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25 November 2008

Mrs G Bremner
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Bremner

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 3-4 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are excellent.

- Standards are high at the end of both key stages and improving year on year.
- Achievement is outstanding. Learners entered for GCSE achieve very well with more than 80 per cent attaining the higher grades and about

a third achieving the highest grades. There is no significant difference in performance in different languages or in the performance of boys and girls.

- Students are confident in all four skills. They have a very good understanding of grammar and a very good range of vocabulary and structures. As a result they are able to manipulate the languages they are learning effectively to express their ideas. They write at length and in detail for a variety of purposes and are able to access information from a variety of texts, including material from the Internet. Their use of the language to write creatively is more limited.
- Students in the sixth form attain standards that are well above average and their achievement is good. They have a very good understanding of grammar and are able to manipulate the languages they are learning very effectively and spontaneously to express their views in speech and in writing. They are confident in listening and reading skills using a good variety of sources, including the Internet.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards learning languages and have a very clear understanding of its importance. They are enthusiastic and confident linguists. Take up in Key Stage 4 is good and increasing significantly year on year in all 3 languages.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent. Students benefit from excellent role models. Teachers use the languages being learned effectively and frequently exclusively in lessons. Speaking and listening skills are very well developed as a result and higher attaining students are challenged to interpret more complex or unfamiliar language for others, thus developing higher order listening skills very effectively.
- Teachers use a very good variety of strategies to engage students and to enable them to build effectively on previous learning. Through the effective use of games and group work activities, for example, students develop in confidence and independence in using the languages themselves.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students and provide good levels of challenge and support. For example, students are routinely expected to identify and explain patterns for themselves from exemplars. They do this enthusiastically and are keen to volunteer their ideas.
- Teachers plan very effectively for groups of differing ability and for continuity and progression. Activities are well sequenced and students are set up to succeed at each stage of learning. As a result they rapidly grow in confidence and competence.
- Information communication technology (ICT) is used very well for example to present new language in an engaging way on the interactive white board and to enable students to demonstrate their

ideas and understanding. Students have frequent opportunities to use interactive programs to consolidate and extend their learning and to work at their own pace as well as to extend their knowledge of the cultural aspects of the languages they are learning.

- Teachers use assessment information very effectively to plan their lessons and to provide appropriate support and challenge for different groups of learners. Teachers use questioning very well to assess understanding in lessons and students themselves are fully involved in evaluating and planning their own progress. Marking is thorough, encouraging and gives excellent guidance about how to improve.
- Students receive very good guidance and are very well informed about the choices they make at the end of each key stage.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- All students have access to French, Spanish and German in both key stages and in the sixth form.
- There is very good provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for gifted and talented students and there is no evidence of disaffection or underachievement.
- Spanish is taught initially in after school clubs. These clubs are open to all students. In response to requests from students, extra sessions have been organised so that they no longer clash with other extra-curricular activities. They are popular and well attended. Increasing numbers of students are choosing to continue with Spanish in Year 10 and beyond as a result.
- ICT is used very effectively to support and extend learning in all four skills and the department make very good use of the modern languages ICT suite to support and extend students' learning.
- Students benefit from their contact with native speakers in all three languages to practise speaking and listening skills and to extend their knowledge of different cultures.
- There is scope to increase opportunities for students to practise extended and creative writing.
- The school provides an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, including work experience abroad for the sixth form, visits and exchanges and language days.
- Links with universities for sixth form languages students are underdeveloped.
- The school takes full account of students' previous experience of learning languages and adapts the curriculum in Year 7 effectively to meet the needs of different groups and to ensure continuity and progression.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The head teacher and the school's senior management team provide very strong support for MFL and have a very clear commitment to enabling as many students as possible to continue their study of a language through Key Stage 4 and beyond and for them to achieve as highly as possible.
- The school has reorganised its groupings and curriculum in Year 7 to take account of students' previous experience in language learning and to ensure effective continuity and progression. This has also had the impact of raising the profile of the subject in the school. Both take up in languages in Key Stage 4 and standards have improved as a result.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the department's performance, both by the senior leadership team and by the department itself, are very thorough and clearly focused on raising standards. This feeds directly into improvement planning and is linked to training.
- There is a very clear rationale for learning ML which students understand and share.
- The department is helping feeder primary schools to develop MFL teaching, students in the sixth form as well as teachers are involved in this.

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

This is good.

- The school's actions to ensure continuity and progression in modern language learning in Year 7 have successfully raised the profile of modern languages in the school. Students appreciate the importance of learning a language and take up rates have risen and continue to rise.
- More than half of students opt to continue their study of at least one language to GCSE and a good number of students continue their study of a language to AS and A2 post-16. There are no differences in take up and performance between boys and girls or between different groups of students.
- A good proportion of students from all years participate in after school clubs to learn Spanish and opt to continue with their study of the language to GCSE and beyond.

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

This is outstanding.

- Students use different applications to improve their language learning, for example, to develop reading skills through a wider range of materials available on Internet.
- Teacher use the Interactive White Board to present new language and to engage students. Students themselves use it to present their own ideas and to practise using new language.
- All students use ICT purposefully on a regular basis to develop their language knowledge and skills and to find out more about the target language countries and communities.
- The subject leader has a good vision for the use of ICT and leads by example. There is a department website that provides effective materials for teachers and students. Department access to resources is excellent, they have their own ICT suite used exclusively for MFL and this and the materials are used regularly and routinely.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing opportunities for students to use the languages creatively, especially in writing.

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

Judith Tolley
Additional Inspector