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Mr D Stevinson
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Dear Mr Stevinson

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 10-11 November 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 information and communication technology (ICT) is being used by teachers and students to improve language learning. 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.

Context

Sandy Upper School and Community College is a 13-18 school. Students have learned French from Year 5 in the middle schools from which Sandy takes its students.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- At the end of Year 9 in 2008 students achieved results broadly in line with national expectations.

- By the end of Key Stage 4 results in French increased slightly compared with the previous year and were in line with national averages. Those for Spanish declined from being in line in 2007 to below average in 2008 but with girls attaining a good percentage of A*-A grades. The decline was largely due to staffing issues.
- Students taking AS and A level also attained results broadly in line with the national average for grades A-E.
- Progress in lessons was variable, ranging from good to unsatisfactory.
- Students are learning reasonably well how to put words and phrases into sentences and extend sentences to make them more complex.
- Higher attaining students learned about different types of verbs and how to use them with clauses.
- Students can extract meaning from short texts satisfactorily. In a good Year 10 French lesson, students learned how to tackle understanding both spoken and written texts by identifying key words.
- Year 10 Spanish students in their second year could present themselves simply and understand words and phrases on the whiteboard, but extended speaking and reading were limited in all the lessons observed overall.
- Students' pronunciation is often weak and hinders communication.
- There was evidence of some good extended writing on display, and in the Spanish exercise books scrutinised.
- Students are aware of how useful learning languages can be and spoke about jobs in the future and their curriculum vitae.
- Overall, the students in Years 9, students learning Spanish generally and post-16 students were enthusiastic and appreciative of their teachers' efforts to help them learn a language. Year 10 French students were less so, particularly where lessons were split between two teachers.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with some good features.

- Teachers' planning is mostly detailed and logical, with clear objectives for learning.
- A series of appropriate activities is planned and carried out to reach the objectives.
- Too much English is used by teachers in most lessons and too little target language is expected of students.
- Too much unnecessary copying features occasionally, resulting in too much activity which is not purposeful, especially when time is restricted, for example in Year 9 French lessons.
- Occasionally poorly managed behaviour hinders learning.
- Teachers use the interactive whiteboard (IWB) to engage learners and students like this aspect of their learning.
- Use of ICT by students is limited, except Post-16, and they would like this to be increased in their lessons.

- Language assistants help students with their oral work but their roles have yet to be well defined for all groups so that they increase students' oral competence overall and not just for examination purposes.
- Marking is regular and in some books there are targets set. These are sometimes insufficiently focussed on language improvement. At times too many mistakes go unnoticed so students are in danger of learning wrong spellings, for example.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory

- There is suitable time on the timetable for learning languages in Key Stage 4 and Post-16, and for the second languages in Year 9. There is insufficient time for learning French in Year 9.
- The school offers three languages: French, Spanish and German. French is taught to all learners in Year 9 and about half the cohort does either Spanish or German as well. Each language is an option in Key Stage 4 and Post-16. For some groups French lessons are split between two teachers which students find unhelpful.
- There is insufficient use of the spoken language expected in some French lessons to meet the needs of the learners, which is borne out in both examination analysis and lesson observation.
- In order to broaden provision, the school manages to employ a Spanish language assistant and a volunteer assistant supports French.
- The school offers a well established French trip which is always well subscribed to and the department is in the throws of planning one to Spain this year. There is already much excitement about this among students. There are also revision clubs and students of Spanish have enjoyed football and cookery in Spanish.
- This year the department hopes to take advantage of the Leadership Awards associated with the school's sports specialism.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Senior leadership including governors are supportive of languages and want to find ways to support raising standards.
- The current curriculum leader is aware of strengths and areas for improvement. Exam analysis is thorough but it does not yet result in sharply focussed strategies for improvement.
- Similarly with departmental review: it is thorough but does not yet result in a development plan for languages which would tackle the key issues as well as school priorities.
- Monitoring and evaluation have been tokenistic over the past year, partly due to time taken up by staffing issues.

- Policies and schemes of work are satisfactory. The latter are based on course books. They do not exemplify, for example, how the target language is to be used spontaneously nor how ICT will enhance language learning.
- Resources are satisfactory but there is a lack of authentic material for reading.
- Professional development is focussed on the new examination requirements and not on identified weaknesses from examination analysis, or monitoring and evaluation.
- Accommodation is satisfactory even though one classroom is away from the main languages block.
- The department liaises with its middle schools particularly in relation to assessment. However, students arrive at Sandy with varying degrees of competence in French which the department has to cater for and for which one hour a week in Year 9 is insufficient.

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

- The school has not reached the first benchmark of 50%. There are 32% students in Year 10 taking a language and 31% in Year 11.
- The school has had to focus its priorities on whole school issues since the current headteacher took up post in September 2007 and the department on staffing issues in Spanish.
- It is in the process of restructuring the ML curriculum and has stopped 'fast track' French this year, partly due to lack of time in Year 9, and consequently the business qualification it offered in Year 11. It is going to offer this in Year 12.
- It has brought in German as an alternative second subject in Year 9 and as an option from Year 10 in 2009, hoping to attract more students.
- Accreditation at the end of Year 9 has been introduced but the impact of this has yet to be measured.

How well is ICT used by teachers and students to improve language learning?

This is inadequate.

- Teachers use the interactive whiteboards well to engage learners who particularly like using them themselves to demonstrate knowledge and/or present to peers.
- However, apart from Post-16 students, learners report that they use ICT rarely except occasionally to write up coursework and none was seen during the inspection. They do not, for example, research the culture of the target language countries and communities on the Internet, improve their accuracy in writing through drafting and redrafting text, or create cues for speaking and presentation.

- Students' entitlement to use ICT to enhance language learning is not met.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving achievement and standards
- improving teaching and learning by
- ensuring that there is enough speaking in the target languages in lessons by both teachers and students
- ensuring all lessons are purposeful
- integrating the use of ICT by students into lessons so that they can improve their language learning
- ensuring that all marking supports students' learning including speaking
- considering improving the length of time on the timetable for Year 9 French
- ensuring regular monitoring and evaluation of provision.

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

Pam Haezewindt
Her Majesty's Inspector
Subject Adviser for Languages