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Mr M Southworth  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Southworth

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 October 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 take up in Key Stage 4, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve language learning.

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 two groups of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons and two lunchtime clubs.

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

Achievement in languages

Achievement is good.

- Standards at Key Stage 3 are well above national expectations and have increased steadily in recent years. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving grades A\* to C at GCSE level was broadly average in

2008, although those in German were below average. The proportion gaining the highest grades was low. As a language college, the school enters many more students for examinations than most schools. Exact comparisons are, therefore, difficult to make. Nonetheless, languages perform more strongly than most subjects in the school.

- The progress made by students in most lessons observed was good.
- Students' speaking skills are good. This reflects the school's emphasis on teaching students to speak confidently. Most students' listening skills are good as are their writing skills. Reading skills are also developing. Students have opportunities to read from whiteboards, games and worksheets but there are few magazines, comics or newspapers which they can browse at leisure or use to stimulate their writing.
- Students' intercultural understanding is good. They know many aspects of French and German culture and could name a number of countries where French is spoken. Their understanding of the importance of learning a language and of the economic advantages it brings is good. They know languages can be useful in careers in policing, teaching and translating, as well as in business and the holiday industries.
- Modern languages make a good contribution to most students' personal development. Behaviour is good in most classes. Students enjoy learning languages and cite the interesting activities and learning about other cultures as reasons for this.

### Quality of teaching of languages

The quality of teaching is good overall.

- Teachers' pronunciation and subject knowledge are good and, in some cases, very good. Lessons are usually organised well. All start with a useful 'entry' activity which revises prior learning. Teaching is typically fast paced, lively and actively involves students. Resources are varied. Planning is detailed and most takes account of students' different levels of ability. However, some plenary sessions are too short.
- There is generally good use of the target language in lessons but, on occasion, some opportunities to use this are missed. There is some explicit teaching of sound spelling links and some very good use of language learning strategies.
- The academic guidance which students receive is good. They know the levels they are working at and their targets. Work is regularly marked and appropriate corrections made. Good assessment procedures enable students to understand well what they need to do to improve.

## Quality of the curriculum in languages

The curriculum is outstanding.

- All students in Year 7 study French and previous knowledge of languages is taken into account. These students are also introduced to Gaelic, Russian, Italian and Spanish which contributes to their good intercultural understanding. In Years 8 and 9, students also study German. All learners in Key Stage 4 study a language to GCSE level and some study a second language. The time allocated to language learning is suitable.
- The school's own schemes of work meet the needs of learners well.
- There is an extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and an annual trip to Germany. Visits also take place to foreign restaurants and to a major football club where Spanish is promoted.
- Learning is supported by colourful and useful displays and regular homework. There is a good range of intervention strategies, such as smaller classes for GCSE groups and weekend revision classes.
- Very good learning links have been established with other departments, such as PE, geography, music and art.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

Leadership and management are good.

- You and the senior leadership team are passionate about all students having the opportunity to learn languages.
- The subject leader leads the department well. Data are used well to monitor students' progress and to identify underachievement. Good self-evaluation informs an annual departmental action plan, although this would benefit from a sharper focus on how to improve attainment.
- Plans, students' work and lessons are monitored well. A number of changes in staffing have been generally managed well, but there is scope to strengthen induction and support procedures for new staff.
- The language college is very well led. Good links have been forged with local and foreign schools, and with higher institutions of learning. Courses are run for other schools on behalf of the local authority and a range of adult classes is also held. Annual 'arts days' contribute strongly to students' enjoyment of languages.

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

All students study at least one language in Key Stage 4.

How well ICT is used to improve language learning

This is good.

- Interactive whiteboards are used in all classes to introduce vocabulary and to reinforce previous learning.
- Students are encouraged to access appropriate language websites.
- Extra-curricular clubs, such as the laptop club and the games console club, enable students to practise their language skills.
- ICT is used well for management and data analysis purposes.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards at Key Stage 4, particularly in German
- sharpening development planning so that there is a more detailed focus on raising attainment
- developing greater use of the target language.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop modern languages in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy  
Her Majesty's Inspector