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Mr T Sharpe
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Dear Mr Sharpe

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 2-3 May 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding.

- Students achieve GCSE results which are well above the national average in French and German. In 2006 targets were well exceeded in both

languages. In German students achieved 100% A*-C grades. In French this was slightly lower but in both languages 25% of entries attained an A* or A grade and 50% attained an A*, A or B grade. In Key Stage 3 modern language targets were also exceeded at both level 5 and level 6 and results were well above those expected nationally. A small number of post-16 students take languages and in 2006 they achieved their predicted outcomes. Three took up places to study languages at Oxford or Cambridge.

- In most lessons observed pupils made very good progress. They are willing speakers and are developing good pronunciation and intonation because teaching ensures that there is enough practice. They write complex sentences from very early on in their language learning and examples of extended and creative writing demonstrate that students of all ages are confident to 'have a go'. Although this writing is not always as accurate as it could be, it communicates well enough.
- In a Year 8 lesson pupils showed how they could seek information from an authentic web site with the prompts two of their peers provided – an ingenious way of developing reading skills alongside comparing and contrasting a French school and its history with that of Saint Mary's.
- Students enjoy learning languages very much. Their attitudes and behaviour in lessons are exemplary, yet students are also lively and show a keen interest. They are very knowledgeable about why language learning is important.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good with some excellent features.

- Most teaching is very lively with very good pace and challenge. Lessons are mostly very well planned, in detail, to achieve their objectives.
- There is good account taken of the ML Framework. Almost all lessons built up students' grammatical knowledge very well. Starters are very good and link well to the main learning objective. Plenary sessions are less good and are generally too rushed.
- Lessons are conducted almost exclusively in the target language which students understand and respond well to. This provides students with good role models and they in turn attempt to talk outside the confines of the topic of the lesson.
- ICT is used to enhance language learning both by teachers and students and there is good encouragement for independent learning and revision via ICT. Plans to increase this for all students are in the development plan. However, ICT such as text manipulation and word processing for drafting and redrafting for accuracy and for different audiences, as part of a lesson, are not yet well embedded.
- Assessment for learning is being built into lessons – for example, students are asked to evaluate others' work and suggest how it might be improved,

they self assess using level descriptors which they have as a desk mat. Students also do a termly self-review which they find helpful.

- Whilst marking is up to date and vigilant, not all books in Key Stage 3 have helpful, short-term student targets.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is very good.

- The curriculum is flexible. There is a sufficient amount of time for languages overall. German and French in Years 8 and 9 are allocated the same amount of time. Extra German is provided to those students who need it.
- The programmes of work and the activities planned in lessons mostly meet the needs of students very well and ensure that they achieve well and enjoy language learning. The schemes of work in French are up to date, comprehensive and include reference to the ML Framework. ICT and assessment are built in. However, those in German are being updated currently.
- A good variety of resources is used to interest students and develop their language skills, spontaneity and creativity.
- There is a wide range of ML provision outside of lesson time which contributes very well to students' enjoyment and achievement and their cultural awareness.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management at all levels are very effective.

- The subject leader is passionate about language learning and leads the department very well along with the second in department who is just as passionate. All members of the department work very well together and have designated roles to play. The department works very well as a team. There is paired observation of lessons and moderation of students' assessments.
- Student attainment data supports teachers' planning. The department's self-evaluation is very good, but under-estimates its effectiveness. The development plan is strong.
- You, senior management and governors are extremely supportive of languages and your evaluation of the department is accurate. The result of such strong leadership and management are the excellent outcomes.
- Whilst recognising the development of primary languages in the feeder schools and using knowledge of this to add to baseline data for individual students, the school has yet to look at the implications of this for its own languages curriculum.

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

- The school still treats languages as part of the core and the only students who do not study a language are those who need extra curriculum support and take one GCSE less.
- In general, since September 2004, take-up has been just below the higher benchmark of 90% but for the coming year it is 94%.
- There is usually a number of dual linguists and this has varied in recent years from six to 14.

The development of speaking skills

- Speaking skills are developing very well. Students enjoy speaking and are very willing to take risks.
- Pronunciation and intonation are developing well.
- Teachers generally have high expectations of students and constantly encourage them to 'have a go' without written support once they have practised sufficiently.
- Preparation for speaking in the examinations is good.
- Teachers are good role models and students are expected to operate in the classroom in the target language.

Inclusion

Inclusion is very good.

- Nearly all students learn German as a second language in Years 7 and 8.
- A few students have literacy support instead. It is possible for them to take up German later in Key Stage 3 if they request to do so.
- Extra time is available for students who need or want some extra teaching in German, the second language.
- There is good and expanding provision for gifted and talented students.
- Entitlement is met in Key Stage 4.
- In lessons there was differentiation and extra support from teachers where necessary. High expectations of all students have a very good effect on all and result in well above average outcomes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- making better use of plenary sessions so that students can assess their learning and what they might do to improve, and so that teachers can plan next steps accurately
- improving consistency in setting short-term targets for improvement in written work
- ensuring that the department liaises with primary feeder schools and that the implications of primary language learning are planned for in good time.

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

Pam Haezewindt
Her Majesty's Inspector