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Dear Mr Wilkinson

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 8 and 9 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 four groups of students, scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- Attainment is above average. Results in 2009 at GCSE level in German and French were above average. Students performed better in German than in French. The percentage of students gaining A* or A grades is average. The school enters many more students for examinations in ML than most schools and the proportion gaining a good grade at GCSE level was well above average in 2008 and 2009.
- The results of teachers' assessments at Key Stage 3 are above expectations. At Key Stage 5, achievement is good. In 2009, most

students gained good grades at AS and A2 level. The most recent results in German at A2 level were very good. Students who speak English as an additional language are supported well in taking examinations in their home language and those who do so achieve well.

- The progress made by students in lessons was good overall.
- Students' writing skills are good. They can write at length, offer opinions and older students use tenses well. Students are developing a good understanding of grammar. Reading skills are good. Students can use a range of strategies to understand a variety of different texts.
- Listening skills are generally good. Most students listen carefully to acquire new vocabulary and grammatical concepts. Speaking skills are satisfactory. These are better developed among older students. Some younger students lack confidence in speaking. Pronunciation is mostly good but there is some mispronunciation of key German words.
- ML makes a good contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy learning languages. Behaviour in lessons is good overall. They have a sound awareness of the usefulness of languages for their future careers. Students' intercultural understanding, however, is not as broad as it could be, particularly in French.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Teachers' subject knowledge and pronunciation are good and some are outstanding. The target language is used well in lessons. Planning is detailed and additional adults are deployed well. A variety of activities and resources is used in lessons. However, some activities last too long or do not always involve all students which leads to some inattention.
- Time is mostly used well. In an outstanding French lesson in Key Stage 3, the fast pace of teaching helped students to make very good progress. Starter sessions in lessons are good and often build on prior knowledge. However, some plenary sessions are not long enough to embed new learning.
- Teachers provide good opportunities for students to write and read. There is scope to develop more speaking activities for younger students to improve their confidence in speaking. Teaching of language learning strategies is good.
- Academic guidance is strong. Students receive feedback from regular testing and know the levels they are working at and what they must do to improve. Students cited the extensive range of vocabulary books, produced by the school, as very useful for their learning.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

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

- Time for languages is appropriate. Students learn French in Year 7 and more able students also study German in Year 8. All students in the school's upper ability band follow one language to GCSE level. This option is also available to less able students. Good opportunities exist for more able students to study two languages in Key Stage 4.
- The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, such as several foreign trips, a language club, visits to a German market and a French-speaking theatre group. Additional languages are taught to prepare students taking overseas educational expeditions and as part of the enrichment programme in the sixth form.
- Students' enjoyment of languages is promoted by creative activities, such as a fashion show for Year 9 students. Learning is supported well by good levels of homework, displays of key words and phrases, good resources in classrooms and by an outstanding languages section in the library.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- The department is led well by the subject leader. Self-evaluation is broadly accurate and based on analysis of examination results. The department's work is monitored through observations of teaching, 'learning walks', scrutiny of students' books and regular tracking of students' progress.
- Language learning is strongly supported by the school's senior leaders and the governing body, which has a link governor for languages.
- Staff development is linked closely to recent changes in how the curriculum is delivered. Action-planning is based on issues identified by self-evaluation and is linked to the school improvement plan.
- Sound links have been developed with primary schools. There are plans to explore how information about students' learning at primary schools can be best used.

Take-up in Key Stage 4

The proportion of students studying a language at Key Stage 4 is well above the benchmark of 50% set by the Secretary of State.

The use of ICT to improve language learning

- This is good with outstanding features. ICT is used regularly in lessons to introduce and practise new learning, for example, through games, songs, videos and recordings of authentic speakers.
- Students use computer suites regularly for language learning, such as drafting and editing written work. Digital recording technology is used well by teachers to model speaking so that older students can practise listening and speaking skills.

- The school's website has a very good languages section where homework for all classes is available to students. Those without access to ICT at home are able to use the library's ICT facilities.
- ICT is used well to record and monitor students' progress and to plan intervention strategies.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing more opportunities for students in Key Stage 3 to develop their speaking skills and confidence in speaking
- broadening students' intercultural understanding.

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