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Mr B Blakeman  
Acting Headteacher  
Nether Hall School  
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Dear Mr Blakeman

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 22 March 2010 to look at work in modern languages.

As outlined in my initial letter, the visit looked at key areas of the subject, and how well a modern language is included in its provision.

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 discussions with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of one lesson.

#### Context

Nether Hall is a community special school for students from five to 19 years with 80 students on roll. The school currently caters for two in three students with severe special educational needs and/or disabilities and one in three with profound and multiple special educational needs and/or disabilities. The majority of students are from a variety of minority ethnic groups, mainly British Asian, and come from across the city. The school teaches French to Key Stage 3 students with severe special educational needs.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good. The school has included French into its provision well.

## Achievement in languages

Progress in French is good given students' starting points.

- The majority of students are currently achieving P4 on the performance indicators for languages; two students are achieving P5. The latter was evident in more independent production of vocabulary.
- Students listen very attentively and respond in a variety of ways, usually by speaking a word, prompted by stimulus; or sometimes with support from a technical aid.
- They try to pronounce correctly because the teacher guides them.
- They memorise vocabulary and phrases through singing which they enjoy a lot and which helps their memorising skills across the curriculum.
- All groups and individuals are achieving as much as they can in their lessons because their learning is personalised.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning French. Their behaviour was very good in the lesson observed. This lasted an hour and they remained well on task.
- Students know very little about France and its culture.

## Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Subject knowledge is sound.
- The teacher uses good methodology; she knows her students well and maximises on this knowledge to ensure each student can make progress, deploying teaching assistants well.
- Good lesson planning takes into account different groups and individuals. A variety of activities ensures students remain interested, on task and make progress.
- Music, singing and games are popular particularly where there is a kinesthetic approach such as a basket of clothes. Games are organised for the entire class, or in smaller groups depending on ability, for example, the memory game or lotto. Hand-held technological support is given as necessary. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to present or consolidate topics.
- Assessment is integral to the lesson, both as it progresses and at the end. Here, students know how well they have done and why. Students are also asked to say what they have learned. The school has not yet looked at how peer-assessment might play a part in students' language development.

## Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- French is taught by the class teacher. The school believes it is sustainable because the scheme of work supports continuity and it would always appoint a class teacher with some French should one leave.
- There has been no training from the local authority to date; the school intends to link with a nearby specialist language college.
- Allocated time of one hour a week is suitable; this is flexible so, for example, it can be 60 minutes one week; 40 and 20 another.
- The scheme of work is based on the Key Stage 2 Framework, adapted to Nether Hall students and taught on a rolling basis of units year on year. It is flexible to meet the needs of the cohort; the teacher and acting headteacher think this will have to be further adapted for Year 7 students in 2010/11 to cope with more severe special educational needs and/or disabilities. The notion of intercultural awareness is not woven through the curriculum as much as the aims for modern languages would suggest.
- Sign language and community languages are used to support students' understanding of French where necessary.
- Other cultures are celebrated in assemblies.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- There is very strong support for learning French from the senior leadership team. You retain the overall coordination of the subject.
- There is a sound rationale for teaching a language to Key Stage 3 students.
- There is a good policy for language development, updated each year, following self-evaluation, with a good set of aims. It includes developing general language comprehension and acquisition with students who are already using some language as a form of communication.
- You monitor and evaluate the provision for languages as part of the overall school's evaluation process
- Governors and parents are supportive.
- There are many school-made resources for each unit of work, and ICT is used to present cues and consolidate knowledge. There are no up-to-date resources, such as DVDs.
- Professional development for ML development has not yet featured in the school's planning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- considering weaving more intercultural awareness into the schemes of work and teaching and learning

- ensuring that there is continuing professional development for teaching and learning languages
- improving the resource bank.

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 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