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Mr K Wilkinson
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Dear Mr Wilkinson

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 10-11 March 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 one lesson and six half lessons. (Lessons last 70 minutes.)

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good and improving.

Achievement and standards

Standards in ML are high; achievement overall is good.

- In 2008 at the end of Key stage 4 students attained standards above the national average in French, with the proportion attaining the highest grades of A*-A well above average. In German, students

attained A*-C grades well above the national average but A*-A grades were average. There has been an improving trend over the past few years. However, students did not attain as well as in a number of other subjects.

- At the end of Key Stage 3 in 2008 teacher assessments indicate that students were well above average. Currently, lesson observations, including observation of speaking tests, indicate that standards are above average.
- In Sixth Form, results for the small number of students who took A level in French and German were good overall.
- Overall, progress in lessons observed was good; in one excellent.
- Students in Key Stage 3 of all abilities demonstrate that they can communicate in speaking and are making good progress in reading and extended writing. It is clear for many, as they move to their chosen language in Year 9, that they respond well to concentrating on one language having been given a sound base on which to make a choice and continue.
- In Key Stage 4, the small but growing number of students who continue to take a language is doing well and is on target to meet the school's expectations. In a mixed ability Year 10 group, achievement varied in their speaking tests with some reaching high standards whilst some were more hesitant. There is scope for improving the strategies students have for approaching speaking tests.
- Students' knowledge of how well they are doing is impressive.
- All students spoken to said they enjoyed learning a language very much and that lessons were active and interesting.
- Students know very well why it is useful to learn a language and those who have opted to do one beyond Key Stage 3 have good reasons for doing so.
- They are aware of the variety of languages spoken in this multi-ethnic school and of show good awareness of where French and German are spoken across the world.
- Students work together very well, show respect for and help each other in language lessons. Learning languages contributes very well to their personal development and well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good.

- One excellent Year 7 lesson, enabled students to manipulate the language and perform at a level higher than might be expected. The planning was very detailed ensuring outcomes were reached, teaching very lively with excellent pace and students participated with gusto.
- The use of ICT by teachers engaged learners and the bank of resources produced is impressive.
- Teaching assistants give good support to students who need it.

- Marking in books varies but there are some very good examples of helpful comments and targets for improvement. Ensuring work is marked for accuracy from time to time should be considered.
- Staff use the school's assessment system well to ensure that students' learning and progress are tracked.
- Although differentiation by outcome was assiduously written into lesson plans, and staff showed good knowledge of students, there is scope to extend this to different tasks and strategies for learning to ensure all students in very mixed ability groups achieve very well.
- Tests revealed that there is sometimes too much of an element of 'learning by heart for the test' which prevents students from speaking fluently. Where they knew better how to manipulate the language and had devised strategies or cues for speaking they were better equipped to perform well.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good with outstanding features.

- The school's model for learning languages in Key Stage 3 is excellent. All students learn both French and German throughout Years 7 and 8. The school's modular curriculum facilitates this very well and every student spoken to said it was excellent, enabling them to choose a language at the end of Year 8 from an informed perspective.
- They choose to study one of the two at the end of Year 8 and continue this into Key Stage 4 if they so wish.
- The school is supportive of any student who may wish to do two languages but this rarely occurs.
- There is suitable time for ML on the timetable.
- The school facilitates those students with home / heritage languages to take a GCSE should they wish to do so.
- The schemes of work are largely text book based but have nevertheless been amended well to fit the modular approach. They do not include many opportunities for using ICT with explanations of how these would help to improve language learning.
- The broad mix of languages that students bring to the school is not capitalised on to compare and contrast language systems, and build upon students' prior knowledge of home languages.
- Staff have produced some excellent, colourful electronic materials to go alongside the textbooks for use with the interactive whiteboard.
- There is after school time for Year 11 to improve specific weaknesses and staff are available to give help to students at lunchtime. Access to computers and ICT programs is also available. There is a weekend trip to either the Black Forest or Rhineland for Years 9 and 10 and a Year 8 trip to Paris. There are no clubs and currently no visits abroad for the sixth form.

Leadership and management of ML

Overall leadership and management are good.

- You keep a close, watching brief and challenge the department very regularly and strongly regarding student outcomes.
- The department is very well managed on a regular basis; lessons and activities run smoothly; assessments, marking, meetings and book scrutiny are regular. The department works together well as a team. Expectations of behaviour are high. Display is excellent.
- At a more strategic level there is scope for improvement: the departmental self-evaluation is not sharply evaluative and the departmental development plan, which should arise from it, lacks prioritization, success criteria and monitoring personnel.
- Resources and accommodation are excellent.
- There are few links with local or regional ML networks.
- Primary schools provide French in Redbridge but the department does not yet feel this is cause to amend its curriculum.

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

- The school's take-up is improving and in Year 10 this year it has its highest take-up for some time at 41%.
- Nearby there are two specialist language colleges which the school believes students attend if they are wish to take languages and that this has an impact on Chadwell Heath's take-up.
- Nevertheless, the school believes that its more stable position in ML regarding staffing and its restructuring of its languages provision in Key Stage 3 will enable students to make a more informed choice about continuing in Key Stage 4.
- At options time Year 10 students talk to Year 9 students about the advantages of learning a language and sixth formers talk to Year 11 at the Year 11 Open Evening.

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

This is satisfactory.

- Teachers make good use of ICT to present language and develop students' knowledge.
- Students say they use it through the school's web system and their access at home to draft and redraft some pieces of coursework in French.
- They also use it extensively for revision.
- Some classes use it for exercises, power point presentations to support speaking, and research for projects, thus extending their reading skills.

- Provision is somewhat marred because not all students have the same opportunities to use it through their lessons.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring that students' standards in ML are as high as in other subjects
- improving the sharpness of self-evaluation and development planning, focussing on how to bring about improvement in student outcomes
- ensuring all students have equal opportunities to use ICT to enhance language learning, and building these into schemes of work.

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

Pam Haezewindt
Subject Adviser for ML
Her Majesty's Inspector