department. Speaking is a focus of most lessons and students have ample opportunities to speak in a variety of groupings.
- Considerable time is devoted in Key Stage 3 to the improvement of pronunciation, intonation and spontaneity and students enjoy speaking. They make a confident start to more challenging and extended work at Key Stage 4, for which they are explicitly prepared.

Inclusion

- Good teaching allows all groups of students to make at least good progress in modern languages and most meet their predicted outcomes. All who enter for a language at GCSE gain a qualification at grades A*-G.
- Support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities ensures that there are no dis-applications at Key Stage 3.
- There is good guidance on language options for Key Stages 4 and post- 16, but there are currently no alternative courses for students for whom a GCSE course is less appropriate.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- the further development of a consistent approach to marking, especially at Key Stage 3, so that all students know exactly what they need to do in order to raise their achievement
- the provision of alternative courses to GCSE at Key Stage 4, including vocational options for all students who want them.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority/Local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Susan Wareing
Her Majesty's Inspector