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Mr M Juby  
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Dear Mr Juby

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and those of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 16-17 October, 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.

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 and extension activities

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards and achievement are good.

- By the end of Key Stage 3, according to teacher assessments in 2007, pupils achieved standards that were above the nationally expected level and made good progress in both French and German.
- In 2007 unvalidated results for GCSE show that pupils did not do as well as had been expected in French. These results are now the

subject of an appeal. In previous years results have been above, or well above, the national and local averages. In German, results in 2007 and for previous years were below the national average but many more pupils were entered than was the case nationally. Pupils achieved well and many did significantly better in languages than in other subjects they took in the college.

- In Spanish, pupils make very good progress given that they have only had two years of studying the language and approximately half gained a grade A\*-C in 2007. They follow an accelerated course which encourages them to use skills they have learnt while studying other languages. They learn to manipulate tenses within the first term, focussing on making their work accurate and they are expected to write paragraphs from an early stage.
- Pupils who speak another language, or want to learn one, are encouraged to take an approved qualification in this. Last year pupils took examinations in Italian, Russian, Arabic and Dutch, with all gaining A\* or A grades.
- Work in current books shows that pupils are making good progress and achieving well, with pupils who are less able achieving particularly well. The majority of pupils is able to use a range of tenses and to speak and write using some complex language. It is an expectation, even during the first half term in Year 7 that pupils will use full sentences and that they should be able to manage a conversation of several questions and answers using connectives and opinions.
- Gifted and talented pupils are allowed to enter examinations early and to study several languages and they make good progress.
- Pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress. For example, in a beginners' Spanish lesson the lesson was almost entirely in Spanish. Therefore, they were not hindered by any lack of fluency in English.
- In all languages pupils have good pronunciation, they are confident in speaking the language and they are allowed plenty of practice during class.
- Pupils develop the ability to read some extended texts, they are able to work out the meaning of new words from others that they already know both in English and other languages, but they are not often given the opportunity to read authentic texts beyond those in the text books.
- Pupils watch films and educational language programmes which varies their listening diet but most of their writing is connected with examination practice and there are a few missed opportunities to enable pupils to work from memory.
- Pupils behave very well, they listen carefully to the teachers and to each other and they collaborate well when working in pairs or groups.
- Pupils said that they were pleased that the college made them learn a language because they enjoyed it and they knew that languages would be useful to them. As one pupil said 'It just gives you more options with jobs, and you might want to work abroad. It gives you an advantage.' They are used to meeting people who speak another

language and they enjoy finding out about the similarities and differences between different cultures.

- Several pupils are now entering the college with some French learnt at primary school. Teachers take this into account and have adapted their schemes of work slightly. The college has plans to move to a more formalised system of recording what pupils have learnt and to use this more systematically to plan the Year 7 curriculum.

## Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers make lessons interesting for pupils. They use a variety of activities; they regularly use games and competitions to encourage pupils to participate and pupils clearly enjoy the lessons.
- Teachers use praise very effectively to encourage pupils to join in speaking tasks in lessons and to have a go at work that is not straightforward.
- Teachers use a variety of techniques to ensure that all pupils are given the opportunity to practice speaking the language and there is very good preparation for the examination, including special lessons with foreign language assistants.
- Working relationships are very positive; staff know pupils well and pupils are respectful towards them.
- Pupils are expected to complete a lot of work in lessons; many of the activities are well chosen so that they enable pupils to build up their understanding gradually before being expected to use the language for themselves.
- Pupils of middle and lower ability are extremely well supported. They are often given extra help from the teacher who breaks tasks down into more manageable elements, and teachers always check that pupils have understood.
- Very good use is also made of support assistants who speak the language to ensure that those who are struggling are given extra help.
- Teachers use the foreign language a lot in lessons which helps pupils to develop good listening skills.
- Pupils often use information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons with at least one lesson in every three or four being planned in the ICT room. Pupils mostly use packages that enable them to practice their vocabulary or grammar but sometimes they also access authentic internet sites, such as when they are practising booking a hotel.
- Teachers are very skilful in allowing pupils to practise the more mundane aspects of language learning using the computer, which they enjoy, so that they can then build on the vocabulary and grammar learnt.
- Pupils are regularly assessed and they know how they are doing, with good feedback in books telling them what they need to do to improve.

They are sometimes involved in marking their own and each other's work using a series of sheets designed by staff.

- Pupils in Key Stage 4 are very grateful for all the extra help they get in languages and for the time that teachers give up in order to help them at crucial points such as examination revision time.
- Pupils also use the wealth of revision sheets which are provided to help them work at home.
- Teachers do not often allow pupils to use language spontaneously, creatively and from memory, especially in Key Stage 4.

## Quality of curriculum

The curriculum is outstanding.

- The curriculum meets pupils' needs very well, especially those who are in danger of becoming disaffected.
- The college insists that almost every pupil studies two languages (French and German) in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 almost every pupil studies at least one language from a choice of French, German, Italian or Spanish.
- About one in four of pupils studies two languages in curriculum time and many other languages are offered after school or on intensive courses. For example, pupils can study Arabic, Mandarin, Dutch, Russian and Italian. The pupils studying Mandarin do so as an intensive course which also involves a visit to the country and pupils often return enormously motivated and with improved language skills.
- Almost all pupils who want to do so, take part in a trip during their time at college. Exchange visits are well supported and pupils make good progress in their spoken language because of this.
- There is a variety of courses and accreditation, including ASDAN, applied languages and ASSET accreditation.
- Pupils who have studied French in Key Stage 3 but choose to continue with another language in Key Stage 4 are offered the chance to complete an accelerated GCSE in Year 10 in French by doing extra lessons after school.
- All courses are planned to cover a range of skills and to develop pupils' ability to understand and use the language. ICT is an integral part of the curriculum and with a dedicated ICT suite, pupils are often to be found practising a language in their lunch hour or after school.
- The college is making links between languages and other areas of the curriculum. Last year it successfully trialled teaching Geography in French to a group of Year 11 pupils who had taken the GCSE early.
- Pupils who join the college after Year 7, or those who need extra support, are offered very effective extra help from the teaching assistants who speak at least one other language.
- The school also uses its language college status to encourage the teaching of languages at other institutions locally, including the college of further education. It provides a teacher who does some the teaching

of German AS, for example. This is very beneficial as pupils get continuity of teachers and the numbers of pupils taking languages at AS from Pilton has increased.

- Schemes of work give clear guidance to teachers about what to teach and how pupils should be assessed, although there is little guidance on the teaching of reading.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good with some outstanding features.

- There is a very clear vision about the future of languages in the college and a strong desire to improve still further.
- There is strong support for languages at all levels in the college. The language department takes the lead in innovation and change both in the college and the local area.
- The department is exemplary in how it supports pupils who find learning languages difficult, with particularly effective deployment of teaching assistants.
- The curriculum has been carefully designed to meet pupils' needs and there is a huge range of extra curricular opportunities for pupils to pursue their interest in languages.
- The college plays a key part in developing the capacity of local primary schools to teach a language. It works closely with eight local primaries and a local secondary to help them with this aim.
- The college is also a lead school for the strategic learning network in the region and has chosen to focus on assessment for learning. The college already has well developed techniques which it can share with the partner schools. Although the group has only met once, there is already evidence of increased sharing of ideas between the local schools who have all agreed to work together.
- The provision for pupils at the top end of the ability allows them to study two or more languages and to enter early for examinations.
- Results are analysed and procedures are immediately put into place to remedy any weaknesses. The recent fall in results in French has led to a more intensive focus on speaking and an appeals procedure is under way. Nevertheless, analysis of results is not always refined, for example, there is not an easily accessible breakdown by gender or ability.

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 is satisfactory

- Pupils develop some good reading skills from an early stage. In Key Stage 3 they learn to skim and scan texts for meaning and they are aware of different strategies, such as using cognates and similarities with other languages.
- 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, especially in Key Stage 3 and they are generally those from the text books.
- Reading texts are often used as a model for writing activities, for example a text on what there was to do in a town was used as the basis for pupils to write their own description but there were few examples of pupils writing more creatively from a model.
- Pupils are taught about the relationship between sounds and spellings in some Key Stage 3 lessons. Pupils generally have good pronunciation when reading aloud as teachers use a lot of the foreign language and so pupils regularly hear the correct version.
- Pupils are sometimes given opportunities to read more authentic or longer texts when accessing information on the internet but this is not well developed and opportunities are missed to help pupils to understand more about the culture of the country whose language they are studying.
- There are some books and magazines which pupils can read for pleasure but these are not often part of a lesson and often only available for those who make a special effort to request them.
- Pupils have access to dictionaries when they need them but many rely on the glossaries at the back of the text book as most of the reading comes from these sources.
- A few pupils have passed an advanced level languages qualification in reading using the ASSET scheme, having entered for the GCSE early.

## Inclusion

- This is outstanding.
- Almost every pupil studies a language and achieves at least a grade A\*-G.
- Pupils who need extra support are very well catered for because the support assistants, all of whom speak at least one other language, are able to work intensively with them.
- Pupils who arrive at the college with little language learning, or without one of the main languages taught, are given intensive catch up sessions.
- There is a range of accreditation to suit the needs of a range of pupils, including ASDAN and the college is planning to introduce the international ASDAN award.

- Pupils with EAL make good progress in Spanish, for example, because teachers use little English in lessons and they are careful to make instructions very clear.

The impact of the language specialism on the college and community

- Pilton has been a language college for four years. Languages are a very important element of the college ethos, with almost all pupils studying a language and approximately 25% taking two languages to GCSE.
- Language college status is used very well to promote all aspects of language learning as well as to make links with other areas of the curriculum and the community.
- There is a very strong international dimension in the college which has just been awarded the International Schools Award (ISA).
- Pilton supports local primary schools to enable them to teach primary languages, working with eight local primary schools. It works well with the local authority to provide training for primary teachers. The languages department is developing a system to enable effective transfer of information from the primary schools to the secondary school about what pupils have learnt and their performance.
- The college works well with other local secondary schools and the local college of further education, for example, it provides staff to teach some of the AS course at the college of further education and is helping another secondary school to work with its primary partners.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the range of authentic texts available to pupils
- increasing the opportunities for pupils to work spontaneously, creatively and from memory in the language
- continuing to investigate ways of making links between languages and other areas of the curriculum.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML in the college.

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