

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404040
F 020 7421 6855
www.ofsted.gov.uk
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr A Lovett
Headteacher
Tiverton High School
Bolham Road
Tiverton
EX16 6SQ

Dear Mr Lovett

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 27-28 January 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are satisfactory in languages.

- In 2008, teacher assessments in Key Stage 3 showed that students performed well below the national average and that achievement was unsatisfactory. In the current cohort, standards are below the national average and achievement is satisfactory. Higher attaining students are able to understand some complex language used by the teacher and

are encouraged to write accurately. Students with learning difficulties are well supported to develop their reading and listening but opportunities for them to speak the language, especially in pairs, are less frequent.

- By the end of Key Stage 4 students attained grades well below the national average in French in 2008 and did worse than in other subjects they took in school. In German standards were in line with the national average. Students' performance was weakest in speaking. In the current cohort this issue is being addressed and all the current group of Year 11 students of French are on course to achieve an A*-C grade. In German the predicted grades show that just over half the group should attain A*-C grades.
- Students are aware of some of the similarities and differences between different cultures, for example they know about some of the differences between school life in France compared to England. Some students go on trips and exchanges which help them to learn about different cultures.
- Most students understand why languages are important for both work and further study as they are given plenty of careers advice.
- Students in Key Stage 4 have positive attitudes to learning languages but find the course requires them to do a lot of learning by heart. In Key Stage 3 students generally work well together and behaviour is mostly good but say they do not find the work as stimulating as other subjects they learn.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory.

- Teachers use a wide range of techniques to engage students' attention and consequently students listen attentively in the majority of lessons and follow instructions well.
- Pace is good, especially in Key Stage 4, and students are expected to complete a lot of work in each lesson.
- Activities are varied. Nevertheless the resources are not always as interesting as they might be with few examples of authentic websites, magazines, books or DVDs. Reading is mostly confined to text book materials.
- Speaking is often done at whole class level so students do not have enough opportunity to practise in pairs or on their own. In two lessons about half of the students managed to avoid doing any oral work at all as the teacher only asked those who put their hands up. In Key Stage 3, students were often asked simply to remember and repeat single nouns and rarely given the chance to create a question or answer in full sentences.
- Teachers use the foreign language well in the classroom so students hear a lot of the foreign language being spoken. Higher attaining students especially are beginning to use everyday language, for

example, to say they have forgotten something or to say they are sorry about something.

- Explanations for tasks are very clear and students know what they are expected to learn. Marking of written work is generally good and students know how they are doing but they do not always get specific feedback in class, for example to improve their listening skills.
- Students are encouraged to keep their work neatly so that they can use their books for reference purposes. They are also given good resources to help them revise for the GCSE and students say teachers run revision sessions for them when necessary.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Students can study French or German in Key Stage 3 and can choose between continuing with one of these into Key Stage 4, or starting Spanish. Pupils in the top sets in Years 8 or 9 are given the opportunity to do a taster course in either French or German before they make their option choices. The school intends to offer Italian in Key Stage 4 from September 2009.
- The Key Stage 3 curriculum has not been adapted yet to make the most of opportunities presented in the new secondary curriculum by reducing content and prescription, although this is something which is planned for 2010.
- In Key Stage 4 few students continue with a language although numbers are rising. Very few study two languages although they are able to if they wish.
- The department recognises that students arrive at the school in Year 7 with varied amounts of language learning. It works with some of the feeder primaries to discuss what students have learnt and is planning to adapt its curriculum to take account of this. Staff from the school also offer taster German lessons in some of the primary schools.
- The scheme of work covers GCSE topics well but it does not include many opportunities for students to work with authentic texts or to link with other aspects of the curriculum. Students say they would welcome more opportunities to understand how to learn a language, to use ICT more and to learn more about people their own age in other countries.
- The school employs a foreign language assistant and an assistant who has lived in France for a considerable amount of time to help students to develop their language skills and understanding of other cultures.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory.

- Self-evaluation is supported at departmental level by the senior team. Results are carefully analysed by groups of students and by aspects of

the examination. The department is supported with any weaknesses that are identified, for example, results were lower than expected in 2008 for French and analysis showed that it was mostly poor performance in speaking. The department has been given time and resources to address this. For example it has been the focus of classroom observations and an oral test has now been included in the mock examinations. Speaking is now improving in Key Stage 4 lessons.

- Teachers attend professional development courses on topics linked to the departmental development plan; for example, on new forms of accreditation and developing the use of the interactive whiteboard and what is learned is put into practice.
- Students are consulted about learning languages and if necessary changes are made. For example, some students found that a few topics were taught too quickly and so changes were made.

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

- In 2008, 16% of students took a language. In the current Year 11 take-up is 21% and in Year 10 it is 26%. The school is aiming to increase this figure by five per cent each year and, although it does not intend to make languages compulsory, it is looking at the guidance it offers to try to encourage more students to take a language.
- The school has plans to investigate a range of accreditation to meet the needs of a wider variety of students.
- Opportunities are 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 satisfactory.

- Teachers regularly use the interactive whiteboard 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 sometimes use word-processing in lessons to draft and redraft work for coursework.
- Students are asked occasionally to use the internet to research aspects of other countries at home and students in Year 7 prepare presentations using appropriate software.
- ICT is not often used to help students develop their spoken and listening skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- continuing to help students to improve their spoken skills, especially in Key Stage 3
- increasing the range of resources that students use, especially authentic texts and ICT, to help them develop their spoken and listening skills
- continuing to work on developing the Key Stage 4 curriculum so that more students are encouraged to continue with language learning.

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