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Mr R Sawyer
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Dear Mr Sawyer

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 11-12 October 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 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 made included: interviews with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of nine lessons.

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

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good.

- At Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils entered for GCSE in a modern language is about average. In 2006, the proportions of those entered who attained A*/A and A*-C were above average.

- All of the pupils in Year 9 who were entered for GCSE attained A*-C. Those who continue with a language in Key Stage 4 perform at much higher levels than the norm for their age.
- Although there are occasional differences in results between French and Spanish, pupils usually achieve equally well in both languages.
- At Key Stage 3, the proportion of girls reaching the expected levels is slightly above average for girls, but the proportion of boys who achieve them is below the average for boys.
- Most pupils make good progress in lessons because of the quality of teaching.

Quality of teaching and learning of modern languages

Teaching and learning are good, and never less than satisfactory. Some lessons are outstanding.

- Teachers have a good knowledge of the languages they teach.
- They teach with enthusiasm and make their lessons lively and enjoyable.
- The emphasis on active learning ensures that pupils work hard and have ample opportunities to speak the language.
- The interactive white board is used imaginatively to motivate pupils, to present new material clearly, and to practise what has been taught.
- Teachers use a good variety of activities which are carefully structured to increase pupils' skills gradually as the lesson proceeds.
- ICT is used effectively to support pupils' independent study.
- In lessons that were particularly good, the teacher used the foreign language extensively, expected the pupils to memorise what they had been taught, and adhered to a tight timetable for each task. Relationships were very good; pupils behaved well and were eager to contribute.
- Teachers do not use assessment consistently well to raise standards.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum for modern languages is good.

- Sufficient time is allocated to the subject.
- The department makes good use of the facility to create its own sets by offering a second modern language to some pupils and the opportunity to take an early GCSE to others.
- A good range of enrichment activities, including study visits to France and Spain, give pupils opportunities to make progress in languages outside their lessons.
- The schemes of work set out a clear teaching programme, relevant to GCSE requirements and the Key Stage 3 Framework. They rightly include a greater emphasis than previously on teaching the rules of the languages.

- Pupils have little understanding of the benefits of multilingualism. The department does not use its multilingual pupils well enough as advocates of learning different languages.
- It is too early to assess the effect of the fast track initiative on those pupils destined to take AS level, and those taking a GCSE in a second language.

Leadership and management of modern languages

The leadership and management are good.

- The division of strategic leadership and operational management is working well. Staff welcome the structure as it allows them to concentrate on the areas of work that interest them.
- Self evaluation is good. The school uses an extensive range of methods to evaluate the department's performance and consequently has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses.
- The links between evaluation and planning are strong. The priorities identified are relevant and supported by appropriate actions.
- The impact of management on pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching is evident. Progress since the previous inspection has been good.
- Senior managers give valuable support for the subject through the good level of resourcing they provide and with their assistance in planning for improvement.

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

- The number of pupils who choose to study a modern language in Key Stage 4 is low. Only 22 percent of pupils in Year 10 study a language, (although several of those who do not have already secured an A*-C at GCSE in Year 9).
- The school has no firm plans to set a benchmark designed to increase participation to over 50 percent, in line with the expectations of the Department for Education and Skills.

The development of speaking skills

- In speaking, pupils can carry out simple transactions in line with expectations for their age. However, many lack confidence, speak without expression and have anglicised pronunciation and intonation. When required to create their own sentences they are often inaccurate because they have a weak grasp of basic structures.
- While some teachers show pupils how to pronounce words accurately, others do not.

Inclusion

The school has comprehensive data which enable it to monitor pupils' achievement. It has identified several groups of pupils in Key Stage 3 who are at risk of not fulfilling their potential and has planned appropriate remedial action.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the number of pupils who study a modern language in Key Stage 4
- using assessment more consistently to improve pupils' achievement
- improving the standard of pupils' speaking.

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

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