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Mr N Tyson  
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Dear Mr Tyson

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils/students, during my visit on 11-12 June 2007 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 reading skills are developing and how reading is used to develop language skills. 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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards in 2006 were below what would be expected nationally at all key stages in both French and Spanish but current work shows a marked improvement, especially in Years 7, 8, 10 and 12. The current Year 11 is still not predicted to attain grades in line with national

averages, according to current data in school, but standards are an improvement on 2006.

- Achievement in 2006 was unsatisfactory for both languages at all key stages. Pupils achieved worse in languages than in other subjects they took in the school but nevertheless over half achieved better than would have been predicted given their attainment at the end of Key Stage 3.
- Current work in books and information from the tracking system shows that there is still some underachievement, especially of the higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 3, but that there is improvement in Key Stage 4. Most pupils now achieve satisfactory standards.
- Progress and standards in Spanish, especially in Key stage 3, are dependent on how much time pupils have to learn the language, which varies from class to class.
- At AS level in French in 2006 numbers were very small but pupils did not achieve their potential. There were no A2 entries for French and no entries for Spanish. Current information shows that pupils are making satisfactory progress.
- Pupils currently make satisfactory progress in writing for coursework, using a range of structures and opinions. They do not often write at any length beyond the requirements of the examination.
- In the lessons seen, pupils had satisfactory spoken skills. In most of the lessons they were able to express themselves with good fluency and accuracy but they only occasionally use the language to express themselves spontaneously.
- Most pupils say they find listening difficult, although they are regularly given listening activities. Few teachers use the language systematically for instructions to tasks and so pupils miss the opportunity to hear the language used for real purposes.
- Progress in Key Stage 3 has not been as good as it should be because the curriculum has, until this year, not been well designed. It has not allowed pupils to work with tenses until very late in Year 9, for example.
- Pupils are aware of the usefulness of languages but careers education does not always cover the types of jobs where languages are important.

### Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers mostly ensure that behaviour in lessons is good; pupils pay attention and work well together.
- The pace of lessons is generally good and pupils are expected to complete a reasonable amount of work.
- Teachers do not always plan tasks at the correct level for the higher attaining pupils at Key stage 3, although pupils with learning difficulties are well supported.

- Resources are carefully selected but teachers do not often use listening tasks to help pupils with their speaking or other activities.
- There is some inconsistency in the teaching of reading. Some teachers carefully exploit authentic and up to date materials, for example on the banning of smoking in public places, but others do not.
- Speaking is satisfactorily developed across the department; most pupils have good pronunciation and fluency and complete tasks well but a few pupils feel inadequately prepared for the examination. At AS level, pupils feel they are good at presentations when they have been given time in advance to prepare the language but they feel less confident about speaking more spontaneously.
- Teachers use the interactive whiteboard well to explain key points and as the focal point for games, for example. Pupils use ICT on a regular basis to help them practise their grammar or vocabulary but they do not often use authentic websites.
- During the past year pupils have been told the level they are working at and they are beginning to understand what they have to do to improve, for example by adding in opinions and connectives. Nevertheless, some higher attaining pupils in Year 9 struggle to attain the highest levels because of a legacy of a lack of focus on tenses earlier on.
- Pupils find it difficult to revise at home as they do not always keep work in systematic order and they have few resources to use independently.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is unsatisfactory.

- All pupils currently learn French at Key Stage 3 and a few learn Spanish in Year 9 but this is not formalised and means that provision in Spanish is uneven.
- Until recently the curriculum did not allow pupils to learn tenses early enough and so these pupils are still suffering from a lack of ability to attain the higher levels.
- The schemes of work are new and are starting to outline the key elements that pupils should cover but have not yet had sufficient impact in ensuring that there is consistency in the teaching of speaking and reading, for example.
- Almost all pupils arrive in Year 7 with some language learning. Ways to establish the extent of their progress and to amend the curriculum in the light of this are being discussed but have not yet been implemented.
- Some classes are taught by more than one teacher and, when this is also shared by a trainee teacher, pupils do not always get the benefit of systematic coverage of key areas of work.

- Take up in Key Stage 4 is low and the only accreditation at Key Stage 4 is the GCSE. However, pupils all have the opportunity to choose a language.
- Pupils at Key Stage 4 and post 16 are given the opportunity to visit France.
- Pupils are encouraged to learn another language or to improve their French or Spanish in clubs after school and in the lunch hour.
- There are some opportunities for pupils to write and email pen- friends in France.
- Pupils get access to native speakers to help them practice their oral skills.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- There is a clear drive to raise standards and the departmental development plan and self evaluation are mostly accurate. The recently appointed subject leader and senior leadership team have a good grasp of strengths and areas for improvement, much of which is based on careful tracking of pupils' progress.
- The school has sought local authority advice and support and, alongside the effective subject leadership, has the capacity to continue to improve provision in ML.
- Standards have risen over the past year. Lesson observations and work scrutiny are helping to improve teaching and learning and behaviour has improved significantly.
- Take up in Key Stage 4 is low but is slowly rising as pupils start to feel the benefits of the changed curriculum and improvements in teaching.
- The subject leader is aware that there is still much to do: in particular, improving the consistency of the teaching and learning, ensuring pupils are well prepared for the examinations and ensuring that schemes of work support the drive for higher standards.

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

- Currently 20% of pupils in Year 10 and 25% in Year 11 are studying a language. Only one pupil takes two languages. The figures for the current Year 9 show that over 20% have chosen to do a language in Year 10 from September 2007.
- The senior leadership team are discussing how they might meet the benchmarks for language take-up and currently ensure that small classes in Key Stage 4 are allowed to run.
- There is no accreditation other than GCSE at Key Stage 4.

The development of reading skills and how well reading is used to develop language skills

Pupils' development of reading skills is satisfactory.

- Pupils can understand texts they are presented with, although most of these are short and often from the text book.
- Pupils read for pleasure occasionally, using magazines and reading schemes. Pupils sometimes read authentic texts from the internet and read letters from pupils living in France.
- There were some good examples of pupils being given interesting authentic texts, such as the ones about smoking, where pupils were expected to use a range of strategies to work out what texts meant including the use of cognates and predicting meaning from context.
- Pupils occasionally use dictionaries and say they enjoy being more independent and being given a choice of reading matter.
- Pupils are better at reading for detail and scanning than they are at understanding gist or inference.
- When pupils read aloud they mostly have good pronunciation and teachers help them with this by correcting them sensitively.
- Pupils do not often use reading as a spring board for other work such as speaking or writing and the development of reading skills is not clearly outlined in the scheme of work.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- A few higher attaining pupils in Years 9 and 11 are not doing as well in languages as they do in other subjects they take in the school because they have a legacy of a curriculum that did not allow them to learn tenses early enough.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are well supported and make satisfactory progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improve the schemes of work to ensure more consistency in teaching strategies, such as approaches to the teaching of reading and speaking
- improve the quality of reference materials to help pupils to work more independently and to be better prepared for the examination
- improve the quality of the curriculum, especially in Spanish in Key Stage 3.

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