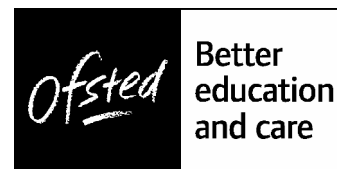


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Mr Alexander Timms
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Dear Mr Timms

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages and science

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during our visit on 20–22 February 2007 to look at work in modern languages (ML) and science.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus for ML 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. In science it had a particular focus on the effectiveness of CPD (including the contribution of the science learning centres) and the management and impact of the introduction of new science GCSEs.

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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons in ML.

Modern languages

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory with some good elements.

Achievement and standards

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory. However, progress in speaking on the subject of the topic in lessons observed was good.

- Pupils' general attainment on entry to the school is below average and literacy levels are low.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 in ML are in line with national expectations in German but below in French. This is borne out by pupils' written work in the books scrutinised. This also reflects the fact that only higher attaining pupils study German as well as French.
- The number of pupils achieving an A*-C grade at the end of Year 11 in 2005 in German was well above average, but below average in French. All pupils achieved a grade A*-G. In 2006 results were similar in French but in German results fell to well below average. This is put down to too many pupils being entered for 'Foundation Stage' and staffing difficulties in the early stages of study.
- In German all pupils do equally well, but in French boys tend to do less well.
- The few sixth form pupils generally achieve satisfactory results although results in German were disappointing in 2006.
- Pupils' progress in speaking on the subject of the topic in lessons observed was good. Pupils of all abilities were confident to 'have a go' in speaking and take risks. However, pronunciation and intonation varies in quality and sometimes interferes with communication.
- Writing in books is very mixed but generally there is insufficient extended writing at the higher levels expected for the age groups. Evidence on display paints a better picture.
- Reading skills were not the focus of the lessons observed.
- ML makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development and well being.
- Pupils demonstrate interest and enjoyment in lessons. As one Year 7 boy said when asked if the pair-work was hard, "Yes, but it was fun".
- They behave well and are consistently engaged.
- All pupils spoken to said how much they enjoyed learning languages. They know how useful it is to learn languages and older pupils showed good awareness of how learning a language could help their economic well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning in languages

The quality of teaching and learning in lessons observed was good.

- Working relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and contribute much to pupils' enjoyment and the progress they make.
- Lessons were well planned to include a variety of activities to achieve the objectives outlined. This included plenty of opportunities to develop speaking skills on the topic of the lesson.
- There were good elements of the Secondary Strategy and the ML Framework in lessons, including lively starters. Plenary sessions were sometimes too rushed to be meaningful.
- Group and pair work were built into lessons well, and included good opportunities for collaboration.
- Routines were well established and ensured that lively work was well transacted.
- Teachers often lapsed too readily into using English without good reason and so pupils did not always have the role models they needed, particularly to learn how to use the target language beyond the topic.
- No ICT was seen in use by pupils. Two lessons included the use of a digital projector which enhanced the lesson.
- Assessment for learning is developing with pupils beginning to self and peer-assess. Oral feedback to pupils in lessons on how well they are doing is good.
- Marking in books does not accord with the marking policy. Whilst up to date with ticks and praise, it does not include many diagnostic comments or targets for improvement. There is no particular focus for marking; on occasions mistakes are not corrected. Pupils had mixed views about how helpful it is and there was a feeling that it is better in German than French.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work to match the new course books in Key Stage 3 are only just being developed. In Key Stage 4, as in most schools, schemes of work follow the examination syllabi.
- ICT is not used sufficiently by pupils, partly due to limited access, nor is its use clearly enough focussed on raising attainment.
- Reading is not developed sufficiently through a variety of authentic reading resources, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- In Key Stage 3 the upper band pupils have three periods of French a week in Year 7. The lower band has two periods of French each week in years 7 to 9.
- The upper band study German in Years 8 and 9 as well as French and have one week of French followed by one of German. The time is limited

in which to reach the higher levels of the National Curriculum and achieve a good base for further study, and there is a long gap between the study of each language.

- In Key Stage 4 all pupils have 180 minutes a week which is sufficient.
- Entitlement is well met in Key Stage 4 with a language built into two different option routes.
- Pupils can do extra work after school or get help with their homework. There are popular trips to France and Germany and the school is setting up an exchange with Germany.

Leadership and management of languages

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- You and the senior leadership team are very supportive of languages, and, like other subjects, its development is clearly outlined in the school improvement plan.
- Subject leadership is satisfactory. It is not yet as strategic as it needs to be. The subject leader is enthusiastic and has done much to improve the department. However, there are a number of developments which are still on the starting blocks. For example, the development and use of assessment information to improve progress, for example of boys in French; developing up to date schemes of work; and broadening provision at Key Stage 4.
- Self evaluation is becoming part of the department's routine, feeding into the whole school process. There is a thorough analysis of Key Stage 4 results leading to priorities, much less so for Key Stage 3. Contributions languages can make to the Every Child Matters agenda are not thoroughly understood. However, overall the priorities for improvement identified through self-evaluation are the right ones to pursue.
- There are no feeder primary schools currently providing a language. There are plans to discuss this with the primary schools and the lead languages teacher at Paulet has the development of this as part of the job description.

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

- This year 31% of pupils take a language in both Years 10 and 11. This includes four taking two languages in Year 10, and three in Year 11.
- The school has no formal plans for reaching the stated benchmarks. However, all pupils have a formal interview at options time and are encouraged to study a language.
- Presentations are made to pupils to show their usefulness beyond school and visits and exchanges enhance pupils' perceptions of learning languages.
- The options system provides two pathways which include a language.
- Different accreditations have been looked at but not yet pursued.

- Spanish is being introduced to the COPE course, but not as a languages department initiative.
- The school maintains the flexibility in staffing to accommodate higher numbers.

The development of speaking skills

- There are very good opportunities in lessons for pupils to develop their speaking skills on the topics through role plays, and to practise and discuss examination topics.
- However, pupils do not have sufficient practice through teacher-pupil talk and pupil-pupil talk (beyond the topic of the lesson) to speak more spontaneously and make their own meaning.
- Opportunities to teach in the target languages are often missed.

Inclusion

- The achievement of lower attaining pupils and those with learning difficulties and disabilities is good, taking into account their low literacy levels.
- Very good relationships with teachers, the routines they establish and the lively work planned for these pupils ensure that most enjoy learning a language and make good progress in lessons.
- Only higher attaining pupils can study German throughout the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to increase the amount of target language spoken by teachers in lessons and to enable pupils to talk more creatively outside the topics of the lessons
- to increase and improve the use of ICT so that all pupils have opportunities to improve their accuracy and editing in writing, know how it can help them with their speaking, and use the Internet for research to feed into simulations and read authentic texts
- to extend opportunities for reading: using text as a means for discussion and understanding of form and structure and using authentic texts and promoting reading for interest and pleasure
- to ensure that the developments which are just getting underway are pursued, monitored and evaluated, and that the way German and French are timetabled in Key Stage 3 is reviewed.

Science

The overall effectiveness of science is good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement in science is good.

- Standards are below average at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, but all pupils achieve well, taking into account well below average attainment on entry to the school.
- At Key Stage 4 some higher attaining pupils perform well and are on course to achieve good GCSE results. Thorough revision and independently produced written work provide a good basis for pupils to reinforce their understanding and knowledge.
- Pupils' good achievement is well supported by a consistently applied literacy policy that focuses on expecting pupils to speak and write accurately about their scientific understanding.
- Lower ability pupils and those with learning difficulties make good progress due to effective, sensitive and knowledgeable support. Similarly, pupils with English as an additional language also make good progress due to persistent support and high expectations that pupils use the correct science terminology in their spoken and written work.
- Teachers provide good support to help those pupils who arrive during the school year to do their best at GCSE.
- The small number of sixth form students following science courses makes sound progress and reaches broadly average standards.
- Pupils' personal development is good. Boys and girls and pupils from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together.
- There is a small amount of inattention that, for the most part, good teaching minimises.
- Pupils behave safely in practical work. The great majority of pupils help each other and discuss experimental results and what they mean maturely.
- On the new GCSE science course the great majority of pupils work well together on the elements of the subject that involve them developing their own opinions about how scientific information should be used.

Quality of teaching and learning of subject

The quality of teaching and learning in science is good.

- Lessons are well planned with a wide range of activities that engage the interest of boys and girls alike.
- Teachers produce challenging work and their expectations are high.
- Practical work and investigative approaches are used well to develop pupils' scientific understanding.

- In the best lessons teachers use explanation and modelling of scientific ideas effectively to enhance pupils' learning.
- The focus on literacy skills is good. Key words are displayed in all laboratories. The quality of questioning and discussion is good and engages pupils in explaining their understanding and as a result, their thinking skills develop well. Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to explain their understanding and knowledge in writing, thus preparing them well for examinations and tests.
- On the whole, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. There is potentially some minor distractive behaviour but nearly all teachers deal with it effectively, mostly by making sure activities interest and involve pupils.
- Marking is satisfactory although there are some inconsistencies. Occasionally work is not properly monitored by teachers, allowing some unfinished work to go unchecked. Some books are marked thoroughly with indications of levels achieved and what pupils need to do to improve. In other instances there is very little marking, scant comments and no guidance on how to improve.
- Assessment is good overall. Despite inconsistent marking, teachers have comprehensive records of how well pupils perform and how they progress. As a consequence lessons are closely matched to pupils' learning needs. Pupils are increasingly involved in assessing their own work.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. Work is challenging and teachers provide clear explanations and challenging questioning. Students respond well and work hard.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum is planned well to meet the needs of all pupils. The focus on literacy and numeracy is effective and literacy in particular is very well planned into schemes of work and contributes to pupils' good achievement.
- A good range of materials to support higher and lower attaining pupils is readily available.
- Provision for ICT in science is satisfactory and is improving as more resources are purchased.
- The new GCSE curriculum is in place. It is effectively planned to include applied science and approaches to help pupils understand how science works.
- There are effective strategies to include investigations in all topics and to adopt investigative approach wherever possible.
- There is a suitable range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities.
- The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory. Not many students are following sixth form courses but the school has ensured that the shared provision with a local school meets the needs of students.

Leadership and management of science

Leadership and management of science are good.

- The department is well led and managed and staff work well together. The subject leader provides clear, determined leadership with a focus on raising standards and improving achievement.
- The quality of self-evaluation is good with a particular focus on improving teaching and learning. Lesson evaluations are rigorous, giving clear direction for improvement.
- Evaluation of marking has been less rigorous, not clearly identifying inconsistencies in providing feedback to pupils and giving them advice on how to improve their work.
- The department has worked determinedly to ensure shared sixth form provision meets the needs of students.
- The quality of professional development is good, with close links with the local authority, and attendance on courses meets the department's specific needs.

Inclusion

The provision for inclusion is good.

- The learning needs of all pupils are well met. There is good, sensitive support for pupils with learning difficulties and for those who are in the early stages of learning English language. Teachers and support staff have a good grasp of what individual pupils' needs are, plan work accordingly and provide opportunities for pupils to acquire the skills they need, but also to work independently.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- using the wide range of assessment information the department has to consistently inform pupils of how well they perform and what they need to do to improve their progress
- ensuring that day-to-day marking is consistent so that pupils have frequent guidance on how to improve their work
- ensuring that the quality of provision for sixth form students is consistently good so that they achieve as well as they can.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Pam Haezewindt
Her Majesty's Inspector