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24 November 2008

Mrs P Canavan
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Dear Mrs Canavan

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 7-8 October 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are outstanding in all three languages: Bengali, French and Spanish.

- At the end of Key Stage 3 students are achieving well. They make good progress in all four skills, and especially in reading and writing in Bengali which they have only been learning for two years. Students

have good pronunciation and they speak with good fluency as they get much practice in class.

- By the end of Key Stage 4 students' progress is outstanding because they are very well taught and have excellent attitudes to learning languages. They achieve well above national averages. The number studying French is below the national average but the percentage of students entered for Spanish and Bengali is well above what would be expected nationally.
- Higher attaining students achieve well; they are encouraged to take the GCSE examination early and they achieve extremely good results. In Bengali in 2008 all students attained A* or A grades. In Year 11, six students took the AS level examination and all attained grade A.
- There is very little difference in the achievement of boys and girls of different ethnic groups; all achieve extremely well.
- Students are well aware of the similarities and differences between different cultures as this is celebrated widely across the school in language lessons as well as in assemblies and other events. Students are encouraged to take part in many cultural activities, including watching a play in Spanish, talking to the many foreign visitors and visiting important exhibitions and venues.
- Students have extremely positive attitudes to learning languages, promoted by the ethos of the school which encourages them to meet people from other countries, share their varied language experiences, and fosters a strong sense of the importance of language learning.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is excellent.

- Teachers know their students extremely well and take great care to develop excellent relationships, frequently seeking their views. In interviews, students commented on how supportive teachers were both in and out of lessons.
- Students with special needs are well supported both by specially designed worksheets in class and by support assistants.
- Higher attaining students are given challenging tasks and are offered an accelerated course with early GCSE entry available in all three languages. This year French is being taken by several students in Year 9 and Bengali by several in Year 10.
- Teachers use their excellent language skills well in the classroom. Students hear a lot of the foreign language being spoken and are expected to reply as much as possible. Therefore, they develop good fluency and pronunciation as well as an ability to cope with everyday language beyond that required for examination purposes.
- Links are regularly made between the different languages spoken by students, so that for example students are encouraged to learn that some of the sounds in Italian are similar to those in Bengali and that some of the words in Spanish and French have the same root.

Students who have English as an additional language are keen to show how their home language can help them to learn another.

- Explanations for tasks are very clear and students know what they expected to learn and how they can improve their performance. They get good feedback both in class and on their homework. They know, for example, that they need to improve their understanding of the difference between the perfect and imperfect tenses and they are asked to reflect on how they might improve their own revision techniques.
- Resources are motivating and varied, with regular use of games, ICT and authentic materials. Students say they love the lessons because 'they are always different and fun'.
- Reading for pleasure is an area that is currently being developed. The library has a range of resources such as magazines and books and teachers encourage students to make use of these by visiting the library in lesson time.
- Lessons are fast paced and students are expected to complete a lot of work, even during the very long double lessons.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- Languages are an important and central part of the whole school ethos; the school is applying for a second specialism in languages. The school has achieved the International Schools Award and is fully committed to this initiative, to taking students on trips abroad and to hosting foreign visitors. Students have visited countries such as China and have successfully studied Mandarin in an intensive course to breakthrough level.
- Students can study a wide range of languages. In Key Stage 3 they can choose between French, Spanish and Bengali as their main language plus all students in Year 7 will study a second language as part of the 'language enhancement' programme. The choice of second languages is wide and includes Mandarin and Italian.
- In Key Stage 4 over half of students continue with a language and a few study two languages. The school supports small group sizes to enable this to happen.
- Students are encouraged to study for a qualification in as many languages as they can, and wherever possible the school provides a tutor. For example students are currently studying for GCSEs in Turkish and Portuguese.
- The vast majority of Year 7 students come from one feeder primary school and the students in Year 6 have all been taught a language by staff from the secondary school. The first cohort of students who had been taught a language during Year 6 has just completed the GCSE course and results were well above those from the previous year. The curriculum in Year 7 has been adapted to take account of students'

prior language learning and students are making especially good progress in speaking.

- There are many opportunities for students to interact with speakers of other languages, including foreign language assistants who help students to develop their language skills and understanding of other cultures.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- Languages are extremely well supported at all levels in the school and the department is given every encouragement to innovate and be creative. For example, the department is beginning to explore how it can make links with other subjects and how it can expand the range and types of courses that it offers to meet the needs of a wider range of students.
- Self evaluation is accurate and is supported at departmental level by probing and incisive line management. Results have risen dramatically over the past six years and have remained very high for the past three.
- Students are frequently consulted about their views on language learning and provision and if necessary changes are made. For example, some students found the curriculum in Year 9 too difficult and so it was adapted. This has resulted in an increase in the numbers of students studying a language in Key Stage 4.

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

- Currently 58% of students study a language in Key Stage 4. 47% study a language to GCSE in the option blocks and a further 11% as an extra curricular activity or as an intensive course. There are currently many languages being offered both after school and in enhancement programmes. Students can easily study two or more languages if they wish.
- The school has a well developed plan to make languages part of the core offer at Key Stage 4 from 2009 and to ensure that this meets the needs of all of its students by offering a range of accreditation.
- The school listens to students' views and adapts its curriculum accordingly. For example: it offers a range of languages and early entry.
- Every opportunity is taken to reinforce the idea that languages are an important skill. For example: local businesses are invited to illustrate how languages can be used at work.

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

This is good.

- ICT is well used by teachers to present new language and to make the learning more interesting and fun. For example, one teacher took photographs of well known staff and students in the school and put them into a presentation on the interactive white board (IWB) in order to illustrate the difference in Italian between greeting children and adults.
- Teachers regularly use the IWB to make points clear, to allow students to play games and to make the learning fun.
- Teachers use ICT to help share resources and data.
- Students use word processing regularly in lessons to draft and redraft work for coursework. Students know how to add accents and use non-roman scripts and their work is generally accurate. All students in years 9 to 11 have lessons timetabled to use ICT.
- Students use email to send work to teachers but there are few opportunities for them to email young people in other countries.
- Students use the internet well to research aspects of the culture or history of other countries and often prepare presentations using appropriate software. They also access language learning sites which help with grammar and vocabulary.
- ICT is not used as often to help students develop their spoken and listening skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the range of ICT tasks for students, especially to help students develop their spoken and listening skills
- continuing to work on increasing the links between languages and other areas of the curriculum
- continuing to work on developing the Key Stage 4 curriculum so that all students are offered a suitable and relevant course.

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

Joanna Peach
Additional Inspector