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Mr A Mottershead
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Dear Mr Mottershead

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 2 and 3 March 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 three groups of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; observation of six lessons and a learning walk that involved brief visits to four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Trinity School has been a specialist language college since 1998. The school is currently subject to substantial building work which has meant that a number of ML classrooms have had to be relocated to other parts of the school.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 show that students achieve outcomes higher than those expected. Results at GCSE level are broadly average. When alternative vocational qualifications are taken into

account, the proportion of students who gained a good GCSE or equivalent in 2009 was significantly above average. However, relatively few students achieve the highest grades at GCSE level in German and Spanish.

- Achievement at Key Stage 5 is satisfactory. In 2009, a minority of students taking examinations at AS and A2 levels achieved grades A to C.
- The progress made by students in lessons observed was good overall.
- Students' writing skills are well developed. They can write at length, use different tenses and express opinions. Students' exercise books showed that most write with accuracy. Reading skills are also good and most students can deduce meanings of new words by applying different language learning strategies. Students' speaking skills are good. Most are eager to contribute to lessons and can speak confidently. Listening skills are satisfactory.
- Learning languages makes a good contribution to students' personal development. Behaviour in lessons is good overall. Students enjoy learning languages and have a good appreciation of their usefulness for their future careers. Students' intercultural understanding is satisfactory.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Lessons are planned well. The pace of teaching is good overall and foreign language assistants and additional adults are generally used well.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and pronunciation are good and sometimes very good. The target language is used well in some lessons. In both of the sixth-form lessons observed, teachers conducted the lessons in the target languages, which encouraged a high degree of their use by students. However, target languages are used less consistently in some other lessons, where use declines as the lesson progresses.
- There is much good teaching of language learning strategies. In a Year 8 German lesson, students were taught how to recognise verb infinitives.
- Teachers have a good knowledge of language learning methodology. A range of resources and activities is used to interest students. On occasion, some activities lasted too long. Some plenary sessions were too short to allow new learning to be embedded.
- Marking is very good. The school's 'feedback' arrangements in students' 'best books' provide students with extensive, detailed and clear guidance on how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- Four main languages are taught and are available as options in the sixth form. Students in Year 7 study either French or Spanish. More able students also learn German or Italian from Year 8 onwards. The time for

learning the first language is good. However, less time is available to learn the second language.

- The curriculum serves the needs and interests of students of different abilities well. In Key Stage 4, vocational courses, focused on communication for business, are offered as a parallel provision to GCSE courses.
- The curriculum is enriched by good classroom displays, several European and international trips, a Euro-club and activities, such as the European Day of Languages. A 'language of the month' school project promotes aspects of different languages such as Thai and Polish. Students reported that this approach is not always followed consistently in form tutor time in other departments.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- The new subject leader has continued well his predecessor's focus on improving teaching and learning and raising standards. Previous staffing discontinuity, which impacted adversely on standards, has been tackled with the strong support of senior leaders. Disruption caused by building work has been handled well.
- The department is not afraid to trial new approaches to the curriculum. It evaluates their impact and makes appropriate changes if they do not improve standards. Training is linked closely to changes in the curriculum.
- Action planning focuses closely on issues identified by accurate self-evaluation. The department's work is monitored by learning walks and scrutiny of students' work. There is scope to monitor lessons in more detail.
- The language college supports the work of the school well. It makes a very good contribution to language learning in primary schools, in the adult community and in a major local business. It also supports language learning in other secondary schools.

Take-up in Key Stage 4

The school exceeds the benchmarks required for specialist language colleges and those set by the Secretary of State.

The use of ICT to improve language learning

This is satisfactory.

- ICT is used to analyse data and identify underperformance. Its use is included in schemes of work. Electronic whiteboards are used well to introduce new learning and to help students to make progress. However, students have few opportunities to interact with or use ICT independently.
- Students use the languages section of the school's website at home. Opportunities for them to use ICT suites are limited. Consequently,

students have insufficient opportunities to use ICT to develop their skills and knowledge in languages, for example in drafting and editing writing.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the number of students who achieve the highest grades at GCSE level, particularly in German and Spanish
- improving opportunities for all students to use ICT regularly and develop their language learning further
- ensuring that target languages are used more consistently in all lessons.

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

As I explained previously, 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

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector