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Mr J C Weaver
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Dear Mr Weaver

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 5-6 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards in ML

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Students' general attainment on entry to the school is below average.
- In all but the sixth form, standards have gradually improved over the last three years.
- At the end of Year 9, standards are below average; fewer students than nationally reach Level 6 and above.

- By the end of Year 11, those students who continue to study French reach well above average standards. Their attainment in French is higher than that in their other subjects.
- Standards in the sixth form are below average. Overall, students do better at AS Level than A2. None has recently achieved an A or B grade at A2.
- In lessons observed, students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. The small number of students who study French at Key Stage 4 make good progress.
- Students learn to write accurately and in most classes to speak French with a good accent and to ask as well as answer questions.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers plan their lessons well and often set a range of objectives or tasks to enable all students to make appropriate progress.
- There are many opportunities for students to hear and speak French in the classroom because teachers set a good example and provide a good model of the language for them to imitate.
- Teachers also encourage students to write accurately and to use tenses appropriately which results in good examples of extended writing from older students.
- Teaching has good pace and appropriate challenge.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good. They concentrate well and make good attempts to fulfil the tasks set.
- Good relationships between teacher and students are a major factor in successful learning.
- Students know how well they are doing compared with national norms because they are given regular feedback by teachers.
- Students say they enjoy learning French. They believe that it will help them to increase their career opportunities and to respect French speakers by speaking to them in their own language.
- There are few opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology (ICT) to support their learning. The department is equipped with interactive white boards but students rarely use computers.

Quality of curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- The curriculum has too narrow an examination focus and so students do not have opportunities to develop language learning skills as well as they might.
- Quarrydale teaches French to almost all pupils, apart from a small group of boys in Year 9, with below average literacy skills, who receive additional support.

- GCSE courses in French are offered in Years 10 and 11, and AS and A2 levels in the sixth form.
- The teaching of German had been discontinued following the school's inability to recruit a specialist replacement for a teacher who left.
- A beginners' course in Spanish is available from Year 10 but, at the time they are asked to choose, students have not had the opportunity to experience even a taster course in Spanish.
- ICT facilities are difficult to access and the school has little suitable ML specific software. This reduces opportunities for independent learning.
- The school library does not have a collection of books or magazines in French, although there is some reading material available in the department. Key Stage 3 and 4 students were unsure how to access reading matter. Sixth form students were aware that it was available and had made use of it.
- There is no foreign language assistant.
- Extra-curricular provision is limited to a day trip to France and support for coursework. As a result, many students have limited cultural understanding of the French way of life.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The school leadership team instigated an evaluation of the ML department which resulted in an overall accurate picture of its strengths and priorities for development.
- You have had already responded to recent difficulties by seeking to stabilise provision in French, the first ML.
- Courses at both Key Stage 4 and Post-16 have attracted low numbers of students. This year, because of the low take-up, the Year 10 course cannot be timetabled and takes place as a twilight activity. The school has supported uneconomic A2 Level and AS Level groups for some years to confirm a commitment to ML.
- School leaders set targets and monitor standards, teaching and learning.
- Learning resources are good overall, except for access to computers.
- Staffing has reduced as the curriculum contracted and the take-up at Key Stage 4 declined.
- Leadership of the department is focussed on raising standards, through effective target setting and sharing with students an understanding of their progress.
- Individual students are well supported and appreciate particularly the help given with coursework.
- So far the school has not been able to offer teaching support to its primary schools.

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

- The school is still a long way short of reaching the 50% benchmark for language take-up at Key Stage 4.
- This benchmark has not been formally set or approved by governors.
- Although numbers at Key Stage 4 had risen gradually up to and including the current Year 11, they peaked at 19% and fell back again in 2007 to 6.7%.

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

The development of reading skills is satisfactory.

- Students are able to understand reading material which is presented in their coursebook.
- They can pick out key words and phrases and skim read for understanding. They read familiar material aloud with fluency and good accent but have too few opportunities to read unseen text.
- Teaching encourages them to relate words to English or other languages to work out their meaning.
- They have little experience of using dictionaries.
- Few students read French books or magazines for pleasure.
- Reading is not used to stimulate speaking development.

Inclusion

Inclusion is satisfactory.

- There are very few students in the school with English in an additional language. Most of these come from Eastern Europe and have become efficient learners of English with the help of fellow students. They transfer their language learning skills to ML.
- There are mixed ability groups in Year 7 and Key Stage 4. Planning for their lessons includes tasks suited to individual abilities.
- The school actively encourages all pupils to continue the study of ML beyond Year 9 regardless of their prior attainment.
- Significantly more girls than boys choose to continue to study French beyond Year 9.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- review the ML curriculum provision to increase opportunities for pupils to continue the study of ML beyond Key Stage 3, and plan for the increased use of ICT to enhance students' language learning
- increase opportunities for students to experience the culture of the language(s) they learn

- extend students' reading experience to material beyond that found in course materials, for example authentic texts, and encourage the use of dictionaries.

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

Peter McKenzie
Additional Inspector