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Mr Andrew Goulding  
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Dear Mr Goulding

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 7-8 March to look at work in modern languages (ML)

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subjects, the visit had a particular focus for ML on how speaking skills are developing, as well as how information communication technology (ICT) is being used to support the development of languages generally. It also looked at where you are in reaching the benchmarks for provision in Key Stage 4.

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. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

## Achievement and standards

Achievement and standards are good.

- By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils are able to use a range of tenses. They speak with confidence and are mostly accurate although their pronunciation is sometimes anglicised.
- In 2005, standards were above the national average at all Key Stages and achievement was good. In 2005 pupils achieved better in French than in most other subjects they took in the school, although higher attaining pupils did not do as well as would have been expected in German and Spanish. In the current Years 10 and 11, achievement is good in French, German and Spanish.
- At the end of Key Stage 4 in Spanish pupils achieve very well in their writing coursework but do not make as much progress in reading as in other skills. In French they do best in writing, with speaking and reading being less good. In German they do best in listening with speaking and writing being less good.
- In Years 12 and 13 pupils following AS and A2 courses attain good standards in all languages and achievement is also good. They can talk and write using good idioms with complex and accurate language on a range of topics, including gene technology, immigration and racism.
- At all levels pupils are well aware of the usefulness of learning a language and know that it is important when applying for higher education courses.

## Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Teaching and learning are good.

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and so provide a good model for pupils, especially at Advanced level.
- Pupils are grateful that teachers give up a lot of their time to help them outside the classroom. For example, pupils can attend 'clinics' and informal support sessions in lunch hours and after school.
- The teachers know the examination syllabus very well and prepare students extremely well. Pupils have booklets in each language which cover all the main elements of the examinations and all pupils have extensive practice using past papers.
- Pupils are expected to complete a lot of work in class and they participate well.
- Pupils regularly use computers to improve their grammatical knowledge and to find out information from the internet. At Advanced level pupils are beginning to use the languages area on the school website to practise skills at home.
- Pupils are given very good feedback on their performance in writing, they are very aware of how they can improve their work and they know precisely how they are doing and what grades they can expect.

Pupils are, however, given less precise feedback on speaking tasks. The feedback often does not focus on how they could improve pronunciation and does not encourage them to work from memory quickly enough, which means that there are times when the most able pupils are not challenged as much as they could be.

- At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils rarely read or listen to extended or authentic texts beyond those available in the text book.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- Pupils have the choice of French, German or Spanish at all Key Stages.
- Almost all pupils learn two languages from Year 8 and, although the number of pupils who choose to do two languages at Key Stage 4 is small at around 10%, it is increasing.
- Pupils have a curriculum which is heavily focussed on the examination requirements which helps them to prepare well.
- There are a few opportunities for pupils to watch foreign films, for example, in Spanish at a lunch times.
- There are trips and exchanges for all three languages which help pupils to develop their language skills.
- Pupils have regular access to ICT which helps them to improve their grammatical accuracy, for example, but they say they would like even more access so that they can read authentic materials.
- Higher attaining pupils can take the GCSE in Year 10, or earlier if appropriate.
- All pupils have a choice of studying Latin as an after school activity which those who do so enjoy.
- Information about language learning in primary schools is not yet gathered and used to inform the Year 7 curriculum.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- The leadership of the school and the department is well aware of the strengths and areas for development and self evaluation is accurate but is not quite as precisely focussed on strategies to improve speaking as it is on writing.
- Areas identified as needing development are effectively addressed. For example, there have been significant improvements in the assessment of pupils' performance and in the tracking of pupils to ensure that they do as well as they can. Similarly the need to develop techniques which address the slight under-achievement of more able pupils in Spanish and German has begun.
- Staff have access to regular professional development opportunities and these are generally well targeted at areas that have been

identified as in need of further work, for example the drive to improve pupils' writing skills.

How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- Almost all pupils study one language at GCSE from a choice of three and they can study two if they wish. An increasing number are choosing to study two because they like the teaching and learning and see that languages will be useful to them, but numbers are currently small at around 10% of the cohort.

The development of speaking skills

Speaking skills are well developed.

- Pupils at Key Stage three get regular opportunities to practise their oral skills because teachers plan role plays and other speaking tasks into lessons.
- Pupils at Key Stage 4 and Advanced level improve their spoken skills because they have regular access to foreign language assistants and they have opportunities to take part in exchange programmes.
- Pupils are well prepared for the oral examination; they get good revision booklets and they know what will be expected of them.
- Guidance for pupils on how to improve their spoken work does not always encourage them to work from memory or to improve their pronunciation.
- Pupils are not consistently encouraged to use language for everyday requests and comments at Key Stages 3 and 4 although they are expected to do so more frequently in Spanish and post 16.

Inclusion

- Pupils with learning difficulties achieve well because they are supported well in class.
- More able pupils do not always achieve the very highest grades at GCSE because the teaching does not encourage them to work on extended texts and to move beyond the set tasks quickly enough.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- encouraging pupils to read and listen to more extensive texts
- encouraging pupils to improve their pronunciation and fluency and to work from memory
- increasing the range of strategies to meet the needs of the more able pupils at GCSE

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Peach  
Additional Inspector