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Mr P Logan
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Dear Mr Logan

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 4-5 July 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards are above average and achievement is satisfactory.

- Standards are above average and students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their starting points.
- According to teacher assessments in 2006 standards reached at the end of Key Stage 3 in French and German were above expectations.

- In 2006, GCSE results were above the national average in French and below average in German. However, since the proportion of students entered for examination in German is much higher than is the case nationally, any comparison with national figures is unreliable. There is evidence of significant improvement in the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades in both languages over the last two years. There is a significant difference between the performance of boys and girls in examinations with girls outperforming boys at the higher grades. The school has strategies in place to remedy this and in lessons seen during the inspection, there was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.
- Progress in lessons observed was satisfactory overall; it was good in half of the lessons observed.
- Students in Year 7, studying geography through the medium of French, were mostly able to understand the main points and some detail from texts and extracts of speech about the way of life of Aborigines in Australia. Those in Year 12 were able to understand some detail about the electoral system in France.
- In a Key Stage 3 German lesson students displayed high levels of concentration and combined what they knew already with new learning to construct sentences for themselves. Students in Year 10 clearly enjoyed using an internet site to extend their range of vocabulary and to produce their own list of issues related to global warming.
- Students behave very well in lessons, show interest and remain on task. They display particular enjoyment in using the language for problem solving activities and in using the languages in realistic situations. They work and collaborate well in pairs.
- All students spoken to have positive attitudes and know why it is useful to learn a language.

Quality of teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teaching and learning in lessons was mostly satisfactory with much that was good.
- Lesson planning is mostly good with well sequenced activities which enable students to build effectively on previous learning.
- In a well planned Key Stage 3 French lesson students rapidly gained confidence in using new language to describe a house as a result of clear presentations and frequent opportunities to practise using it, including games.
- The target language is not always used as much as it could be and so pupils miss out on essential role models for more spontaneous use of language. Pupils are generally not well enough prepared to talk in the target languages beyond the topic of the lesson or their examination preparation.
- The range of extended writing is limited in both Key Stages 3 and 4.

- Texts are used effectively to develop students' awareness, identify patterns and extend their range of language and structures.
- Assessment is regular in all four skills and feeds into whole school assessment. Whilst this helps with setting it is not yet used as much as it could be for lesson planning. As a result some students find tasks too easy or too difficult.
- Plenary sessions during lessons to check what has been learned lack focus. They are often done orally and it is uncertain as to whether all students are able to follow or are able to understand how answers were arrived at.
- Opportunities for students to work collaboratively or independently of the teacher are limited and opportunities for them to use the languages themselves are often restricted to rehearsal.
- Marking provides good guidance about how to improve. Students themselves, particularly in Key Stage 3, are not involved as much as they might be in evaluating their own work, or that of others, and setting their own targets.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The school provides two languages in both Key Stages 3 and 4. All students, except those for whom an alternative curriculum is provided, take a language to the end of Key Stage 4; both French and German are offered as GCSE options, although there is no other accreditation. Both French and German are also offered to advanced level in the sixth form and a small number of students learn Spanish from scratch for the International Baccalaureate (IB). Currently the most able students in Year 7 take one language and have experience of a second through the 'immersion course' in geography. At present there is no opportunity for students to take two languages in Key Stage 4. This disadvantages able linguists in the next stage of education. The Key Stage 3 curriculum will change from 2007 when all Year 7 students will take French and those who achieve well will also take up German or Spanish as a second modern language in Year 9. There is good justification for this restructuring, particularly in view of Year 7 students who will arrive having started French or Spanish in Key Stage 2.
- Schemes of work are under review. The use of information and communications technology (ICT) is not well represented nor is there sufficient detail about how tasks are to be approached by groups of differing ability within lessons.
- The 'immersion course' in French develops students' reading and listening skills well but opportunities for students to develop skills of speaking and responding are limited.
- Language learning is enriched by long-standing exchanges and trips to France and Germany, including work experience for sixth form students in France. There are also booster classes after school for Year 11 students.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- You and senior leaders are supportive of languages and much has been done to improve the quality of provision over the last two years.
- External advice and support have been sought and, alongside increasingly strong subject leadership, ML is steadily improving.
- The introduction of the IB including Spanish from *ab initio* to higher levels in the sixth form is successfully raising the profile of modern languages within the school and proving popular. Take up of languages in the sixth form has increased considerably over the last three years.
- Self-evaluation and the departmental development plan are good. The subject leader has a clear grasp of strengths and areas for improvement. The department is now more focussed on improvement and intervention. Standards and achievement have improved and the key priorities for improvement are in place.
- The subject leader is aware that there is still much to do, in particular improving the proportion of good teaching, ensuring students make consistently good progress, and ensuring that the use of assessment information informs lesson planning.
- Liaison with primary schools is at the early stages of development and, as yet, there are no firm plans as to how continuity and progression are to be achieved for those children joining the school in September who have begun to study French or Spanish in Key Stage 2.

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

- The school exceeds the benchmark of 90% since almost all students study either French or German to the end of Key Stage 4. This is due to change to around 75% in September 2007 in order to better meet the needs of a small proportion of students.
- The school does not offer accreditation other than GCSE.

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

This is satisfactory

- Students are able to translate what they are set to read.
- There is some evidence of students interpreting for others, mainly more complex instructions, but this is not developed consistently across the department.
- Students use dictionaries reasonably proficiently.

- In one lesson students used German texts from the internet effectively to extend their range of language and were able to make up their own sentences using the new language they had learned.
- Students in the sixth form are able to use headlines and visual clues to work out meaning. This is not well developed in Key Stages 3 and 4.
- In Key Stages 3 and 4 texts are used effectively to enable students to identify patterns and therefore improve their knowledge and understanding of grammar.
- In Key Stage 3 reading is sometimes used for problem solving activities, although this is not fully developed across the department.
- Reading is used effectively to develop intercultural understanding. Good practice in this area was seen in the sixth form.
- A satisfactory variety of texts are used. In the French 'immersion course' a variety of maps, labels and word maps were used successfully to enable students to understand the main points of the topic they were studying in geography. In Key Stage 4 a German Greenpeace internet site was used to good effect to extend vocabulary and in the sixth form newspaper and magazine articles were used to give students an insight into the French electoral system.
- Opportunities are missed to develop students' reading skills and reinforce learning through demonstration. For example, plenary sessions are often done orally with no reference to the text, so that students are not given the opportunity to learn from others by seeing how an answer was arrived at.
- Strategies to develop reading skills are not yet written into schemes of work although, since the department has introduced new course materials very recently, the review of schemes of work is at an early stage.

Inclusion

- All students study a language in Key Stage 3 and almost all in Key Stage 4.
- Entitlement is well met in Key Stage 4. Although at present there is no opportunity for students to take more than one language in Key Stage 4.
- Sometimes students' needs could to be better provided for to ensure lower attaining students are well supported and the more able sufficiently challenged in lessons. .
- Provision in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving. Students have the opportunity to continue with French or German and those following the IB course have the opportunity to take Spanish from scratch, although at present this involves only a small number.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing opportunities for students to use the languages themselves, and speak more spontaneously
- improving the use of assessment information in lesson planning to support and challenge individual students more effectively

- ensuring continuity and progression in languages for those students joining the school from Year 6 who have already begun their study of a modern language.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop modern languages 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

Judith Tolley
Additional Inspector