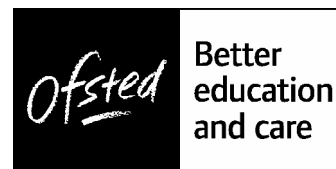


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Mrs Felicity Martin
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Dear Mrs Martin

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 28 February - 1 March to look at work in modern languages (ML).

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

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Learners' achievement and standards are satisfactory at both Key Stages.

- In 2005 and 2006 standards in French were similar to those expected nationally overall but girls and higher attaining pupils underachieved. Current standards have improved in Years 10 and 11 because of the new leadership.
- At Key Stage 3 pupils are performing as would be expected nationally; achievement is satisfactory.
- At both Key Stages progress in lessons is satisfactory. Pupils develop their ability to understand spoken French and they can hold basic conversations by the end of Key Stage 3. Speaking is generally focussed on examination tasks at Key Stage 4, for which pupils are well prepared. By the end of Key Stage 4 they have made better progress in reading and listening than they have in speaking and writing.
- Writing is better developed at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 pupils are encouraged to write at length, they are able to use a range of tenses and they are generally accurate. Higher attaining pupils produce some interesting work with a lively use of expressions in their coursework.
- Behaviour and attitudes are good; pupils enjoy the lessons and relationships are good. They have a good understanding of how useful languages can be at work.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Teaching and learning are satisfactory.

- Teachers understand the examination syllabus well and prepare pupils well for the examinations. Pupils make good use of the revision guides and 'self-help' booklets.
- Teachers have high expectations of both behaviour and the quality of work. The learning support assistant is well used to develop pupils' oral skills.
- ICT is underdeveloped, especially to improve speaking and listening skills.
- The pace of lessons is sometimes a little slow.
- There are inconsistencies across the department, for example in how teachers use language to give instructions and in the teaching of grammar.
- Assessment is not always accurate at the end Key Stage 3 and feedback on performance in class and on homework does not always tell pupils what they can do to improve, especially with regard to pronunciation. Marking and feedback on work does not always encourage pupils to work from memory and to use language spontaneously.

Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory.

- Higher attaining pupils can enter early for the GCSE in Year 9 and will learn Spanish from Year 10. They also have the opportunity to learn Russian and Chinese after school.
- Pupils have ten per cent of curriculum time to study a language which is adequate.
- The scheme of work is currently being developed and, although it provides an outline of the topics to be covered, it does not provide enough guidance for teachers to enable them to have consistent approaches to the teaching of grammar or how to use the new language for explanations and instructions. This leads to inconsistencies across the department.
- Pupils have very good opportunities to go on trips and visits to improve their language skills.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- Through the sustained support of the senior leaders in the school and the direction provided by the head of department there has been improvement in several aspects, for example, there has been a significant improvement in the behaviour and attitudes of pupils. Teachers have much higher expectations and pupils know that they will be expected to behave and achieve well.
- There is a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the department and plans to address issues are good. For example, there has been an improvement in standards in the current Years 10 and 11 because teachers focus much more clearly on the requirements of the examination.
- Pupils are becoming increasingly independent; they are able to use reference materials effectively. This area was identified by the Head of department as one that was in need of improvement and has been effectively addressed

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

- The school currently has 35% of the cohort taking a language in Year 11, 40% in Year 10 and predicts 46% of the current Year 9 will take a language in Year 10 from September 2007. The school is encouraging take-up by improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- The option system allows all pupils to choose up to two languages but currently only more able pupils are choosing to take a language at Key

Stage 4 and, although the school is investigating other forms of accreditation to help increase the range of pupils it attracts, it has not yet found anything it feels is suitable.

The development of speaking skills

- Pupils are well prepared for the oral examination at Key Stage 4. The good revision booklets, clear guidance and mock orals all contribute to this.
- Language work is a carefully planned element of visits and trips; those pupils who attend make good progress orally.
- The learning support assistant, who speaks French, is well deployed to develop pupils' oral skills.
- Feedback on oral tasks does not always tell pupils how to improve, especially with regard to pronunciation, or encourage them to work from memory.
- There are some missed opportunities to encourage pupils to speak spontaneously.

Inclusion

- Results in 2006 showed that girls significantly underachieved and that higher attaining pupils were not doing as well as they should, but in the current Years 10 and 11 this is not the case.
- Few pupils with learning difficulties take a language at Key Stage 4 but all pupils at Key Stage 3 take a language and make similar progress to their peers.
- Higher attaining pupils can take the GCSE in Year 9.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving marking and feedback on work, especially with regard to pronunciation in oral work as well as encouraging pupils to work from memory and to use language spontaneously
- planning ICT tasks into schemes of work and encouraging pupils to use ICT to support their oral work
- increasing the consistency of teaching techniques such as explanations in French and the teaching of grammar
- continuing to investigate new forms of accreditation which will meet the needs of a wider range of pupils at Key Stage 4 as well as those coming from primary schools with some language knowledge.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML 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

Joanna Peach
Additional Inspector