

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr J Loughton
Headteacher
Joseph Whitaker School
Warsop Lane
Rainworth
Mansfield
NG21 0AG

Dear Mr Loughton

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 24-25 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.

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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is satisfactory and standards are average.

- Standards at the end of both key stages were broadly average in 2007.
- Despite an improvement in 2008 standards remain broadly average at both key stages.

- Progress according to local authority (LA) data was satisfactory in 2008.
- Progress in lessons is satisfactory overall but progress in speaking is inadequate. Students have very limited skills in instinctive response to a picture, situation or question.
- Students' progress is hindered by lessons with little pace caused by over-use of English by both teachers and students and by students not making good use of groups and pairs for independent learning.
- The school operates an open-access policy to take-up at Key Stage 4. There is a growing percentage of students continuing to study a ML beyond Key Stage 3.
- Students' speaking skills are inadequate. They lack confidence in French and/or Spanish because they speak too little for real communication, and often have a poor accent because they read new material as though it were English.
- Progress in extended writing is most evident in or after Year 9. Before this they tend to write lists of words and sentences designed to practise grammatical points.
- Students receive much teaching of grammar and yet their grammatical understanding is not clear because they do not link it to using the language in a communicative way.
- Students have demonstrated significant creativity in their work in ICT to support their language learning. Presentations are creatively produced and illustrate good learning points.
- Many students do enjoy learning languages. They are largely committed learners, especially in and after Year 9. They follow instructions, try to fulfil tasks as asked and recognise the value of languages in their possible future lives. They understand the part languages play in business, politics and global understanding. One student described a commitment to language learning as '...respect for other people'.
- A number of students in the school have family or friends whose home language is not English. They show genuine interest in these languages and in the skills of speakers and their culture.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- Teaching methodology is formal and based on too little speaking and far too much writing.
- Teachers' planning is good, identifying objectives for a range of students' abilities, although the full range of objectives may not be fully delivered when support is not available.
- The school has good procedures for raising the expectations of all groups of learners: identified gifted and talented students, support by a dedicated linguist TA for students with learning disabilities and/or

disabilities (LDD), withdrawal from second ML to support those with a higher level of LDD and oral practice for post-16 students. All provide very effective support for ML learning.

- The development of all four skills is significantly imbalanced. Speaking is inadequate as most speaking consists of reading aloud prepared writing exercises. Writing dominates the teaching and learning style across all ages and stages. There are few opportunities to read authentic materials in the target language.
- Students do not write creatively until Key Stage 4 when some good imaginative extended writing is seen, further developed at Post-16 level.
- Good assessment practice ensures that teachers have information to plan lessons to take account of individuals' needs. Students understand their own levels of attainment and targets. They are aware of the level criteria as it is given and explained to each student.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Schemes of work take account of the latest developments of the National Curriculum and examination board requirements.
- Faculty priorities highlight the equal access to all four skills but this is not delivered in practice.
- Languages are just emerging in the school's primary feeder schools and the school is well equipped to incorporate learners with prior ML learning because of its previous history of admitting students from middle schools.
- Students are well guided and supported to take up ML in Key Stage 4 through presentations, contacts and individual support.
- Take-up at Key Stage 4 has increased significantly in the last four years to 58% and the current target is to repeat this increase to achieve 70% within the next four years.
- Students receive good support and guidance towards a sixth form course in languages. They feel that information from those students currently on the course is particularly valuable. A good number of students continue to study ML in the sixth form.
- Extra curricular provision includes booster classes and a link with a school in Brazil. Visits abroad are not organised by the ML faculty but ML students take part in visits abroad organised by other faculties.
- The school has taken advantage of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum to broaden its approach with themed lessons and will further develop it to accommodate students with primary ML experience as they arrive.
- There is a significant impact of the school's specialist sports status in the development of language leaders following the sports leaders model, which will support early ML learners in this and other schools.
- One student attended a summer course at the University of Salamanca from which she derived immense confidence and motivation.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The support from the school's leadership team for work in ML is very strong. The levels of support to the subject leader in self-evaluation and target setting have provided a good base for further development.
- Subject self evaluation is satisfactory. A compelling opening statement of principles, particularly in a commitment to develop the four skills, has not been delivered. Teaching methodology has not been developed as planned.
- Good accurate target setting has provided a basis for improvement in standards.
- The review analysis of 2008 examination results and SATs data is accurate.
- Staffing and resources are good. The faculty has good linguists and very effective support staff. There is a good level of resources, including ICT provision, many of the ICT materials being produced by the teachers themselves.
- The school library has a collection of books suitable for post-16 students but nothing to encourage younger students to read authentic materials in the target language.
- The school's decisions for developing ML are well founded and have the capacity to lead to effective development.

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

- The school has reached its targets and in the last four years has increased by 12% those following a course at Key Stage 4. It has now agreed a further four-year target to reach 70%, reflecting a continuing increase at the present rate.

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

This is good.

- ICT is used regularly and well by students to support their learning.
- The faculty has a dedicated ICT suite which is readily available and regularly used.
- All rooms have interactive white boards (IWB) and these are used by both teachers and students to manipulate words and occasionally pictures and other graphics.
- Commercial packages are used to support learning of students with LDD and as booster materials for students' home use. This acts as good motivation and students produce creative presentations in French

or Spanish including those about the culture of francophone countries and cross-curricular issues such as healthy eating.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raise standards in speaking by using more spoken target language for real communication
- increase the pace of teaching and learning by motivating students with a range of independent activities
- develop understanding within the faculty of the school's principles for ML learning and monitor their whole-school delivery and effectiveness.

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