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Mr J Nicholls
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Nicholls

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.

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 four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Standards are well above average and achievement is good.

- Standards in 2007 were well above average at both key stages. GCSE results and teacher assessments in 2008 were above national averages. Students achieve higher standards in languages than in their other subjects.

- The progress made by boys is good and is better than girls' in several respects although all students make good progress throughout the school.
- Students have learnt a language in primary school and benefit from the start it gives them.
- Students make good progress because of good teaching and their own outstanding attitudes to learning.
- Students are making good progress in reading and extended writing although little extended writing is seen below Year 9.
- The highest attaining students are creative in their speaking.
- There is good creativity in the students' use and presentation of ML topics through ICT.
- Students enjoy learning languages and described their language learning as 'fascinating', 'interesting' and 'useful'. One student said 'I feel smart when I read German.'
- Students' cultural understanding is satisfactory because of events to mark the European day of languages and visits abroad. Very few people in the school's community speak any home language other than English and students have limited opportunities to meet people of their own age from other cultures on a regular basis.
- Specialist status in ML, albeit the school's second specialism, has contributed to achievement by leading the support for local primary schools, including providing teaching, and increasing the range of ML opportunities in the curriculum. The school is planning the introduction of Mandarin to its students and the community, and 'master classes' for the highest attaining students.
- A significant number of students go on to study languages in the next stages of their education.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the languages they teach.
- Opportunities are provided to support the development of all four language skills in equal measure.
- The levels of expectations for different groups of learners are not always well communicated to students. Lesson objectives often fail to address the full range of students' abilities.
- The school library has an up-to-date collection of books and magazines in the target languages but there is little evidence that they are used regularly.
- Good use is made of a wide range of resources including interactive white boards (IWB) and teacher-produced software, and access to the internet.
- Assessment is very thorough. All teachers have assessment data to aid planning, students are tracked and targets set. Attainment

targets are given and explained to all students, but they do not recognise sufficiently well what this means for them.

- Students feel that they are very well supported to improve. Teachers are available to provide extra help and to support students, particularly in encouraging self-study through home use of ICT.
- Marking is not always helpful in guiding students to improve. There is clear indication that work is corrected and often praised, but marking lacks specific guidance on improving standards.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- The curriculum provision is good and the school is considering ways in which to develop it further.
- The school delivers three languages. French is taught to all students from Year 7 and its standards are reported at the end of Year 9 as the principal ML. Spanish was introduced in Year 10 in previous years but is now the second ML from Year 7. German is currently introduced in Year 9 but will develop a new place in the curriculum as Spanish develops through Key Stage 3. These changes have taken place as a result of developing the ML curriculum within the languages specialism.
- Opportunities are planned into schemes of work and delivered to develop all skills in equal measure. Although planning for the use of ICT is not strong, the actual use is good and supports learning well.
- The school leads the cluster in developing a consistent approach to the primary ML Curriculum and has taken advantage of the flexibility of the new Key Stage 3 curriculum to accommodate the skills students bring with them.
- There is limited time for the introduction of the second language in Key Stage 3 and students comment that they prefer learning the language which is given more time because they feel they are making more progress.
- Entitlement at Key Stage 4 is met. Despite the school's language college status, it is a second specialism and, as a small school, it has not got the flexibility to offer a compulsory language throughout as well as meeting the curriculum requirements of its other specialisms. About 88% of students currently learn a language at Key Stage 4.
- Students are thoroughly supported in choosing a language for Key Stage 4 and are well aware of the nature of the course and the demands it poses.
- Despite the difficulties posed by the transport needs of the school's wide catchment area, the school provides a good range of extra-curricular activity including visits abroad and language-related activities in school. These include visiting drama groups.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- The support from the leadership team for developing the languages curriculum is very strong. Leaders have played a major role in establishing ML as one of the school's strongest subjects.
- Subject self evaluation is good. It is based on effective departmental review and improvement planning.
- The school successfully tackled boys' underachievement to the degree that they now out-perform girls in some areas of ML.
- Monitoring, evaluation and ensuing action, particularly within the development of the language college has been highly effective in driving ML forward in the school.
- The provision and impact of continuing professional development (CPD) in the department has taken account of the Language College status and changes in the National Curriculum and examination requirements. There has been good support from the local authority and a partner language college. The department has been effective in delivering professional development opportunities, especially to primary school colleagues.
- The language department is well resourced, much of the material being generated by teachers themselves. Access to computers has been difficult, resulting in a reliance on students' capacity to work on computers at home.
- The school has overcome recruitment problems and now has a stable and effective team of specialist teachers.

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

- The school has met the benchmarks for languages take-up in Key Stage 4. All students take one except those on vocational pathways.

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

- This is good.
- Computers in the school are limited, especially for languages' occasional use.
- ML teachers find it difficult to plan for access to ICT suites but make as much use as is practical and encourage students to use website materials and commercial programmes at home.
- Students are aware of materials and value access to authentic language in target languages.
- Students have produced a range of good work, using creative skills in ICT, including illustrated writing and presentations.

- Teachers and students make wide use of the IWB to support learning, including using an impressive range of school produced software.
- The impact of ICT on students' motivation is significant because there is access to a good range of software which provides challenging activities.
- Despite the good use of ICT in teaching and learning languages, planning gives insufficient detail of its intended place within schemes of work.
- Teachers have very good ICT skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- including opportunities for the use of ICT in long term planning
- setting and delivering lesson objectives which take account of the range of abilities of the students
- ensuring that marking helps students to improve.

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