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Mrs K Sparling
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Dear Mrs Sparling

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 22-23 September 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 satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- At the end of Key Stage 3 students reach standards which are above national expectations for those working at Level five but below national expectations for those attaining Level six or above. In 2008, school targets were not met in either French or German.

- Standards at GCSE were slightly above national averages in 2007 but in 2008 there was a significant drop in the number of students attaining A*-C grades. Despite a higher proportion of students attaining A* and A grades than nationally, overall students in modern languages did not meet the challenging targets set by the school.
- Progress in lessons observed was satisfactory in two lessons and good in two. Progress was better in those lessons where work was better matched to students' needs.
- Listening skills are developing well because students concentrate hard. The highest attaining students are particularly adept at extracting a high level of detail from recorded French texts.
- Students' pronunciation and intonation are good; they emulate the good models of language provided by their teachers. Some of the higher attaining students in Key Stage 3 are already responding to their teacher's challenge and are manipulating the language to create their own meaning. Sometimes speaking skills are adversely affected by students' lack of confidence and reticence to join in.
- Students' written work shows an increasing and accurate use of grammar as they progress through the school.
- There is limited evidence in books and files of any extended and/ or creative writing. Students comment that they would like their work to be more creative.
- Students who have opted for the subject at Key Stage 4 or in the sixth form are enthusiastic about their learning. Students in Year 12 are particularly positive about their induction into the AS programme.
- Students in Key Stage 3 say that they enjoy the activities in their language lessons but few say that French or German is their favourite subject. They have a good understanding of why languages are important.
- Overall, languages contribute well to students' personal development and well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Students are managed well with some imaginative grouping arrangements to extend opportunities for pair work.
- Teachers use a wide range of resources and plan for a variety of activities to stimulate students. They make particularly good use of mini whiteboards to check comprehension of reading and listening tasks.
- Teachers use the target language extensively and this impacts positively on students' listening skills and their accents. They do not always check that students understand what is required and students are not always confident enough to ask for help. In mixed ability and groups of average attaining students, teachers do not always ensure

that all participate and so not all students are developing confident speaking skills.

- When objectives are not specific, or starting points of the students are not sufficiently defined, lessons lose pace as activities which are too difficult or inappropriate become laboured.
- Books are regularly marked and there is good feedback in lessons and, by some teachers, in books and files. Teachers' practice in assessing and giving feedback is, however, not consistent.
- Target setting both in books and on the personal progress charts is insufficiently precise to guide students on how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- The time allocation for languages at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is good.
- Schemes of work for Years 8 and 9 and 10 and 11 are satisfactory. They make appropriate reference to the relevant programme of study and examination specifications. The schemes of work for both French and German for Year 7 are insufficiently detailed, particularly with reference to how language skills are to be developed.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- The work of the faculty is well managed and organised on a day to day basis.
- The head of faculty has a clear idea what the strengths and weaknesses of the subject area are. The formal self evaluation, however, does not have sufficient detail in its analysis, does not indicate what action the faculty needs to take to improve and it does not show how the impact of any action will be measured.
- Annual reviews and development plans contain some specific and appropriate suggestions on how to improve practice and raise standards but these are not consistently being followed. For example, an effective method of assessment of speaking skills has been trialled by the head of faculty but is not being used by all teachers.

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

- In the recent past the school has successfully exceeded benchmarks for language take-up at Key Stage 4. With the introduction of a smaller number of option choices in 2007, numbers of students choosing to study German or French has dropped dramatically to below 50%.

- You are very aware of the need to improve take-up and the school is considering how this might be done.

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

This is good.

- Interactive whiteboards are used particularly well by teachers to support presentation and modelling.
- Students make good use of a range of ICT applications to support their language learning and are clear on why they are using them.
- They are motivated by the use of ICT for independent and creative work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in both languages at Key Stage 4 by ensuring that the needs of average, as well as higher attaining, students are planned for and met by teachers
- encouraging oral participation and building students' confidence
- ensuring that the Key Stage 3 curriculum prepares and motivates students for further study at Key Stage 4
- planning in detail how improvements in practice are to be made and ensuring that any agreed actions are consistently applied across the faculty.

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

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector