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Mrs E Hitch
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Dear Mrs Hitch

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit with Michael McIlroy HMI on 12 - 13 March 2008 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of eight lessons, as well as a brief visit to a Year 8 Mandarin Chinese club session.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be outstanding.

Context

Beaumont School was designated a specialist language college in 2003.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good, and outstanding in some areas, and standards are above average overall.

- Key Stage 3 results are well above average. Fast-track opportunities result in many students reaching exceptionally high levels by the end of Year 9, but all do well.
- Results in 2007 at GCSE, where almost all students were entered for at least one language, were above average in two of the three main taught languages and most targets were met or exceeded. Results in German dipped slightly, but overall trends in recent years are strong.
- Robust numbers of students continue with their languages through to AS and A2 examinations.
- Students are currently achieving well in all languages, and achievement is outstanding in fast-track groups and in Spanish and Italian. Progress in all of the lessons observed was at least good, and often outstanding.
- Students listen and respond with enthusiasm in class. Their speaking skills are of a very high standard. They speak extensively and with confidence. Pronunciation and intonation are very accurate. Reading and writing skills are well developed.
- Students develop as language-learners very effectively and they are very positive about their progress. They organise their work extremely efficiently, and can explain in detail how they are developing different areas of knowledge and skills.
- They work well together, helping each other in pair and group activities.
- Their intercultural understanding is strong: students show great interest in similarities and respect for differences.
- They have a very good understanding of the importance of language-learning and are pleased that they have so many opportunities.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is always at least good and often outstanding.

- Teachers are highly skilled and this results in very high levels of engagement by learners. Lessons are characterised by excellent working relationships.
- Teachers plan their lessons very thoroughly and ensure that students are stimulated by lively and engaging resources. This results in high levels of motivation. Games and successive lively activities ensure that students maintain concentration; not a moment is lost and students learn to their maximum potential.
- Teachers ensure that learners understand fully what they are to learn and also the tools with which they will do this. Teachers use the target language for most parts of the lesson and this results in a very high level of challenge.
- Students appreciate the care which their teachers take to ensure everyone is involved and feels valued in lessons. One older student said: 'it's the best teaching I've had in the school'. And a younger

student said: 'you never feel like it's your fault if you don't understand it'.

- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to give students clear models of language and to enable them to practise in lively and entertaining ways. All teachers use data projectors on whiteboards to present activities and some teachers use this facility with their students in innovative and highly creative ways.
- Whilst teachers mark students' written work very conscientiously, there is variation in the quality of feedback to students and the extent to which next steps in writing development are clarified for them.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- Students have a choice of two languages out of French, German and Spanish in Key Stage 3 and they find this very motivating. Latin is also offered from Year 8.
- Almost all students achieve a GCSE in languages by the end of Year 11, many gain two qualifications and a good number continue into the sixth form. Italian is introduced into the curriculum in Key Stage 4 to provide further choice.
- Fast-tracking of identified groups, with GCSE taken in Year 9, enables higher-attaining students to take an AS course in Key Stage 4. Aware of the potential pitfalls of these complex arrangements, the school has undertaken an analysis of students' views and is adapting and refining the curriculum accordingly. This ensures that students remain positive throughout the demanding course and continue their language-learning into the sixth form and beyond.
- The International Baccalaureate has been introduced this year, and students are very positive about this development.
- Students have the opportunity to study Bangla and Urdu (as home or heritage languages) in extra-curricular classes and there are also opportunities to learn Chinese in Year 8 and Japanese and Russian in the sixth form. Students are encouraged to sit GCSE examinations in their home language, but they are not yet offered alternative accreditation where GCSE is not available or appropriate.
- The school offers an impressively wide range of extra-curricular visits, placements and exchanges. Almost every Key Stage 3 pupil takes part in an early visit abroad, and many go on to experience the varied opportunities offered as they move through the school.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are excellent and lead to very high outcomes.

- Self-evaluation is strong and the school's senior and middle leaders have a very good knowledge of what goes on in languages lessons. All

aspects of teaching and learning are very closely monitored and students are actively involved in this process.

- High quality leadership of the different languages ensures that students make continuous progress in all languages. Effective arrangements for departmental collaboration ensures that best practice is shared effectively across language teams.
- Accommodation and resources are excellent. There are ICT facilities in every classroom. Students also have ready access to multi-media rooms.
- The school supports a large number of primary schools. There is a clear rationale for developing primary colleagues' competence over time. Whilst outreach work is monitored, there is evidence that further visits to monitor teaching and learning would be useful. The Year 7 curriculum builds well on students' prior attainment.

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

All students in this specialist language college continue with at least one language into Key Stage 4. Almost all achieve success at GCSE in one language, and many in two. Those students successful at GCSE in Year 9 have the opportunity to study for an AS examination in Years 10 and 11.

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

This is good.

- Students have very good opportunities to see clear examples of written language through the use of data projectors and whiteboards and excellent printed resources.
- Teachers link the written word with the spoken word very expertly, and this enables students to become accomplished readers. This linkage of skills leads to high levels of achievement at all levels, with outstanding results from the fast-tracked groups.
- Exciting, stimulating printed materials encourage them to read, and to want to pursue their knowledge of topical and sophisticated topics.
- Dictionaries are used regularly and students' skills are well developed.
- Sixth-formers report using the internet widely for personal reading and research in the foreign language. There is less evidence of younger students reading beyond the classroom for pleasure, although very up-to-date text books provide standard texts of good quality for all students.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good.

- The school's philosophy and rationale for languages are underpinned by a high regard for equality and diversity. Teachers ensure that all students, and groups of students, are involved and achieve in lessons.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum is highly inclusive, with all students having the opportunity to study at least two languages. Very occasionally students with learning difficulties reduce this to one language in order to focus on basic skills. Nevertheless, the excellent progress seen in a Year 8 Spanish lesson by one pupil with quite complex learning difficulties indicates that high quality language teaching is supporting overall literacy development, rather than detracting from it.
- Although very high numbers of students achieve success in GCSE in one or two languages, there is currently no accreditation for those few students who cease study of a language prior to a GCSE course. Similarly there is scope for earlier identification of students' home or heritage languages in order to plan ahead for further accreditation wherever possible.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing greater consistency of practice in marking, giving feedback to students on their writing and defining next steps
- building on links with primary schools through (a) further monitoring of languages outreach work and (b) earlier identification of students' prior language experience, particularly home and heritage languages.

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 and local learning and skills council. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Anne Feltham
Her Majesty's Inspector