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Mr R Campbell
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Campbell

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 1-2 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 nine part lessons, as well as a brief visit to an after-school Mandarin Chinese club session.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Context

Impington Village College was designated a specialist language college in 1999.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good and standards are above average.

- Standards in French in Key Stage 3 are above average. Those who come from the main primary feeder schools build successfully on the above average standards reached at the end of Key Stage 2, especially in their skills in listening and speaking. Those with no previous experience in French make very good progress and catch up quickly.
- Students make good progress in German and reach above average standards after only two years.
- In 2008, results in GCSE examinations were above average in two of the three main languages. Almost all students were entered for at least one language. French is the weakest subject, but standards across all languages are rising.
- In the sixth form attainment is well above average. Students achieved very high levels in the International Baccalaureate (IB) courses which almost all follow.
- Progress in the lessons observed was mostly good and occasionally better.
- Students show confidence in their speaking skills and cope with ease when listening to the language either in recordings or when used by their teachers to manage the lessons. They read well both for comprehension and when reading aloud. The level of written language in their books is above average.
- Students develop good language learning skills. This enables them to cope with the study of a second language and to acquire new languages in the sixth form quickly and successfully.
- Students cooperate well in lessons with the teacher and with each other. They enjoy languages and exhibit good behaviour and attitudes.
- The very wide range of languages on offer and the international focus of the school contribute strongly to the students' cultural development and awareness of global issues.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and good classroom management skills. Several are native speakers.
- Teachers plan carefully to ensure their lessons include a range of activities. The students particularly appreciate the games and fun activities that enhance their enjoyment. Occasionally some activities are allowed to run on for too long and the pace of learning declines. This is especially the case in activities that are mainly led by the teacher or involve too much listening.
- Teachers make good use of resources including ICT.
- A particular strength of the department is in the use of the language being studied during lessons. Teachers use the target languages almost exclusively for managing the lessons and for communicating directly with the students. There are high expectations of the students

in using the language to respond. However, the use by students when talking to each other is less well developed in Key Stages 3 and 4.

- The department is highly inclusive. Almost all students study two languages in Key Stage 3. Many students needing additional support with their learning make very good progress because they receive strong support from teaching assistants and close attention to their individual needs. However, across the department the provision in lessons of activities that are closely matched to individual needs is not regular enough to improve further the progress students make.
- There are regular opportunities for students to be involved in creative projects, many of which make use of technology to increase participation. An aspect of creativity which is less well developed is the students' spontaneous use of language and their ability to respond to the unexpected.
- Assessment is used well by subject leaders to monitor the progress being made by students and to enable them to target intervention effectively. Increasing use is being made in lessons of techniques such as peer assessment to increase students' confidence and independence.
- Teachers mark students' work carefully and regularly but do not always provide enough feedback on how to improve the work. They do not always check that the mistakes they have highlighted are understood with the result that the same mistakes continue in subsequent pieces of work.
- Students are set targets but are not always fully aware of what the targets are. This limits the potential for this process to raise their aspirations and results in a few reducing their efforts in Key Stage 4, especially in French.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good and outstanding in the sixth form.

- There is a wide range of languages available in all key stages. Almost all students study two languages in Key Stage 3 and the vast majority continue with at least one in Key Stage 4.
- The range of languages includes more unusual options such as Latin, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese.
- Students whose first language is other than English have opportunities to gain qualifications in their first language.
- The curriculum is being developed further with additional languages on offer and a wider range of qualifications. The offer of the IB attracts a wide range of students to the sixth form including a number of foreign students who make a very positive contribution to the international focus of the school.
- There is a wealth of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities. These are extremely well supported and make a strong contribution to the personal and social development of the students.

- A strong feature of the work of the department is the innovative approach to cross curricular projects. An example of this is the successful teaching of ICT through the medium of French in Year 7.
- The department is well-resourced. Students have good access to text books and other reading material such as magazines. There is a generous allowance of time devoted to languages and in the sixth form; students benefit from being taught in small groups.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- A major strength of the leadership is the creation of a clear, common vision for the direction of the department. This has fostered a strong team spirit. All subject leaders work well together and there is a high level of coherence and consistency across teaching in the different languages. In addition it has ensured that the department has coped well with some recent staffing difficulties.
- Departmental self-evaluation demonstrates that subject leaders have very good knowledge of the strengths and areas to develop. The departmental development plan is detailed, linked well to the main school plan, reviewed regularly and a good instrument for ML improvement.
- Monitoring activities are regular and thorough and take very good account of the opinions of students. This is through formal and informal procedures and in the sixth form makes very good use of the departmental website.
- The department benefits from good accommodation especially the multi-media room.
- The work of the advanced skills teacher in the primary schools ensures that students start in Year 7 with well developed language skills and a very positive attitude to learning languages. There is scope for the scheme of work in French to build more explicitly on this work.

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

The school's take up in Key Stage 4 is well above the national average.

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

This is good.

- All teachers use data projectors in lessons effectively to engage students and improve their learning.
- Students have developed their confidence in using language sites and other areas of the internet to develop their research and reading skills.

- There are regular opportunities for students to use a range of language software to support their language development.
- The departmental website is used by staff and students and the department is actively seeking ways of developing its use further, especially for students in the sixth form.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- ensuring the pace in lessons is maintained by identifying more opportunities to stretch and challenge the more able and highlighting those points where some might need additional support
- sharing individual targets with students more explicitly in order to raise aspirations
- developing more opportunities for students to use the target language creatively and spontaneously and encouraging them to use it in their interactions with each other.

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

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector

