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Dear Mr Munson

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 04-05 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, observation of five lessons and attendance at a special assembly for the school's link with China.

Context

The school has quite recently changed its designation from a 12–16 school to 11-16 and has applied to become an 11-18 school. It currently teaches languages and classics post-16 in conjunction with two local schools. The ML department is the lead department working with the sports college.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards in German are very good. In French they are satisfactory.

- In GCSE in 2008 results in German were well above average with 100% A*-C grades and a high percentage of students gaining A*-A; in French results were broadly average.
- Higher attaining students study German from Year 8 and have the option to continue in Key Stage 4. Their study in Key Stage 3 contributes to the well above average results at GCSE.
- Students at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2008 attained results just lower than expectations but there is a rising trend. The impact of receiving students in Year 8 who have done varying amounts of language in Year 7 is still working its way through the school.
- Progress in most lessons observed was good.
- Students demonstrate reasonable grammatical knowledge from an early stage in their learning.
- They write in paragraphs and are capable of quite accurate extended writing by Year 8, initially using models to help them.
- There was some evidence of students responding to questions in the target languages and carrying out simple role plays, though they tend to rely on the printed word for prompts.
- Too often teachers use English or translate their instructions into English thus diminishing students' need to listen carefully.
- Students mostly behave very well in lessons, listen well and remain on task.
- Students are very aware of how useful languages could be to their future economic well-being. ML contributes well to students' personal development.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is mainly good.

- Lessons observed ranged from very good to adequate.
- Teachers' planning is generally detailed; this results in lessons where objectives are met.
- Preparation for examinations is very thorough but can over-dominate the lesson.
- Teachers implement a series of good activities to achieve objectives including games, pair and group work, and good use of the electronic whiteboard. Students say lessons are fun and on the whole they enjoy them.
- However, some students think that they could speak more than they do in lessons and the inspection bore this out.

- The course book is relied on for reading texts so the many authentic materials available, including texts from the Internet, are not capitalised on.
- ICT activities are integrated into lessons to enhance learning and there is some good use. However, the department is getting used to its new facilities and so far the use of ICT is inconsistent across the department. Consequently, some students have more opportunities to use it more than others.
- Some self- and peer-assessment is getting underway through developments in assessment for learning (AfL) and students like doing more of their own marking. However, there are times when mistakes go unnoticed and students are in danger of learning the wrong thing. There is some very good teacher-marked written work with good short-term target setting, but not all is as good.
- New approaches to assessment and levelling work have been brought in this term and are being embedded into practice. A few Key Stage 3 students were hesitant about what their National Curriculum levels mean and Year 11 students feel they do not know how well they are doing in speaking. Nevertheless, students mostly feel they know how well they are doing and how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Entitlement is met in Key Stage 4.
- The school provides good time for languages on the curriculum.
- All students start with French in Year 7 and higher attaining students begin German in Year 8. This is about 50% of the cohort. They are provided with suitable time to study their second language in Years 8 and 9.
- In Key Stage 4 those students who have studied German in Key Stage 3 can choose to study it for GCSE instead of or as well as French. There are four dual linguists in Year 10 and ten in Year 11.
- Students who do not do German in Years 8 and 9 get a taster of classics and it is an option in Key Stage 4 for which there is a respectable take-up.
- Activities in lessons interest students and the department is currently adapting its schemes of work to match the new Secondary curriculum.
- The current accreditation is GCSE but the department is looking into further options.
- There is not always enough language support for lower attaining students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).
- Some students have the opportunity to train for Young Leaders' Awards in languages and those who do are able to work with primary pupils.
- Enrichment opportunities are plentiful. There are several trips abroad including a French and a German exchange, a French and art trip to

Paris and a German and history trip to Berlin. Lead department status has been instrumental in increasing trips abroad. There is also a ski trip to Austria linked to Sports Status.

- There is a French club and Spanish extra curricular lessons are due to begin. Speaking practice sessions are also provided for Year 11 students.
- The school has a link with China established last year. A delegation was visiting during the subject inspection. During this time a group of students learned some Chinese and discussions for work in China next year took place. Amongst others, those with Young Leaders Awards in languages will visit next year and some students will learn Chinese before they go. The Languages Department is at an early stage of involvement. The school is hoping to be awarded the Intermediate International Schools Award (ISA) in 2008/09.

Leadership and management of ML

Overall, leadership and management are good.

- Senior leadership is very supportive of languages. Should the school bid for a second specialism, it considers ML a strong contender since it is already the lead department.
- There is no formal subject self-evaluation form but the departmental action plan and various documents relating to lead department status show that the department is aware of its strengths and weaknesses. The department action plan reflects school priorities and is well linked to student performance.
- There have been recent improvements to performance. German GCSE results at Key Stage 4 have improved to well above the national average and, although French results remain broadly average, there is an upward trend in Key Stage 3 and indications of better Key Stage 4 results in 2009. Focussed mentoring is to be introduced shortly to support underachieving students in French.
- The head of department is aware of changes that need to be brought in to adapt to the new Secondary curriculum and some of this is underway with the upgrade in resources and developments related to lead department status.
- Accommodation and resources for languages are very good, except for a lack of authentic resources for reading.
- The school supports the development of primary languages in their two main primary feeder schools. One teacher works there part of the week both teaching and supporting development. There are plans to adapt Year 7 schemes of work for 2009/10.

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

- The school is currently quite close to the first benchmark of 50%. In Year 11, 49% of students take a language and in Year 10, 42%.
- The school expects the impact of 'lead department' status to make a difference to take-up. Spanish is to be introduced in Year 9 extra-curricular time later this term and as an option in Key Stage 4 next year. There is evidence that Asset languages and other accreditation are to be thoroughly investigated.

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

This is satisfactory.

- Access is good since the school moved into its new building last term. The department has its own cluster of computers attached to the network and access for all students at home.
- Students cited a number of good ways they used ICT in language lessons. For example: preparing presentations and using as cues for speaking; keeping a record of new language on each different topic; researching the Tour de France; using proprietary software for consolidation; and word processing coursework.
- There is very little drafting and redrafting to improve accuracy or to adapt writing for different purposes or audience.
- Use is not yet consistent across the department and so some students use it more than others.
- All ML classrooms have interactive whiteboards, though some have only just been fully installed. Teachers used them competently and engaged students well with different activities.
- ML will shortly be the first department involved in developing the school's virtual learning environment.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving consistency across the department, for example in marking and the use of ICT
- working out a clear policy on the use of the target language by teachers and students in lessons so that students hear more of the language and get used to listening and responding
- using authentic texts for reading in all year groups.

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 Language