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Mrs G Kelsey  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Kelsey

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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- Achievement is good in relation to students' starting points.

- Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average in French and German.
- Although students' progress in developing writing skills is satisfactory, at present the range of students' writing is limited.
- Students who have previously studied French at primary school make good progress in Year 7. Their speaking and listening skills are well developed.
- Students have a very good understanding of grammar. They identify patterns, explain and apply them.
- Students speak confidently; they respond promptly and competently to the extensive use of the target languages in lessons. Their intonation and pronunciation are good.
- Students enjoy learning languages. They say: 'school would be less exciting if we didn't learn languages'. They have a very good understanding of the importance of learning a language and appreciate the opportunity to study other languages through the links with the local college.
- In lessons students are very well behaved, listen attentively and concentrate on tasks set. In most lessons they are keen to participate in whole class oral work. They increase in confidence and competence when they are given the opportunity to practise in pairs and small groups.
- Students are involved in evaluating their own progress on a regular basis, they have a good understanding about how to improve and are very well motivated

### Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- The quality of teaching and learning is good. There are instances of outstanding practice.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a good knowledge of subject methodology. Students benefit from excellent role models. The target languages are usually used very effectively; students' listening and speaking skills are well developed as a result.
- In the most effective lessons higher attaining students are effectively challenged to interpret for others and develop higher level listening skills as a result.
- Teachers plan their lessons well with short, manageable steps in learning. Students therefore build very effectively on what has gone before.
- Teachers present new language clearly so that students rapidly understand and use new language themselves.
- Opportunities for students to practise informally increases their confidence and competence, although these are often limited to rehearsal rather than to use the language for real purposes to give and gather information not already known to them.

- Students have a very good understanding of grammar and are frequently asked to identify and explain patterns in the language themselves. Texts are used well for this and to reinforce learning but opportunities are missed to develop more complex reading and writing skills through the use of longer texts.
- Teachers make good use of games and competitions as well as imaginative and interesting presentations and activities using the Interactive White Board (IWB) and information, communication technology (ICT) to engage and interest students.
- Questioning is used well to check understanding and in lesson planning assessment information is used effectively to meet individual needs. Marking is regular and gives good guidance about how to improve. Insistence on accuracy in pronunciation and spelling ensures high standards.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work detail content but lack guidance about how groups of differing ability are to be approached in lessons and yet in practice this is done well.
- Students' access to ICT during lesson time is limited at present but is in the process of being developed; students access ICT programmes in the library and at home.
- Home/heritage languages are celebrated and students are given the opportunity to get qualifications in their home languages.
- The proportion of the cohort entered for GCSE examinations in both languages is very high (94%).
- There is unevenness in the time allocated for languages. This has a negative impact upon progress for some students and upon the proportion of students who gain the highest grades at GCSE.
- All students study one language in Years 7 and 8 and higher attaining students study two in Year 9. Students are well informed about languages courses both at school and at the local college
- Entitlement in Key Stage 4 is met fully. Almost all students take a language in Key Stage 4. About a quarter study two languages.
- Students are entered for GCSE or entry level examinations.
- A good proportion of students continue their study of a language post 16.
- Extra curricular provision is excellent. 'Travel to Learn' programmes include Chinese, Japanese and Spanish and plans are in place to teach Latin. An exchange with teachers from Germany is well established, a student exchange is being planned and students have the opportunity to participate in trips abroad. Students talk enthusiastically about the Chinese club for Years 6 and 7, European Languages Day, French Day and assemblies featuring languages and other cultures.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are outstanding

- You and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) provide very strong support for languages.
- Leadership and management of the department is excellent.
- Self evaluation is accurate, based on the rigorous analysis of data. The Head of Department gives detailed feedback to SLT and governors on a regular basis. Strengths and areas for development are identified and action planned to raise standards. There is rigorous monitoring by the SLT.
- Underachievement is identified swiftly and support, negotiated with individual students, is provided through the mentoring system.
- The relative weakness in writing is currently being tackled through staff training
- Languages are regularly promoted in assemblies and other events in school.
- Resources, including a new language laboratory and interactive whiteboards in each classroom, are excellent. However language classrooms rooms are spread around the school. This restricts opportunities for informal monitoring and for the informal exchange of ideas and spread of good practice.
- Year 9 students and a languages teacher give lessons at a primary feeder school but this is limited to one occasion per year.
- Students joining the school with previous knowledge of languages are well catered for in Year 7, but links with primary feeder schools are in the early stages of development.

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

Take-up in Year 11 in 2007-08 is 94%. All students, except for a small number who follow an alternative curriculum, study at least one language. A good proportion of students also study additional languages after school.

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

This is satisfactory

- Opportunities are frequently taken to link sounds and spelling.
- Text is used effectively to reinforce learning.
- Text is used effectively to enable students to identify, explain and apply patterns and as a result students have a good understanding of grammar.
- There is little evidence of longer texts being used to develop reading strategies, for example skimming and scanning, using visual clues.

- Opportunities are missed for students themselves to explain the strategies they have used in understanding a text.
- There is little evidence of students reading for pleasure or using language from texts in their own writing

#### Inclusion

- The uneven time allocation and spread of lessons across the timetable slows progress for some students.
- There is no difference in the attitudes or achievement of boys and girls.
- Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities learn languages in mainstream classes and make the same good progress as their peers.
- Pupils are given the opportunity to study a wide range of languages both after school and through the 'Travel to Learn' programme at the local college.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- reviewing the timetabled provision to eliminate inequalities between different groups
- increasing opportunities for students to use the languages spontaneously and for real purposes
- developing the use of texts to improve students' reading and writing skills.

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,

Judith Tolley  
Additional Inspector