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Mr C Hummerstone
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Hummerstone

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 27-28 November, 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards are above average; achievement is good overall.

- At Key Stage 3 in 2007 pupils attained above average results in French and German according to teacher assessments and achievement was good.
- At GCSE in 2007 in French pupils attained grades that were well above the national average with many more of the very highest grades than

would be expected nationally. This was a significant increase in the results for the previous two years. Pupils achieved well, gaining better results than they did in the other subjects they took. In German they attained grades slightly below the level expected nationally; achievement was satisfactory when compared to other subjects. In Spanish they attained grades well below the expected level and did less well than would be expected given their other grades. This was mostly due to having very little time to study the language as they only started Spanish in Year 10, weak preparation for the oral examination by pupils and staff illness.

- At AS and A2 in French and German numbers were very low but pupils achieved better than would be expected given their grades in GCSE.
- The progress of the pupils currently in school is good overall. Pupils make good progress because they are well taught and they do particularly well in coursework. The most able pupils also do well in speaking. Boys and girls make similar progress in all languages.
- In French and German pupils have good pronunciation and speak fluently and accurately but in Spanish they find this more difficult. Pupils are given plenty of opportunities to speak in class and they all take part in a competition where they have to do a presentation and recite a poem. Many pupils take part in exchanges and visits to France or Germany and return with improved skills in speaking and listening. In Spanish, especially for the less able pupils, speaking is often a weakness and pupils are reluctant to spend enough time practising for the oral examination beyond the lesson time.
- In reading, pupils cope well with texts they are given. They are all taught how to use a dictionary and do this effectively. They are sometimes given opportunities to read authentic materials, such as the one they were given on a well known celebrity getting married. Pupils also enjoy opportunities to use a reading scheme.
- In writing pupils regularly produce different sorts of writing such as brochures, emails and posters. Their coursework shows that they are able to use a range of structures and to express themselves clearly on a range of topics and use tenses accurately.
- Current pupils studying AS and A2 in both languages are making good progress, producing some excellent work in German for example, which showed very good spoken skills and demonstrated a determination to try hard to use more complex language.
- Pupils enjoy learning languages and appreciate that different cultures have different customs but say they would like to do more work on this, especially in French.
- Pupils are aware of how languages might be useful to them; they know that it is helpful in gaining entry to university and that it is a useful skill for many jobs.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Teaching and learning are good overall.

- In French and German, teaching and learning are good because teachers prepare pupils well for the examinations; they make the lessons fun and use interesting resources.
- Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) well. There is a set of departmental laptops and also many pupils in Year 7 have a school laptop, so they are regularly given tasks which help them to develop their writing. In one lesson all pupils completed a lot of work using laptops as they had a series of tasks to complete and there was plenty of extension work for those who had finished. Pupils use ICT to develop their writing skills and they are sometimes used to help develop speaking skills, such as when preparing a podcast.
- In lessons pupils regularly have opportunities to speak in pairs and groups, which they enjoy. Pupils say that they often have lessons when they are allowed to practise speaking and they feel confident in their oral work.
- Pace is generally good with pupils being expected to complete a lot of work, especially when working on the computer. Pupils work hard and enjoy the lessons. Nevertheless, there were instances in lessons when able pupils had finished the work set but were not given anything else to challenge them.
- Resources are well selected to interest the pupils, for example, they were given pictures of celebrities to describe, or role plays which enabled them to use their imagination in a German AS level lesson.
- Teachers are well aware of pupils' progress as they keep very good records and are able to track which pupils are doing better or less well than expected. Pupils know clearly what they have to do to improve and they know the level at which they are performing. In class pupils get good feedback on their performance so that they can improve their own pronunciation, for example.
- Teachers consistently use the foreign language in class and so their pupils regularly hear the language constantly. Pupils have good role models and consequently good pronunciation.
- Pupils appreciate the extra help and support they get from teachers outside lessons to enable them to make progress. Working relationships are very good.
- Pupils are encouraged to keep their work systematically so that they can revise from their books easily.
- Homework is well set and is generally also available on the school website so that pupils and parents can see what has been set. Pupils who have been absent are encouraged to look at the lesson outlines which are also on the website and parents can easily see what their child has been doing.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- In Year 7 only a few pupils arrive having learnt some French at their primary school. The school is aware that more and more French is being taught in local primary schools and has been involved in discussions with primary staff to make sure that they know what pupils have done. The school plans to support primary schools in their language teaching from next year.
- In Key Stage 4 most pupils are able to opt to continue with a language and currently about 40% do so. Currently pupils following a vocational pathway cannot also study a language in curriculum time. There are a few pupils (about 6%) who do two languages, mostly this is in curriculum time but there is also the opportunity to study German GCSE after school.
- The progress of pupils studying Spanish is adversely affected by not being able to start this until Year 10 and then only having two hours a week.
- Numbers for French and German at AS are generally low but are predicted to rise for 2008. Most pupils who do opt continue with French from Year 12 to Year 13. Pupils can study Italian GCSE in the sixth form.
- The schemes of work ensure that all pupils are well prepared for the examinations and that ICT is a regular feature of their work.
- A few pupils are entered early for GCSE and this is generally those who speak the language at home. Last year there were entries for Portuguese, Turkish, Polish, Russian and Chinese Mandarin.
- Extra curricular provision is good. Last year about 35 pupils from Years 9 and 10 signed up for an exchange with France and about 40 visited Germany last year, returning with improved spoken skills and an understanding of the culture of the country. There was also an exchange with Russia. There are also clubs for a range of languages, including Russian.
- There are many trips and visits abroad organised by the school which has just received an award for the international aspect of their work.

Leadership and management of ML

Overall, the leadership and management of the department are good.

- There is a good focus on raising standards in the department. In French there has been good improvement in the numbers of A*-C grades over the past three years and pupils are doing better in French than any other subject they take. In German pupils are doing marginally better than in their other subjects although results have fluctuated. Results in Spanish have risen but are still too low.

- The quality of the teaching has improved and there is a careful focus on encouraging pupils to know how they are doing and what they have to do to improve.
- Staff are well deployed and supported.
- Resources are interesting and well used. ICT has been carefully introduced and contributes to pupils' enjoyment and achievement.
- In German, the scheme of work has been altered to allow pupils to do more independent research and to find out more about the culture of the country. It has also included more ICT based work which has had a positive effect on pupils' attitudes to learning a language.
- Parents are involved in their children's learning; they have access to information about homework and the curriculum.
- Self-evaluation is accurate.
- Pupils are given good guidance about how useful languages can be to them and about careers involving languages. Nevertheless, it is not always easy for pupils to study a language if they are following certain options at Key Stage 4. Members of the senior leadership team are investigating how they can offer more pupils a language, perhaps by widening the range of accreditation on offer to meet the needs of pupils following a vocational pathway.

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

- Currently about 40% of pupils study a language in Key Stage 4; numbers have dropped over the past three years.
- Pupils are made aware of the usefulness of a language but it is difficult for those on certain pathways to carry on with a language in Key Stage 4. The school is aware of this and has plans to address it for the current Year 9. The school is investigating the possibility of different forms of accreditation.
- The department works hard to ensure that pupils know how useful languages can be and to make sure they enjoy language learning.

The development of reading skills

Pupils develop good reading skills.

- Pupils perform well in the reading element of the examination.
- All pupils are taught how to use a dictionary and they are given very good help in organising their vocabulary books so that they can also use these as a helpful source of reference.
- In Key Stage 3 pupils practise picking out specific pieces of information and they practise reading texts in order to get the general message but texts are often very short.
- Pupils are taught about the relationship between sounds and spellings in Key Stage 3 lessons. Pupils generally have good pronunciation when

reading aloud as teachers help them to do this and correct their pronunciation.

- Pupils are sometimes given opportunities to read longer texts from the internet but pupils say they would like to do more of this and to understand more about the culture of the country whose language they are studying.
- There are some books and magazines in the library and in classrooms which pupils can read for pleasure although they only occasionally do so.
- Reading aloud is encouraged and pupils have a competition to read poetry and make a presentation from written prompts.

Inclusion

- Higher attaining pupils did well in French but not quite as well in German.
- In Spanish several less able pupils did not do as well as they should have done.
- Individual gifted and talented pupils are allowed to enter the GCSE early and to study for a GCSE in another language after school.
- There is no significant difference in the progress of boys and girls.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the curriculum provision for Spanish and ensuring pupils have sufficient time to prepare for their oral examination in Spanish
- ensuring that more pupils can choose a language within the options system and continuing to investigate the different forms of accreditation at Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of a wider range of pupils
- ensuring that higher attaining pupils have challenging extension work available for them in class.

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

Jo Peach
Additional Inspector