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25 January 2010

Mrs J McIntosh  
Acting Headteacher  
Longdendale Community Language College  
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Cheshire  
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Dear Mrs McIntosh

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

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 13 and 14 January 2010 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 the 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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with nominated staff and two groups of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of five lessons and several extra-curricular clubs.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

### Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good. Attainment is average but the progress made by students is good.

- Attainment at Key Stage 3 is above average. In Key Stage 4 it is average. In 2009, results in Spanish and French were broadly average. Results in German, however, were well below average. As a language college, the school enters many more students for national examinations than other schools and exact comparisons are difficult to make.

- The progress made by students in lessons was good, and occasionally outstanding. Listening and reading skills are good. Writing is developing well and students can write well at length in their books.
- Speaking skills are adequate. Many students lack confidence to speak in a foreign language beyond a classroom setting. Students' understanding of grammar is good. For example, in a Year 9 lower set, a student confidently explained the difference between the German pronouns 'sie' and 'Sie.'
- Intercultural understanding is good overall. However, students' understanding of the usefulness of languages is satisfactory. They know that languages can be useful for further study, travelling and for a number of careers. Languages make a good contribution to students' personal development. Behaviour in lessons was good overall.

### Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good with outstanding features..

- Teachers' subject knowledge and pronunciation are good. Planning is detailed, informed well by the good use of data, and identifies how the needs of students of differing abilities will be met. Lessons are prepared well and a wide range of activities is used to maintain interest. Previous learning is routinely revised and built upon. However, plenary sessions are not always consistently used to reinforce learning.
- Target languages are used well by teachers. On occasion, their use declines as a lesson progresses. There is scope to create more opportunities for students to speak so that their confidence improves. There is good teaching of language-learning strategies. In an outstanding lesson in Year 7, the teacher skilfully used students' knowledge of English grammar to encourage their use of French connectives.
- Support for students is good. 'Coursework clinics' are held for those who need assistance with languages. Marking contains good examples of developmental feedback but this is not consistent across all staff.

### Quality of the curriculum in languages

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

- Four main languages are taught by the college, and students can also study for qualifications in Urdu outside of the school day. There is a good range of language clubs, including Turkish and Mandarin clubs. The time allocated to learning languages is good and all students in every year group study a language.
- Good opportunities exist to study additional languages in Key Stage 4. The number of dual linguists has grown each year and there is a small group of triple linguists. Older students who have already gained a good GCSE in a language can study another language and some are able to study for an AS qualification in French. The college also provides vocational courses

and alternative accreditation which have increased the take-up of additional languages and motivated less able students.

- Language festivals, enrichment weeks, a range of exchange visits and residential trips abroad contribute strongly to students' enjoyment of languages. Learning is supported by good classroom displays. However, there are few resources for students to read and browse for pleasure.

### Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in languages is good.

- The subject leader knows the department's strengths and weaknesses well. Staffing levels have been improved and successful steps taken to make languages teaching more effective and consistent. Weaknesses in teaching have been tackled, partly through specific training.
- Lessons and students' work are monitored regularly. New schemes of work have been written. Data are used well to identify underachievement, hold staff accountable and to inform improvements to learning, such as the careful matching of specific classes to teachers' strengths.
- The school's specialism makes a good contribution to its work in ML. Good links have been established with a large number of primary schools, local universities and a sixth form college. It assists with the funding of visits and additional staff and organises language classes for the local community.

### Take-up in Key Stage 4

- The school exceeds the upper benchmark for the uptake of languages at Key Stage 4 in specialist language colleges.

### The use of ICT to improve language learning

- The use of ICT to improve language learning is satisfactory. It is used well for management purposes and interactive whiteboards are used well in lessons. Although some innovative use of ICT by students was observed, too few have regular access to ICT facilities, which limits their opportunities to develop skills, such as drafting and editing writing for accuracy.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment in German at Key Stage 4
- developing opportunities for all students to have regular access to ICT to develop their language skills
- developing more opportunities for students to practise their speaking skills so that they are more confident in using modern languages.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop 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