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Dear Ms Newton

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages and art, craft and design

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and for the help of your staff and students, during our visit on 19-20 March to look at work in modern languages and art and design.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus in modern languages 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. In art it had a particular focus on art, craft and design within the art department and included an evaluation of the effectiveness of provision on the breadth and depth of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills and the contribution of the subject to pupils' creative development.

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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of lessons.

Modern languages

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

Achievement and standards

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

- At GCSE, although the numbers entered are low, the proportion of pupils who attain A*-A and A*-C is well above average.
- Most pupils achieve their anticipated grade although a significant minority, particularly in Spanish, does not.
- There are no persistent differences over time in the achievement of boys and girls in Key Stage 4.
- At Key Stage 3, teacher assessment in 2006 indicates that attainment was about average for boys and girls. Given its prior attainment, this year group achieved satisfactorily.
- Pupils' written work is accurate and well presented (although some clutter their exercise books unnecessarily with obsolete worksheets). They have a good grasp of grammar; when writing at length they use a suitable range of expressions and structures.
- Progress in lessons varies with the quality of teaching, but is rarely less than satisfactory.

Quality of teaching and learning in modern languages

Teaching and learning vary considerably; at times they are outstanding, and overall they are satisfactory.

- Teachers have a sound knowledge of their subject and a good awareness of how to prepare their classes for examinations.
- Lesson plans set out clearly what is to be learned and suitable activities to ensure that the intended learning takes place.
- Relationships are good. Pupils are confident their teachers will help them to succeed. They behave well in class, volunteer answers when they can, and have responsible attitudes when working individually or in groups.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' ability to learn and to use grammatical structures.
- Assessment is used well to help pupils to understand how to achieve higher grades. Teachers, for example, explain assessment criteria in some detail and expect pupils to use them to assess each other's work.
- In the very best lessons, the teacher skilfully enables the pupils to work independently, constantly assessing their progress and subtly offering well judged support to individuals and to the whole class.

- In some classes the teacher talks too much. In these lessons, a lot of time is spent teaching how to assess and not enough on how to improve the pupils' French or Spanish.
- Teachers use too much English, even when issuing routine classroom instructions.
- ICT is not used sufficiently, either for presenting new language or for giving pupils purposeful activities.
- Insufficient concentration on teaching correct pronunciation and intonation leads to pupils' relatively weak performance in this area.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- The time allocated to the subject is just adequate.
- The timetable allows the creation of relatively homogenous groups, which makes it easier for the staff to teach their classes.
- The French scheme of work sets out clearly what is to be learned. Its content has a suitable emphasis on grammatical structures, and the Key Stage 4 scheme is relevant to the GCSE syllabus. It does not contain enough guidance to staff on how to introduce into their lessons more speaking and listening activities and work that would engage the lower attaining pupils.
- The department supports a satisfactory range of extracurricular activities, including a study visit to France.

Leadership and management of modern languages

Leadership and management are good.

- The new head of faculty has made a very good start by identifying ways in which teaching and learning are to improve. Recent innovations designed to bring about improvements in areas identified in the last inspection have not had time to take effect.
- Monitoring and evaluation are outstanding. The head of faculty uses an extensive range of data to assess the department's effectiveness, including surveys of pupils' views. Rigorous lesson observations contain frank and perceptive judgements about teaching strengths and what needs to be improved.
- Accurate self evaluation leads to suitable action to tackle the key issues. The departmental development plan has a strong focus on standards and on teaching and learning.

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

The school is making satisfactory progress in this area.

- After declining to 12%, the number of pupils opting to learn a language in Key Stage 4 has now increased to about 35%. This is due to improved marketing of the subject, removal of some of the barriers created by the option system, and better teaching in Key Stage 3.
- The faculty's plan to increase participation to 50% over two years is ambitious but appropriate. The actions designed to achieve this are imaginative, though activities are aimed at attracting high attaining pupils rather than middle and lower attaining pupils.

The development of speaking skills

This is satisfactory.

- Speaking is less well developed than pupils' writing skills. Too few pupils use verbs well enough to construct simple sentences in conversation.
- Their pronunciation and intonation are good when the teacher helps them, but many pupils' pronunciation is anglicised and on occasion difficult to understand. This occurs particularly when pupils rely on the written word for support.
- Pupils' comprehension of spoken French is weak, largely because they do not hear the teacher speak it much in class.

Inclusion

- The faculty does not analyse the achievement of different groups of learners.
- Able pupils achieve at least satisfactorily because the teaching and the curriculum are designed to challenge and support them.
- Able boys achieve as well as able girls.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- adjusting the teaching and the content of lessons to engage lower attaining pupils better
- using ICT more to present new work and to give pupils more purposeful activities
- giving pupils more opportunities to hear the foreign language in lessons in order to improve their listening and speaking skills.

Art and design

The overall effectiveness of art and design was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to Year 9 from starting points typical of their age and experience. Students gain confidence in their drawing skills and in working in two and three dimensional media. Sketchbooks in Years 7 and 8 show that structured exercises and written research are effective in developing subject skills, knowledge and understanding. The large scale constructions based on animals created by Year 9 students are of good quality. However, overall there is insufficient evidence of students' individuality expressed through the subject by the end of Year 9.
- Year 10 students said they enjoyed the opportunity and freedom to develop their projects and wider use of clay and print; there are good examples of sustained development emerging although standards are widely variable. Year 11 students have produced some individual and imaginative work, but their depth of understanding about chosen influences is not always well developed, for example, of a particular artist or work of art. Following the national trend, girls outperform boys in the subject. In 2006 GCSE results fell from well above average to below average. This is attributed to increased numbers taking the subject combined with unforeseen disruption and staffing shortages.
- Sixth form students make satisfactory progress. Their ability to evaluate work critically is developing; AS-level students shared insights into their paintings and 3D structures based on architectural details in Sheffield. First hand research and development had a positive impact on the quality of this work. GCE A level achievement is satisfactory.
- Students behave well in their art lessons. They appreciate the work displayed in the art studios that provide clear examples of standards to aspire to.

Quality of teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Most lessons are well structured and sustain students' interest. Teachers demonstrate and explain points related to drawing or composition clearly. The highly structured teaching is effective in

promoting students' understanding of the formal elements of art and in systematically developing drawing skill. However, in Years 7 to 9 the different needs of individuals are not identified clearly enough either at the lesson planning stage or in some lesson activities to allow for more individual approaches or encourage greater variety in the use of media.

- The whole school focus on assessment for learning is used effectively within lessons; students receive regular individual feedback from teachers. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of written feedback; some comments, while positive and encouraging, do not give enough clarity about how to improve work further.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The department handbook describes a range of working and processes in two-dimensional media that includes painting and printmaking, and three-dimensional media that includes ceramics. However, students' understanding of three-dimensional concepts is less well planned and developed in all key stages. The use of design computer software to generate ideas has been introduced, and a good resource of laptops is used within the art department.
- Visiting artists have been involved very effectively and enrich the curriculum by providing students with an insight into the interface of contemporary art, artists and the world of work. Staff also have the expertise to incorporate their skills and experiences as artists into their teaching more regularly.

Leadership and management

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Following a period of disruption to staffing there is now stability. The teaching team are specialists with good levels of expertise and appropriate expectations of students as they progress through the school. However, transition into Year 7 could be better managed in order to track the individual progress of students from the start and promote creative diversity early on.
- The subject evaluation and department plan is largely accurate. There are clear strategies aimed to raise achievement, particularly that of boys, and improve assessment practice further.

Inclusion

- The contribution of the subject to the inclusion of students is satisfactory. Subject specialists place high emphasis on improving

literacy within art and design. Students with wide ranging ability are supported effectively in art and design lessons and through extended school opportunities.

Breadth, depth and creativity of provision and outcomes

- This aspect is satisfactory overall due to the increased breadth of opportunities in Key Stage 4, depth developed in the sixth form and creative diversity that emerges as students progress through the school. Nevertheless, these qualities could be developed earlier and by all students, by encouraging more creative diversity in Years 7 to 9.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising students' examination performance by identifying at an earlier stage highly creative students and those at risk of underachieving
- promoting students' individuality and expression by addressing personalised needs and interests in planning and by widening the range of experiences and approaches to use of media
- improving the consistency and quality of written feedback given to students across the department.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority 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