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Mrs A Behan  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Behan

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages.

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and those of your staff and students, during my visit with Pam Haezwindt HMI on 25-26 September 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.

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 two groups of students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

#### Achievement and standards

Overall achievement and standards are satisfactory.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 are well above national expectations.
- At Key Stage 4, standards are well below average. To some extent, standards have been adversely affected by previous staffing difficulties and by the early entry of students to GCSE exams. As a language college, the college enters all of its students for at least one

examination in a language and therefore national comparisons are difficult to make.

- Students' progress observed in lessons varied between adequate and outstanding dependent upon the teaching.
- The college has adopted a new method of accreditation for ML and predicts that results will rise at Key Stage 4. It is, however, too early to judge the full impact of this initiative.
- Students are well behaved, listen carefully and respond well to instructions in lessons. ML contributes well to their personal development and well-being.
- Students say they enjoy learning languages and appreciate the advantages which they offer, for example, for their future employment prospects.

### Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with good features.

- The target language is well-used by teachers in some lessons, but in others opportunities for its use are not always fully exploited.
- The development of pupils' speaking skills is satisfactory. Students in some classes are given appropriate opportunities to speak in the language they are learning and some teachers are imaginative in how they encourage students to talk. For example, in one German lesson, ICT was well-used to teach students a song which reinforced their understanding of new vocabulary about colours. However, in other lessons, opportunities for students to develop their speaking skills were not fully exploited.
- There are good opportunities for students to read in the languages they are studying.
- In some lessons observed, appropriate use was made of language learning strategies to help students understand more fully the meaning of words and to remember them. In one lesson, cognates from both English and another language which students had already studied were usefully drawn upon to help them understand the meaning of new vocabulary. Word association strategies were also deployed to help students remember new words.
- In lessons that were good or better, a wide range of activities, such as quizzes, games and songs, was used to make learning both interesting and stimulating. Students appreciate these activities. Planning is good and caters well for different abilities and the pace of learning is fast.
- In satisfactory lessons, the pace of learning was slower and work at times was not appropriately matched to students' abilities.
- Students have targets for the languages they study and know them.
- Work is marked regularly, but there are inconsistencies in the use of guidelines for marking. Where marking is at its strongest, learners are given very precise guidance on how well they have done and on what they need to do to improve.

- The college's specialism in languages has had little impact on teaching and learning in other parts of the college.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory with good features.

- Little Lever offers a broad curriculum. Students learn two languages in Key Stage 3. In addition to being able to study the college's core languages of French, Spanish and German, there are opportunities for students to learn Japanese, Italian and Russian. Students are also able to study Gujarati and Urdu outside of the normal college timetable.
- Students in both Key Stages 3 and 4 say they enjoy learning languages but few choose to do so.
- Older students have the chance to study for vocational business qualifications in French.
- The time allocated for the study of languages is suitable.
- Enrichment opportunities for students are satisfactory. They include a number of opportunities for students to visit other countries. Additional classes are held at week-ends and during holidays throughout the year and the department holds some language days. However, there are currently, no extra-curricular clubs whereby students can extend their knowledge of languages or understanding of different cultures; and internationalism does not permeate the school as strongly as it could.
- The college's virtual learning environment website for ML is satisfactory. However, not all students, particularly younger ones know about it, or are as aware of its benefits as they could be.
- The college provides strong support to local primary schools, including developing a website for them. French is taught in its main feeder schools by an outreach teacher and there are good links with a large number of other local primary schools.
- A large number of evening languages courses are provided by the college for local adults. Both this provision and its extensive outreach work with primary schools mean that the college makes a good contribution towards community cohesion.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- You are passionate about the study of languages and the senior leadership team has a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the well resourced ML department.
- However, there is a lack of clarity about the leadership of the department. This contributes to some important gaps in the department's work. For example, the departmental development plan for the current year is underdeveloped. It lists a set of priorities but does not identify costs, resources, the responsible personnel, targets

and milestones that are necessary to ensure a rise in standards in languages by the end of Key Stage 4.

- The department's self-evaluation of its effectiveness is also overgenerous, for example in its assessment of how good standards are and in its understanding of the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the department.
- Careful consideration has been given to the recent underachievement of students and the college is in the process of developing a more attractive curriculum through the adoption of the Asset Languages assessment scheme.
- Good links are maintained with the local authority and the college provides training for other secondary schools in its local cluster of schools.
- The college has worked hard to develop its links with its main feeder schools as well as developing those with other local primary schools. These links, established and maintained largely by an outreach teacher, yield a good amount of assessment data about students' abilities in languages on entry to the college. This information is made available to class teachers but provision is not yet systematically adapted to incoming students. Very good links also exist with a local, special school and a unit for students with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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

The use of ICT is good overall.

- Interactive whiteboards are regularly used in most, but not all, lessons to develop and extend learning. These are well used to introduce and consolidate new vocabulary and concepts in lively, colourful and interesting ways. This makes learning stimulating. It also adds to students' enjoyment of lessons, as well as deepening their learning and their understanding of ICT.
- Computer suites are used to give students opportunities to complete extended writing tasks. In one lesson, students prepared a PowerPoint presentation in French on the theme of introducing their own commercial business to new clients.
- Students are able to use ICT tools confidently, such as translation software and programs to check spelling in the languages they are writing in.
- In some classes, students have opportunities to interact with the whiteboards. For example, in one very good French lesson students were able to play an exciting and challenging interactive game which tested and consolidated their understanding of new phrases.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students reach their full potential at Key Stage 4
- ensuring that leadership roles are made clear
- improving teaching, including the consistent use of assessment, so that all teaching is good
- developing the school's international work and the impact of the Language College on the school.

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

Michael McIlroy  
Her Majesty's Inspector