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Dear Mr Lewis

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 2-3 February 2009 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 is satisfactory and standards are average.

- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3, after students transferred to the school one year earlier, were assessed by teachers as above average, although very few students achieved the highest levels. Girls achieved

better than boys, although by less than the national average difference.

- Standards in German were above the national average at the end of Key Stage 4 in terms of GCSE grades A*-C although fewer students than the national average attained the highest grades. Overall students do less well in German than in their other subjects, but high standards are achieved by a small cohort of students who also reach high standards in their other subjects. Very few students follow a Key Stage 4 course in German.
- Relatively few students follow a Key Stage 4 course in French. Standards are below average and no students attain the highest grades. Students do less well in French than in their other subjects.
- A small number of students attain high standards in community languages including Polish and Portuguese.
- Standards in speaking are acknowledged as the weakest overall and students say that they like speaking least. Students are taught a lot of grammar and apply it well in targeted exercises but make grammatical errors in extended writing. This approach develops insufficient creativity in writing.
- Progress in lessons is satisfactory overall. In a minority of cases, learning is hindered by the disrespectful attitudes of students to the language and the teaching. Better progress is seen when students engage with the language and the teaching and demonstrate commitment and interest.
- Students have very limited understanding of the culture of the people whose languages they learn. Similarly, they have little understanding of how language learning can promote multi-cultural awareness and understanding.
- Students understand how ML can increase their opportunities for economic well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good overall. Methodology is satisfactory, although over-emphasis on the written word does not always ensure even progress across the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Speaking outcomes are poor because teachers use too much English in the classroom and because there is a small group of students who reject the spoken language.
- Students say that there is little authentic material in the school library in French or German. They do not seek to read or listen to real French or German.
- Assessment and tracking processes are effective in motivating students, most of whom understand targets and how to achieve them.

Students understand their attainment in different skills and these often relate to how much they enjoy them.

- Assessment also contributes well to teachers' planning and objective-setting, which is a significant strength.
- Marking is variable. In German, it is detailed and thorough and includes help for students to improve. Elsewhere it is less thorough and does not provide sufficient guidance on how to make progress.
- Very few students in the school have a home language other than English. One such student said how learning English as an additional language had improved his ML learning skills.
- Students say that teachers are always ready to help them improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work are appropriate. Assessment processes are integrated into the planning.
- Planning and policy statements include provision in all four skills and ICT although the policy on target language is not delivered.
- The time allocation for ML is adequate but the provision of one long lesson a week is not ideal.
- Accreditation at Key Stage 4 is currently only through GCSE but planning is well developed to increase the range of accreditation by 2010 in line with the school's vocational specialism.
- The number of students following a course in ML at post-16 level is small. The college only provides a French course; the small numbers of students studying German throughout the school do not generate a viable post-16 course. With partner colleges and schools, there are plans in place for more opportunities in post-16 ML from September 2009.
- Extra-curricular provision is satisfactory and includes a partnership with a school in Germany and video-conferencing with another. There was an exchange with a school in France until 2007 and visits to German markets for several years but these no longer run.
- The school has not yet introduced the new Key Stage 3 curriculum and plans to do so from September 2009. Teachers in the department have been working with middle schools to introduce it in Year 7.
- Support for increasing take-up in Key Stage 4 is developing, including sending postcards to the parents of able linguists to encourage them to consider the merits of a ML at Key Stage 4.
- Students say that they receive good help and support both in choosing Key Stage 4 and post-16 courses.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Management of the short term routine and administration of ML department is effective and ensures the smooth running of the department. Leadership has not fully embraced the need to plan strategically to raise standards.
- School leadership support for ML is satisfactory. An assistant headteacher acts as link member of the leadership team to the department.
- Self assessment within the department is satisfactory but includes some elements of inconsistency. Monitoring of teaching and learning concentrates too little on students' outcomes.
- The school no longer has a foreign language assistant (FLA) to support speaking skills. In line with commitment to meet the benchmark for Key Stage 4 take-up and improve speaking skills, the school seeks to appoint a FLA in 2009.
- The school has targeted appropriate professional development, largely to support the developments in examination courses and the imminent installation of interactive white boards (IWB).
- The school plans to reach 50% of students at Key Stage 4 studying a ML by September 2010 at the latest. Targets are agreed with Governors.
- The school supports middle schools in Key Stage 3 and has begun to develop links to support Key Stage 2 teaching in first and middle schools.
- Effective links are developing with technology, the school's first specialism, specifically through ICT.

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

- Entitlement at Key Stage 4 is currently short of the national target. The school has processes in place and agreed with governors to reach 50% by September 2010 at the latest.
- A number of students say that they do not follow a course in ML after Year 9 because they find it too difficult or do not enjoy it.

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

This is good.

- The department has a dedicated ICT suite and an appropriate range of software.
- The installation of IWBs is imminent in all the ML classrooms
- The new subject leader for ML is also an ICT specialist and is already planning to extend the use of ICT in ML learning.
- A video conferencing link is established with a school in Germany and one is currently being sought with a school in France

- Teachers and learners both demonstrate good ICT skills and ICT provides good motivation in language learning
- The school's technology specialism has been effective in developing ICT as a strength of the department.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- developing strategic planning to raise the level of enthusiasm for ML learning in the school and increase uptake at Key Stage 4
- raising standards in speaking by greatly increasing the use of target language in lessons by both teachers and students
- developing learners' understanding of the culture of those whose languages they learn, and their appreciation of how respect for language and culture promotes racial harmony.

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.

Ofsted gathers information on the immediate and longer-term impact of survey inspections, both on the institutions themselves, and with a view to improving its own processes. To this end, I should be grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire and return it within the next ten days. We have also just sent a copy of the questionnaire by email. Please return your completed questionnaire to either the email or postal address on the form, not to me. We may also contact some schools by telephone after several months in order for us to gain a picture of longer-term impact. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Peter McKenzie
Additional Inspector