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Mr K Wadsworth  
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Dear Mr Wadsworth

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 22–23 June 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 five Key Stage 3 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

#### Context

The school is a specialist technology college which attained high performing school status in 2008. It then chose a further specialism – languages - which it was awarded from April 2009. It is in the process of planning for this. At the time of the ML inspection, Year 10 students were taking examinations, Year 11 students were on exam leave and Year 12 students were at a higher education event. Nevertheless, the inspector spoke to a group of Year 10 students who kindly gave up their time shortly before an examination, and

two Year 12 students. A key member of the department was also absent due to unavoidable circumstances.

## Achievement and standards

Overall, standards are broadly average; achievement in Key Stage 3 is good.

- Standards in Key Stage 3 were well above national expectations in 2008 and the ML department has worked hard to achieve this as they remained stubbornly broadly average for a number of years. In lessons observed progress was good.
- In lessons students spoke with good accents and pronunciation and because the teaching was well structured they learned how to have conversations on simple topics such as at the restaurant or at the doctor's or to make presentations about themselves or others.
- Teachers' expectations that they do this from memory and from building up their knowledge without recourse to written material helped students to make good progress.
- Because they had practiced sufficiently and understood well the key words in use almost all students were able to respond to listening exercises well.
- Students were able to deduce meaning from text well, using context to help their understanding.
- They showed that they had some knowledge of grammar, for example in forming the perfect tense, the near future and in understanding first and third person.
- They write with reasonable accuracy in both key stages according to their ability and there are many examples of extended writing displayed, some of them creative.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 were below the national average last year. Overall, the school's results dipped and languages suffered similarly. In languages this was attributed to the cohort make-up as well as to staffing changes. There is evidence to show that outcomes for the current Year 11 are likely to be broadly average.
- The relatively few students who take French and German post-16 do well.
- Year 10 students were very positive about learning languages and what it could contribute to their future. Key Stage 3 students also felt that learning a language was useful and none expressed a desire not to do so.
- Generally, behaviour in Key Stage 3 lessons was very good. Overall, learning languages contributes very well to students' personal development and their economic well-being.

## Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Lessons were well planned with clear objectives and good progression. Planning allowed for differentiation, mostly by outcome, but in a Year 7 French lesson materials enabled students to achieve according to their ability with all experiencing some success.
- Lessons observed were well structured so that students built on prior learning and could do more than when they started the lesson.
- Lessons were well paced with high expectations.
- Interactive whiteboards were used well by the teachers to revise prior learning or present new work, and on occasion students worked from the front of the class with them to demonstrate to their peers.
- Peer assessment was well used in several lessons, for example, in a Year 8 Spanish lesson where peers critiqued each others' presentations very fairly and said what might have been done better.
- Occasionally a student with specific needs needed more attention from the teacher during activities.
- The target languages are not used routinely to conduct lessons, give instructions and praise, and so students miss out on the more spontaneous exchanges that might be learned and used during their lessons.
- Marking varies in quality and although there are some excellent examples with very good short-term target setting there is also some weaker marking which does not correct basic inaccuracies and does not help students with their next steps. This was reinforced by the students' own comments on marking. There is a departmental policy but it is not always followed.
- Students' books are mostly well presented and provide good reference material.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- French is taught in Year 7 and Spanish or Latin are chosen as second languages in Years 8 and 9. Spanish was introduced in 2007 to replace German which few students were choosing into Key Stage 4. This has been a popular move with twice as many students opting for Spanish as for French in Year 10 for 2009/11.
- However, some students feel that with specialist language college status, German should be retained across the school.
- Students are able to learn Panjabi at the nearby girls' school. Examinations in other languages are facilitated, for example: where a student has a first language other than English. The language specialism will bring with it provision for languages for adults

- There is suitable time allocated to learning languages in both key stages, including for the two languages in Key Stage 3.
- Activities in lessons observed met the needs of almost all learners and helped them to enjoy learning, achieve well and be creative. Students said they mainly used text books for reading and would like more variety.
- Two foreign language assistants are employed to support students and whilst they work mainly in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form to improve oral skills, they do some work lower down the school.
- Not all classrooms have as good display as most, or celebrate students' written work. The department does not display how learning a language is important to students' futures.
- Schemes of work follow the text books and are not written to reflect the specific nature of the school.
- There are good enrichment and enhancement opportunities in the curriculum with a trip to both France and Spain, numerous extra study activities, student work with primary schools and various enrichment days. The school is already innovative about how it includes languages in its school activities and visits as is demonstrated by the technology specialism 'spectechular' last summer which was compered in French, and visits abroad where other subjects team up with languages such as history and music.

#### Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- You are clearly interested in promoting languages and have been instrumental in taking them forward with the changeover to Spanish and the language college bid.
- The department is sensitively led and this has enabled changes both to staffing and the curriculum to take place in a supportive environment.
- Staffing is now stable, and although some staff are relatively inexperienced, all are enthusiastic and the department has put in place mentoring to ensure that students benefit from all teaching and learning and make the best possible progress. There remain some inconsistencies in departmental practice.
- The department's self-evaluation is evaluative, and accurate. The development plan is well focussed on improvement and has some imminent targets for the language specialism.
- The subject leader has taken notice of the new secondary curriculum and with the department has looked at ways in which they can adapt what they do in response.
- The school has wisely appointed another part-time Spanish native speaker teacher to add to capacity, and ensure that its aims regarding the development of primary languages in its feeder primary schools are met.

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

- The school reaches the higher benchmark because it has retained its policy of all students learning at least one language to the end of Year 11.
- There is an increase in the numbers of students taking a language in Year 12 from 3 in 2008/09 to 11 in 2009/10.

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

This is satisfactory.

- Teachers are using ICT well to present and consolidate work and engage students' interests.
- Students enjoy using the interactive white boards (IWB) themselves to demonstrate to peers.
- The department has a set of wireless laptops which enables it to use ICT very flexibly in classrooms.
- However, depending on which class they are in, students do not use it with the same amount of regularity.
- In a lesson where it was observed, it was introduced at just the right time and motivated students but was not used to its full advantage; for example: to do what a word processor is best for: drafting and redrafting for accuracy and to demonstrate to students the progress they are making.
- There is no policy on its use to highlight when and where it is best used and can enhance students' learning.
- Work on the virtual learning network is envisaged within the specialist language college plans.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the use of the target languages for conducting lessons and helping students to use language spontaneously beyond the topic areas
- ensuring that inconsistencies within the department which affect students' outcomes are eradicated
- writing schemes of work which take account of the 'new' secondary curriculum, using ICT and are tailored to the school.

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  
Her Majesty's Inspector  
Subject Adviser for Languages