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Mrs P Walters  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Walters

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 25 and 26 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 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is outstanding.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is outstanding.

- Attainment in ML is above average. Students enter the school with standards that are well below average, especially their linguistic skills. They make excellent progress in Key Stage 3 and the qualifications they gain through the Asset Languages scheme show that the standards they have reached are well above average. They benefit from the excellent, well-structured teaching so that all groups thrive, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Standards in GCSE examinations are above average. Students gain qualifications in a large number of the different languages they speak. All of the students who take French at the end of Key Stage 4 pass the examination. A minority also achieve well in A and AS-level qualifications which the school enables them to study.
- Students greatly enjoy learning languages and appreciate the advantages of doing so, not just for their future success but also to support their learning in other subjects. Trips and other enrichment activities make an excellent contribution to their cultural development as do the projects undertaken with other departments, such as art and religious education.

### Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is outstanding.

- The subject team have excellent subject knowledge and very high ambitions for their learners and for themselves.
- Lesson plans are extremely helpful and detailed and the graded objectives provide a suitable level of challenge for all abilities.
- Throughout the lessons, all teachers consistently make excellent use of the language being studied. They have high expectations of its use by students when they respond.
- Teachers use a wide range of assessment techniques to monitor progress in lessons, adjusting their teaching accordingly. Results from regular formal tests feed into the new monitoring system and are being used to refine the setting arrangements and, to a lesser extent, to adjust provision within lessons.
- Resources are well produced and increase students' enjoyment. Activities to develop effective language-learning strategies are a regular feature of lessons. Activities are managed exceptionally well and students respond to the secure and consistent standards with excellent behaviour.
- The pace of lessons is brisk and teachers use a variety of time-limited activities to ensure no one has time to be bored. Occasionally, teachers fail to give all students sufficient time to discuss new ideas with each other. This impedes their development as independent learners.
- The use of ICT in lessons is strong. Students have regular opportunities to use ICT in their work and the department has its own multimedia suite.
- Marking is thorough and teachers regularly provide helpful comments on how to improve. Corrections are used well to improve learning. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to the learning for all students.

### Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- The curriculum provides well-organised, imaginative and effective opportunities for learning and a broad range of experiences. Some

imaginative projects have been undertaken with other schools and for the European Day of Languages, building successfully on the Performing Arts specialism. Gifted and talented students have opportunities to compete in language competitions.

- The curriculum is adapted to the needs of the least able by offering Spanish to the bottom two sets in Key Stage 3. However, there is no provision for students wanting to study both French and Spanish in either key stage.
- Cross-curricular events have been well received by the students. They spoke with great enthusiasm of events such as pancake making where no English was allowed in the kitchen. The subject is making a good contribution to students' literacy through a consistent approach to sound-spelling links.
- The school has links with a growing number of schools in the countries where the two main languages are spoken. These links include electronic and written communications. Trips abroad are popular and successful.
- Strong links exist with feeder primary schools and teachers from Holte deliver French lessons in the schools every week.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- The department has developed into one where there is a very high level of consistency and an excellent standard of teaching.
- There are strong partnerships with other organisations, for example with providers of initial teacher education and with institutions of higher education. Research projects have been undertaken and the local area is benefiting from the expertise that exists within the school.
- The department benefits from the generous support for languages you and the other senior leaders provide. The subject leader monitors the work of the department rigorously, using outcomes from the monitoring system she has devised to make an accurate evaluation of strengths and areas for development. Leaders have built a team with high morale and enormous expertise that is recognised as leading practice.

#### Subject issue: take-up in Key Stage 4

- The number of students taking a modern language in Key Stage 4 is still well below the Government's target. This is being tackled with some success but the lack of choice militates against this. The numbers have risen from 12% in 2009 to 18% in 2010.

#### Subject issue: the use of use of ICT to improve language learning

The use of ICT to improve language learning is excellent.

- All students regularly use ICT to improve their knowledge and understanding of grammatical functions, their cultural awareness and the

quality of their writing. They use a wide range of applications to support their speaking, including links with schools overseas.

- Extensive use is made of technology in lessons, such as individual digital recorders and interactive whiteboards.
- Homework is sent via email which the students find motivating.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- continuing to develop strategies to increase the take up at Key Stage 4
- providing regular opportunities in lessons for students to become more independent in their learning and to explore and increase their understanding through discussion.

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

Elaine Taylor  
Her Majesty's Inspector