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Mr A Beaumont  
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Dear Mr Beaumont

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 16-17 October 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.

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 or parts of lessons.

### Context

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory. The languages department has, in recent years, suffered very severe staffing difficulties. Despite strong management, and support for a wide curriculum through specialist language college status, these have had a deleterious effect on departmental progress. However, staffing has, this year, strengthened and the department has the potential to make rapid progress.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory

- GCSE results in 2006 were broadly in line with national figures in terms of A\*-C percentage passes, with almost all pupils entered for a language. This pattern has continued in 2007. There were variations from language to language, and across skill areas within languages. Russian results were particularly strong. Pockets of underachievement have been identified in French, and in German where it is more marked.
- In addition to the three main taught languages, pupils also took GCSEs in nine home/heritage languages. Results were generally very high, although larger entry numbers in Urdu led to a wider range of results.
- Entries were made at AS and A2 levels in all three main taught languages, as well as in four minority languages. Outcomes were broadly in line with national figures, although some underachievement has been identified.
- At Key Stage 3 pupils' results are, again, broadly in line with national figures. However, given that all pupils study two languages throughout this period, and that time allocation is generous, the school rightly acknowledges that better results might be expected. One third of pupils do not attain the expected level by the end of Year 9. The difference between boys' and girls' attainment is significant.
- Good use of data is now enabling the department to pinpoint where pupils have underachieved. Close analysis of teaching and attainment over different skill areas has the potential to improve target-setting and raise achievement in the future. In the relatively small sample of lessons seen during the visit, two-thirds of pupils observed were making good progress in their language-learning.
- Pupils are pleased that their school has language college status and are proud of the range of languages offered. In interviews, they particularly mentioned Russian and the opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation in their home and heritage languages. They think language-learning is important as a life-skill. Where their attitudes to languages are less positive, these are directly related to some experiences of weaker language teaching.

## Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with some very good features.

- Teachers want their pupils to succeed; most lessons are characterised by good relationships, with good pupil behaviour.
- The best teaching is supported by very detailed planning, with a clear focus on pupils' learning outcomes. Most teachers use the Framework well to identify learning objectives.

- Whilst some teachers use the target language almost exclusively in their lessons, which results in a high level of challenge for pupils, this practice is inconsistent across the large team.
- Resources are carefully selected, and teachers in the department are benefiting from recently installed information and communication technology (ICT) equipment. They are beginning to use this well to present clear linguistic inputs. In the best classes, pupils take part in very motivating games, such as foreign language versions of *Who wants to be a millionaire?* Opportunities for pupils to have 'hands-on' experience with ICT equipment are currently limited to certain teaching rooms, but all pupils have some access.
- The department is developing assessment as a major initiative and some good examples of this were seen. In a Russian lesson, one pupil shared her writing with the class by the use of a visualiser and data projector. Year 7 French pupils were shown how their speaking was already moving from Level 1 to Level 2. Year 11 German pupils were led through a range of exciting learning activities which were then linked to their forthcoming GCSE speaking exam. However, these approaches are not yet widespread across the large teaching team.
- Teachers' marking, whilst mostly conscientious, shows variation in the quality of target-setting.
- The deployment of teaching assistants and foreign language assistants needs review, in order to ensure that staff other than teachers are used to maximum benefit, particularly in Key Stage 3 classes.

### Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- All pupils learn two languages throughout Years 7, 8 and 9. On entry to the school, good account is taken of pupils' prior learning and experience of languages in deciding which languages they should study. Higher attaining pupils are identified at the end of Year 8, and they can begin fast-track GCSE work in Year 9.
- The great majority of pupils (96%) continue with a foreign language to GCSE, and those pupils taking early entry in Year 10 have the opportunity to learn a new language in Year 11. Around 7% of pupils each year take two languages to GCSE.
- The sixth form offers AS and advanced level courses in all three main languages, as well as in several languages of the local community.
- Pupils are encouraged to take early-entry GCSE in home and heritage languages. The school holds an annual event where pupils teach their peers a language: Teach a Friend a Language (TAFAL).
- ICT use is at a relatively early stage of development in supporting work in languages, but virtually all classrooms have recently received data projectors, and one classroom has a networked bank of computers.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management of ML are good.

- The department's difficulties in recruiting and retaining good teachers in recent years have proved extremely challenging to senior and departmental leaders. It is a credit to your determination and hard work that overall achievement in languages has remained at least satisfactory.
- Good new appointments and creative approaches to subject leadership are now leading to rapid improvements in the overall quality of teaching and learning throughout the school.
- The head of languages is very knowledgeable and dynamic, has a high profile in local languages initiatives and has developed the school's reputation for the teaching of Russian from Year 7 upwards. He has led the team well through recent difficult times, and has ensured that the team is cohesive, supportive and forward-looking.
- Very good line management, with a senior manager meeting fortnightly with all subject leaders, ensures that new initiatives are monitored and supported effectively.
- The languages teaching team is a very large one, but these firm management structures point to the school's capacity to bring about planned improvement in languages.
- The department is involved in many new languages initiatives, and there is a shared acknowledgement that energies need to focus this year on establishing a consistent approach to good teaching and learning in Key Stage 3.

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

Almost all pupils study a language in Key Stage 4 as part of the specialist college requirement.

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

Pupils' development of reading skills is satisfactory.

- GCSE results show that pupils' attainment in reading varies across languages, for example it is weaker in French than in German. There is currently no analysis of Key Stage 3 work at skill level.
- Pupils learning Russian do a lot of reading, and express enjoyment at the challenge of a new script.
- Pupils can understand texts they are presented with, but these are mostly short and often from text books. Many text books are quite dated, and so pupils lose out on opportunities for topical material.

- There are no reading schemes or regular opportunities to read for pleasure programmed.
- Pupils have the opportunities through the school to purchase magazines to read for pleasure.
- Pupils do not systematically use dictionaries to extend their reading.
- In a Year 9 French class observed, pupils took turns to read aloud, and this was undertaken in a fast-paced way which kept them on their toes – and helped them improve pronunciation.
- Sixth form pupils enjoy reading stories and jokes, but this type of reading appears to be largely limited to post-16 work.
- Departmental access to the internet, and new data projectors installed, have the potential to offer a wider range of up-to-date reading matter.

## Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- All pupils have the opportunity to study two languages in Key Stage 3 and almost all continue to GCSE in Key Stage 4.
- Pupils have good opportunities to develop their home and heritage languages, and there are plans to extend this work further.
- Weaknesses in boys' progress have been identified and different strategies are being trialled to address the issues.
- Some lower attaining pupils are in need of more support in Key Stage 3 lessons.

## The impact of the language specialism on the school and community

- Woodbridge High School is well established as a specialist language college, alongside its business and enterprise status. Languages are an important part of the school's ethos, with all pupils studying two languages throughout Key Stage 3 and almost all (96%) continuing with at least one language to GCSE.
- French, German and Russian – the school's main curriculum languages – are offered in the sixth form. The school is highly unusual in offering Russian as a joint first foreign language throughout the school from Year 7 upwards.
- Outreach work to local primary schools is focused mainly on Russian, and Year 6 pupils' linguistic needs are taken into account on transfer to the school.
- The school also provides a rich range of other languages, including those of the local community, in extra-curricular sessions. These are open to all pupils and members of the wider school community. A highlight of the languages year is the annual TAFAL (Teach a Friend a Language) event which raises the status of 'minority' languages spoken within the community.

- The school is involved with other local schools and SLCs in developing the Key Stages 2 and 3 curriculum. The head of languages is a lead teacher within these local networks.
- Cross-curricular initiatives have been undertaken, but recent staffing difficulties have forced the languages department to postpone some of these whilst staff stabilises. A rich range of trips and visits has nevertheless continued to enhance the international dimension in the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included the need to:

- develop consistently good teaching and learning in Key Stage 3, with greater use of games, ICT, topical reading and challenging use of the target language in lessons
- develop paired planning, teaching and coaching opportunities to bring all teaching up to the level of the best
- develop a rationale for the deployment of classroom and foreign language assistants to support pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop 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

Anne Feltham  
Her Majesty's Inspector