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Mrs H Renard
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Dear Mrs Renard

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 3 and 4 November 2009 to look at work in 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 included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of nine periods; and parts of four Year 7 'taster' sessions in four different languages.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in languages

Overall achievement is good.

- Achievement is broadly satisfactory by the end of Key Stage 4; there is an improving trend. Achievement in languages that students have chosen to study, such as Russian and Italian, is very good.
- Achievement by the end of Key Stage 5 is good with the majority of students gaining A to C grades in AS and A2 examinations in 2009.

- In Key Stage 3, teachers' assessments demonstrate that students achieved above the national averages in 2009.
- Progress in the lessons observed was mostly good.
- Students listen well in lessons and acquire vocabulary and grammatical notions, such as gender, relatively quickly. Pronunciation is good in most lessons. Students were not observed speaking at length.
- Students build up their writing using reading and scaffolding to help them write from word to sentence to paragraph level quite quickly. They present their work well.
- Students talked about how they enjoyed learning a language or languages and showed good awareness of its importance as a life-skill. All students had good reasons for choosing the languages they were studying. Generally, students showed good cultural awareness and were very grateful for all the extra-curricular opportunities their language college affords. Overall, languages contribute very well to students' personal development and well-being.

Quality of teaching of languages

The quality of teaching is good overall.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good in several languages.
- The majority of teaching observed was good and brought about good learning and progress. Most lessons were planned well and were delivered with pace.
- The interactive whiteboard was used well with interesting activities to engage students, either for presentation or practice.
- Teachers are using 'assessment for learning' strategies well to help students reflect on how well they are doing in lessons.
- Occasionally, lessons were too teacher dominated, not allowing the students the space to develop more independently.
- There are times when teachers could use the target languages much more for routine instructions, requests and praise, thus providing good role-models for listening and responding.
- There are very good working relationships. Students say they are supported well by staff to know what they need to do next to improve, although this is not always written into their exercise books. This was borne out in the scrutiny of work.
- Teachers are still learning the school's new data and monitoring systems so that they can tailor their lessons to students' performance more individually.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum is good with some outstanding features.

- The range of languages now on offer, including the taster sessions, twilight and extra-curricular provision, is excellent.
- However, there is very little time for able students to study their chosen second language, either Russian or German, in Years 8 and 9.
- Schemes of work are in a transitional phase as the school introduces new monitoring and evaluation processes and requirements. The department is aware of the revised Key Stage 3 framework and intends to incorporate this into revised schemes.
- There is an outstanding range of visits abroad, exchanges and language days in school which both supports languages and contributes to other subjects across the school.
- There is also an excellent range of activities which develops students personally as well as contributing to language learning. For example: Year 11 'language leaders' teaching German in primary schools; sixth formers teaching Russian to Year 10 students; a bilingual sports day; and a Year 9 radio show with Lincoln University.
- The department's contribution to literacy, for those students who are less able, is a good initiative.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

Leadership is good.

- The leadership of the acting head of department, while the substantive head of department is on maternity leave, is ensuring effective continuity under the strongly supportive senior leadership team.
- The latter has supported the developments to improve provision and outcomes. For example, alterations to the curriculum and accreditation to improve motivation for languages, particularly in Key Stage 4, provide a choice of pathways. This is proving successful. Along with the teaching team, the senior leadership team is instrumental in providing a good language-learning ethos.
- Self-evaluation is satisfactory and the departmental development plan links well to the school's improvement plan.
- There is a good amount of professional development.
- Resources are good with four foreign-language assistants who provide support across the key stages. There is a dedicated suite of rooms with two ICT rooms. Display enhances the department's environment and ethos.
- The language college supports language learning in primary schools, local secondary schools and the adult community.

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

It reaches the benchmarks and exceeds those for specialist language colleges.

How well ICT is used to improve language learning

This is good with outstanding features.

- One of the major reasons students cited for liking languages was the ICT they used regularly in lessons. They could discuss how it helped them. For example: by memorising and practising new vocabulary; drafting for accuracy; and supporting presentations.
- There are good facilities which are used well. Because the timetable is based on 35-minute periods which are frequently allocated as double periods, the department takes the opportunity to take students into the ICT rooms for one 35-minute period to consolidate work through specific games and activities.
- There are many commercial resources as well as some very good 'home-made' resources, which support specific lessons that students can access at home as well as in the ICT club. Generic software, for example, word processing for drafting and re-drafting for accuracy, is also used.
- Sixth-form students use the internet for the French radio and those studying Russian said they use it on a daily basis. Blogs have also excited Year 7 students when older students used them to communicate from their trip to Normandy. Video-conferencing activities are being organised.
- Staff have embedded ICT well into the ML curriculum and use it to manage their work through the virtual learning environment. It is not yet written into schemes of work or monitored for the impact on learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing speaking in the target languages in lessons by both teachers and students
- monitoring achievement in the second languages in Key Stage 3 given the very small amount of time there is for learning them each week
- monitoring the impact of using ICT on language learning.

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 local Learning and Skills Council and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Pam Haezewindt
Her Majesty's Inspector