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Mr B Heavisides
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Dear Mr Heavisides

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 01-02 December 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 good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- In 2007, overall standards at the end of Key Stage 4 in French and German and Spanish were below average, Boys' standards were below average; girls' standards were average. Overall, students did better in almost all their other subjects than in languages.

- Results in 2008 demonstrate that the school has taken a further significant step in the incremental improvement since 2003
- Overall the school met the target set in the Language College redesignation bid.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2008 were high, again reflecting the trend of improvement.
- In addition, 98% of the fast-track Year 9 entrants gained A*-C in French. These students are now beginning a second fast-track course in another language. Those studying Italian are already attaining levels at least on a par with students who have studied the language since Year 7.
- All pupils have studied a ML in primary school, come as confident learners and make good progress overall.
- Because of the wide range of the curriculum and accreditation available, all groups of students are making equal progress.
- Pupils' speaking outcomes in examinations compare favourably with standards in the other skills, except writing which is strong. Students' understanding of grammar is often good. They are beginning to understand the patterns of languages and to adapt them to other contexts.
- Take-up at post-16 in other local schools and colleges has gradually increased and over one in ten students now follows a post-16 ML course.
- Students enjoy learning languages. They describe language learning as '[making] you more confident'. They are proud of their achievements and understand the potential usefulness of ML in their future economic well-being.
- They understand the role of other home languages, respect speakers of these languages and know how the understanding of community languages promotes racial harmony. This is a school where students from a number of different cultural heritages learn together with mutual respect.
- The impact of the specialist Language College status has had an outstanding effect on standards and achievement by increasing the motivation and standards of boys throughout the school and in the success of fast-track students in 2008.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers' subject expertise is outstanding. Almost all teachers have at least two languages to a high standard, which ensures good role models for students.
- Expectations for different groups of learners are good in most lessons. Planning often includes a range of work matched to learners' abilities and teachers provide individual support where necessary. Foreign

Language Assistants (FLA) often work in the classroom to support students who need additional help or need to improve a particular skill.

- In a small minority of lessons, planning is not in place for the full range of students' ability and some students do not achieve their full potential.
- Opportunities to develop a range of skills are good, except in the case of speaking where there is too much reliance on written support rather than students being helped to speak spontaneously. Students like listening least and think their listening skills are the weakest.
- The impact of ICT is a major contributor to the school's continuing improvement through strong motivation and a wide range of resources.
- Assessment supports students' achievement well; tracking, target setting and good marking give guidance on how to improve. Marking is especially good in Italian.
- Students are aware of their progress in individual skills and of their end of key stage targets.
- They appreciate cultural and inter-cultural aspects of languages because of themed international days every year.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good

- Schemes of work are developed by the school from commercial materials. The school has not yet developed schemes of work to take account of the flexibility of the new Key Stage 3 National Curriculum to accommodate the prior learning of students who have followed the Key Stage 2 curriculum in primary schools.
- Opportunities are planned into schemes of work to develop all four skills and to integrate ICT into the learning process.
- The timetable allowance for ML teaching is generous, especially in the case of the fast track groups in Key Stage 3.
- All students follow a ML course at Key Stage 4. These courses include a wide range of accreditation from ASDAN through Asset languages and the traditional GCSE, and include provision for students who have gained a fast track GCSE pass in Year 9 and begin a new language in Year 10.
- Students praise the information and support they are given to prepare them for a language course on entering the school at the end of Key Stage 3 and in advance of moving to other schools and colleges for post-16 study.
- No students are withdrawn from studying ML. The school offers a course for everyone and adheres to a strong philosophy that all students complete a Key Stage 4 course.
- Extra-curricular provision is good. The school is constantly developing its range of activities for languages, especially those which bring them into contact with other schools. To develop its broader international

dimension, it has established a partnership with schools in Austria, Belgium and Italy to play volleyball.

- The impact of language specialist status on the curriculum is outstanding. The school has increased its provision from two to four languages, significantly raised standards, developed fast track groups, supported primary schools in their development and provided courses for parents in all four of the school's ML. It has turned its least successful curriculum area into one which is developing into a key strength.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good

- Support from the leadership team and especially yourself is very strong.
- Subject self-evaluation, as presented in the Language College annual report to Governors, is accurate and forms a good platform for further development.
- The professional development needs of staff are addressed in respect of the development targets of the department.
- Languages staff have received and delivered professional development in school and in partner schools to develop ICT skills and primary ML development.
- The languages department is well resourced with teachers producing many of the materials.
- The school library and several of the classrooms have a selection of magazines in the four target languages, which students know about and can access. Students also access reading and other materials from the internet.
- The school has a defined set of aims and aspirations for the Language College and the has a cross-curricular management group which forms part of the leadership structure.
- The school is a lead school for a strategic learning network. This impacts significantly on partnership working with local secondary and primary schools, enriching the ML curriculum and extending the potential experiences of students.

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

All students follow a Key Stage 4 course in ML.

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

This is outstanding.

- ICT has a significant impact on learning and teaching. It has contributed a high level of motivation, particularly for boys, and raised expectations. All teaching rooms have interactive white boards (IWB). The languages department has a dedicated ICT suite (The International Centre) which is a popular facility.
- The school has a wide range of ML software including access to websites available through the school's portal to students at home. Students make creative use of word processing and presentation software in ML.
- The school has established a virtual learning environment and been a key contributor to national developments in this area.
- The impact on the whole school in the area of using the IWB has been significant. ML staff have trained and coached other colleagues.
- Those students who have no internet access at home can use school ICT facilities throughout an extended day.
- Students have good ICT skills and are comfortable accessing all the information they need.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing students' speaking skills by encouraging spontaneous talking and reducing the reliance on reading aloud
- ensuring that planning in all lessons meets the full range of students' abilities.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter McKenzie
Additional Inspector