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Mr B Guthrie  
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Dear Mr Guthrie

Ofsted survey inspection programme – Modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 25-26 September 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 is being used to support the development of languages generally. It also looked at the school's position 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 included: interviews with pupils and staff, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons. It is important at the outset to record the context at the time of the inspection: a period of staffing disruption in languages, culminating in the recent loss of several key staff, has created a challenging situation for the new head of department, for which she, clearly, cannot be held responsible.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages was judged to be satisfactory.

## Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards are broadly average in Key Stage 3. The school's data do not permit analysis by gender or of the number attaining above the expected level.
- The percentage of pupils attaining A\*-C at GCSE is below average and declined significantly in 2006.
- Very few pupils achieve grade A\*/A.
- The school's data do not permit an analysis of the relative performances of the two languages, of boys and girls, or in the examination's different modules.
- Most pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons. They have a sound understanding of grammatical structures and the rules of pronunciation, and an adequate vocabulary. High attaining pupils use a wide range of structures and expressions in their extended writing.
- Pupils enjoy the subject, behave well in class, and carry out their work responsibly.

## Quality of teaching and learning of modern languages

Teaching and learning are satisfactory; teaching is sometimes good with outstanding features.

- Planning is thorough and results in well structured, highly organised lessons, with smooth transitions between activities.
- Teachers have high expectations of the pupils' behaviour and of the pace with which the pupils are expected to work.
- Each lesson includes a good variety of imaginative activities, relevant to its aims.
- One teacher's use of the interactive whiteboard to support teaching and learning is outstanding.
- There are significant differences between the two teachers in the ways they use the foreign language to give instructions, the text book for listening exercises, and the written word to help pupils learn. Consequently, pupils' learning varies between good and satisfactory.
- The teaching does not meet well enough the needs of the higher and lower attaining pupils in mixed ability groups.

## Quality of curriculum

The curriculum for modern languages is satisfactory.

- The new head of department has produced a detailed, lesson-by-lesson scheme of work for some year groups, but for others the published scheme is not useful as a planning tool.

- The time allocated to the subject is about average, but the recent decision to teach two languages in Year 7 means that the pupils get considerably less time for each language than most pupils do nationally.

### Leadership and management of modern languages

The leadership and management have been inadequate. This is the result of staffing disruption last year and shortcomings in the information provided to the new head of department, whose time in post is too short for her to take any responsibility for the current situation.

- There is no departmental development plan.
- Departmental self evaluation is weak.
- Data to set targets and monitor performance are incomplete and unreliable.
- Issues in the previous inspection report have not been tackled, and GCSE results since then have deteriorated.

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

- The numbers choosing a language have declined considerably in recent years. Only 15 percent of pupils in Year 11, and 29 percent in Year 10 are studying a language.
- The school has not set a benchmark for participation, as expected by the Department for Education and Skills, and has no plans to increase take-up in Key Stage 4.

### The development of speaking skills

- Teachers place an appropriate emphasis on speaking skills in lessons.
- The pupils speak accurately and with good pronunciation. Many can construct their own sentences when supported by the teacher in a lesson, but have difficulty understanding basic conversational questions outside the topic they are studying.

### Inclusion

- Low attaining pupils are unable to keep up with the pace of some lessons, do not understand everything they are expected to do, and do not make enough progress in class.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving GCSE results, with particular regard to the number of A\*/A grades

- analysing the department's performance through rigorous use of reliable assessment data
- improving the quality of teaching
- strengthening the leadership and management of the subject.

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

Derek Neil  
Her Majesty's Inspector