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Mr R Ruszczyński
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Dear Mr Ruszczyński

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and those of your staff and students, during my visit on 06-07 February 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. 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good with some outstanding features.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- In 2007, standards in French at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above average. Standards in German were average, students having begun the language in Year 8. Standards at GCSE in French and German were well above average. Students do better in French than in

their other subjects but less well in German. Standards at AS Level were above average and at A2 were average.

- Standards currently are broadly in line with those reported in 2007.
- Students attain well in all four skills with good examples seen in speaking, writing with accuracy and a good understanding of grammar. Students listen and read well; they are able to grasp the meaning of text when they do not know every word.
- Achievement is good overall. Students made good progress in most lessons, particularly when tasks were planned and delivered to meet individual needs. Their commitment and enthusiasm along with the excellent working relationships in the classroom contributed significantly to the progress they made.
- Compared to French, progress in German and Spanish is variable because students have spent comparatively little time learning these languages.
- Students enjoy learning languages and understand the influence they may have on their lives.
- Cultural understanding is fostered by the curriculum, visits abroad, the work of the foreign language assistants (FLA) and 'Access Week' which included work in a range of community languages.
- Students are advised of their potential prior to choosing their Key Stage 4 courses.
- Personal development is very strong; learning and progress are the result of outstanding working relationships. Teaching includes topics which support personal, health and social education (PHSE).

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and their teaching methodology often generates interest and enjoyment and helps students to make progress.
- The school is well-staffed with specialist linguists, a teacher following the Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) and three FLA.
- Students' speaking skills are well-developed in most lessons through pair work, role plays and a good role model from teachers.
- Students make good progress because they are taught a balance of the four skills and they learn to use them in combination.
- The department has a good marking policy, reviewed in practice through book monitoring, and shares sub-levels and targets for individual skills with students.
- Assessment is good. Students know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Students say they are encouraged to improve through special sessions after school and the help and advice given by teachers.
- The best lessons are planned for all abilities of students but in a minority, the highest- and lowest-attaining students are not sufficiently provided for.

- Cultural aspects of languages are included in the teaching and they are well catered for in extra-curricular activities.

Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work and assessment frameworks are very clear, regularly reviewed and include reading, speaking, information and communication technology (ICT) and cultural development.
- Although the school has very few students with home languages other than English, these students have played a part in lessons and in 'Access Week'.
- French is taught in all the school's principal feeder schools by Chellaston staff who then identify areas of the scheme of work for consolidation from Year 7.
- All students study French from Year 7. In Years 8 and 9 German and Spanish are studied in a rotating programme for the highest four sets of six in each band. German had previously been taught to the upper sets from Year 8. Spanish was introduced to half the cohort in the current Year 9 and to two-thirds in Year 8 and is proving a popular language with students.
- There is adequate time for the teaching of languages and the school uses this time creatively to provide an accelerated course in French, whereby gifted and talented students take GCSE at the end of Year 10. They then focus on their second ML in Year 11. However, older students believe that this has restricted their progress in German.
- The school met its target of 50% of students taking a language in Key Stage 4 in 2007. This target and outcome have been reported to Governors. The number of students is rising slowly and the school has a target of 55% for September 2008.
- At the present time accreditation is only through GCSE in French and German. Students study French to GCE AS and A2 levels in the sixth form. Year 9 students take the Certificate in Business Languages Competence in Spanish at the end of Year 9.
- The curriculum is well-planned to meet the needs of all learners, providing for gifted and talented students in French with accelerated courses and extending the teaching of Spanish to two in three students in Year 8.
- Extra curricular provision is good. Students appreciate language study based visits to three countries and regular support sessions after school.
- The school has developed outstanding ICT provision in languages through its status as a Technology College and all rooms now have interactive white boards; classes regularly access ICT facilities and there is access to a wide range of software. This provides considerable motivation to students.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Analysis, planning and creativity combine in a strong team environment to secure an ongoing trend of improvement.
- Support for languages from the school's leadership team (SLT) is strong. You and the SLT link person are enthusiastic, supportive and well-informed.
- The school knows the strengths and weaknesses of languages well. The department plans effectively as a result.
- The subject leader monitors performance very effectively, shares information and concerns with colleagues in the department, meets them regularly and plans very well for improvement.
- The SLT supports CPD and relates outcomes to the work. Three teachers developed skills in Spanish to support its successful introduction as a third ML.
- The school takes decisions on development of the ML curriculum on the advice of the subject leader who regularly attends SLT meetings.
- The school planned for and met its Key Stage 4 take-up benchmark of 50% in 2007. Governors agreed this target and were informed of the outcomes.
- The school is a partner school in the Strategic Learning Network engaged in research on why students want to learn languages, which has informed the school's planning.
- Motivating boys is a strength of the department through good male role models and use of topics of interest to boys, such as sport and ICT.

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

- The school surpassed its target of 50% in 2007 and has planned for 55% for 2008 which it is likely to meet.

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

The development of reading skills is good.

- Much authentic reading material is used in lessons to replace the traditional text books, which the department does not use regularly.
- Students can use context, cognates and clues to identify meaning. Progress in reading contributes to successful learning in all four skills.
- Magazines and materials are available in the department.
- Although there is not a wide variety of books and magazines readily available in the library, students are encouraged to use a range of websites.

- Sixth form students read recommended texts and develop good reading skills to support their study of French institutions.
- They search out reading materials independently from the internet to support topic-based work and to extend their skills.
- Overall, students relate well to reading and work well independently.

Inclusion

Inclusion is good

- Support from teaching assistants in mixed ability classes was outstanding.
- Curriculum provision is in a developmental stage to provide for gifted and talented students through the accelerated French group, and to extend the opportunities in ML for more students by the introduction of Spanish.
- Planning and teaching students of all abilities in most lessons was good but in the occasional lesson it was weaker such that all students did not always make optimum progress.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included to:

- plan and deliver a variety of tasks in all lessons to ensure that students of all abilities make appropriate progress
- continue to extend the range of accreditation.

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

Peter McKenzie
Additional Inspector