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 J Kehoe
Mount Carmel RC Technology College for Girls
Holland Walk
Duncombe Road
Islington
London
N19 3EU

Dear Mr Kehoe

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 30 June and 1 July 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, observation of five lessons and a Year 7 assembly on preparing students for a cross-curricular day on international citizenship.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory with some good features.

Context

Mount Carmel is an 11-16 school. At the time of the inspection Year 11 students were on examination leave and Year 10 students were on work experience.

Achievement and standards

Overall, standards and achievement are satisfactory.

- A tiny group of Key Stage 4 students who took French in 2008 achieved very good A*-C GCSE grades. Students who took their heritage languages, usually during Key Stage 3, achieved outstanding results. When they carried on to take AS level in Key Stage 4 they attained very well.
- Performance at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2008 was below national expectations, but had improved on 2007. This year it is well below.
- Progress in Key Stage 3 lessons observed was satisfactory.
- Students demonstrated that they had satisfactory prior learning and used this to consolidate their knowledge, for example in the ICT room to carry out tasks such as constructing a time table, a form or a paragraph.
- Some Year 9 students showed that they could understand Spanish websites and begin to construct an 'advertisement' for a film.
- Their books and display show that many could construct paragraphs of reasonable length and accuracy dependent upon age and ability when expected to do so. Presentation is good.
- In lessons observed there was sometimes insufficient intensive practice of language presented for students to speak well, and they were not always encouraged to pronounce accurately or to use the specific language alphabets. Consequently, sound spelling links were weak and reading aloud did not communicate well.
- Some students did not listen attentively and so their progress was not as good as it might have been and teaching did not always tackle this.
- Students know well how learning a language can be useful in the future even though not many choose to carry on. They have a developing awareness of the cultures of the countries and communities of the languages they study.
- For the most part, learning languages contributes well to their personal development and enjoyment in school.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Key Stage 3.

- Planning is good and has the potential to lead to good lessons; it includes open ended differentiation, so students can use support provided or not.
- However, on occasions lessons are marred because too much is attempted, or students are not fully aware of the tasks they need to accomplish.

- There is good effort to teach in the target language and students can follow instructions quite well but they do not use the languages spontaneously themselves.
- Teachers use interactive whiteboards to engage learners. Some students say that this sometimes becomes too much of a routine and that their work is a mixture of presentation and course book rather than more exciting activities.
- Teaching does not consistently manage students' inattention and/or underlying chat during lessons and so progress is not as good as it could be for everyone.
- Marking is of good quality overall with some useful comments and 'short term targets'; it is better in Spanish than in French.
- Assessments in all skills are carried out at least once in the first half year and students take an examination later on. This is not enough assessment to ensure that students make fast enough progress and to diagnose weaknesses early on, particularly with the ultimately low performance at the end of Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory with good features.

- A rolling programme of language provision was introduced three years ago: all Year 7 students take Spanish on entry one year and continue with it until the end of Year 9 and the next Year 7 cohort takes French. This has been successful in attracting more students to opt into languages in Key Stage 4, with numbers, though small, nearly doubling this year.
- One GCSE class will take Spanish in curriculum time; another will operate after school in order to enable students to take advantage of the school's wider curriculum.
- Very recent adjustments to the school curriculum also mean that students now have three options enabling more possibilities for language take-up. The subject leader would like to introduce a choice of language in Key Stage 4.
- The time for language learning in Key Stage 4 is good but in Key Stage 3 it is barely adequate for good progress to be made. In Year 7 this year students are timetabled for a double lesson once a week which has made provision difficult.
- Classes are not set and remain extremely mixed ability in Key Stage 3; one lesson demonstrated well how more homogenous groups could have achieved their potential better.
- The department is to be congratulated on having introduced accreditation at the end of Key Stage 3 in order to celebrate students' achievements.
- The school facilitates, alongside the local authority (LA) EMAS team, students with heritage languages to take a GCSE, for example in Spanish, Portuguese, Polish or Turkish, and also provides help via after

school clubs. These languages are usually taken in Key Stage 3. Students then do AS levels with mostly very good results, and evidence shows they often continue at local colleges.

- Schemes of work are good, tailored well to the school resources; it would be opportune to consider building in more tenses earlier on in order to improve performance.
- The school shares two foreign language assistants to help students' oral work.
- There is a good range of enrichment activities which include a trip to Spain, E-twinning with France and Spain, a Paris – London link, and study support. They have grown more recently as the school has worked towards its full international schools' award (ISA).
- The school has introduced a cross curricular day for Year 7 which takes place shortly with the aim of improving global citizenship, raising awareness of and encouraging appreciation and empathy with Africa. There will be languages activities with maths, and with geography and religion.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory with good features.

- You are clearly interested in and supportive of languages and promoting them alongside the international dimension at Mount Carmel.
- You have facilitated an extra pathway in Key Stage 4 this year which should support the improvement in numbers taking a language.
- The subject leader is in charge of both modern languages and English as an additional language and this supports her awareness of students' needs in English and their desires regarding their heritage languages, as well as ensuring that ML has a strong place in the growing international dimension.
- Departmental self assessment is evaluative and the departmental development plan is well focussed on improvement.
- The subject leader has already begun to look at using the revised secondary curriculum and schemes of work in Spanish in Year 7 now reflect this.
- Monitoring and evaluation meetings are reasonably regular and documentation shows that some areas for improvement are being tackled. For example, Behaviour management development needs have been supported. Monitoring of lessons is not regular enough given the low performance by the end of Key Stage 3.
- You and the subject leader are very aware that there will need to be changes made to accommodate the increasing numbers of Year 7 students who arrive with ML skills.
- The school works with other local secondary schools. There are plans to work with the local authority and primary schools, and also to host local network meetings for other secondary schools.

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

- The school is well below the 50% benchmark for take-up in Key Stage 4 although it has improved for 2009/10.
- With technology and religion compulsory subjects, students have been left with two options, but this has changed for the coming year so that students have three pathways. Students do not have a choice of languages in Key Stage 4.
- The school is trying different ways of motivating students in Key Stage 3 including linking languages across the curriculum in relation to the revised secondary curriculum; accrediting students' performance at the end of Key Stage 3; display on the importance of language learning and what it can lead to; and broadening its international work.

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

Overall, this is good.

- Interactive whiteboards are used by teachers to present work and engage learners. Sometimes learners use them to do exercises in front of their peers.
- ICT is used by students to word process and compose presentations.
- The Internet is used for research.
- It is integrated into work across the Key Stage 3 curriculum and logs kept of use. Students say their use depends on which class they are in as well as access to ICT network rooms. Recently teachers have countered access problems by planning and booking well in advance.
- Students can use ICT on certain lunchtimes with ML teachers to help them.
- Teaching in ICT rooms sometimes lacks the basic routines of working in such rooms which results in some students not paying attention, but in another lesson routines were well established and students paid attention very well.
- Activities are built into the schemes of work and there is a separate paper on what might be done across Key Stage 3.
- There is no indication against activities of how it is intended they will improve language learning, for example: written accuracy; reading skills; cultural awareness.
- The virtual learning platform holds ML materials and is used for linking to e-twinning.
- So far there are no plans to monitor the use of ICT for its impact on students' learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- to provide sufficient practice in speaking and to improve opportunities for students to use the languages spontaneously and creatively
- to consider setting in Key Stage 3 in order to enable all students to achieve their potential; and improve the amount of time on the timetable for a language in Key Stage 3
- to increase assessment opportunities in Key Stage 3 in order to improve performance
- to monitor and evaluate lessons more frequently to move teaching and learning from satisfactory to good
- to consider introducing a choice of languages and alternative accreditation in Key Stage 4.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your LA. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Pam Haezewindt
Her Majesty's Inspector
Subject Adviser for Modern Languages