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Mr D Gundry  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Gundry

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 14-15 May, 2007 to look at work in modern languages (ML).

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, 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 staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of eleven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be satisfactory.

Achievement and standards

Standards are above average. Achievement is satisfactory overall.

- At Key Stage 3 and at GCSE in 2006 pupils attained average results in German but above average in Spanish and French. All groups of pupils achieved well in Spanish but in German and French very able pupils did not do as well as expected: there were few A\* and A grades in French

and in German only 59% of those who took the GCSE obtained a grade C or above, which was a significant decrease on the figures for 2005.

- At AS and A2 in French, higher attaining pupils achieve well. In A2 in 2006 the majority of the class were higher attaining pupils and they performed particularly well but the few lower attaining pupils under-achieved. In German and Spanish numbers were too low to make valid comparisons with national figures but pupils performed as well as the school predicted they should, with able pupils attaining high grades.
- The progress of the pupils currently in school is satisfactory overall. Pupils make good progress in Spanish because tasks are designed to meet the needs of all the pupils. In French pupils are not always given tasks that are sufficiently challenging or made aware of how they can improve their work. In German, a lack of grammatical knowledge sometimes hinders progress.
- In speaking pupils make good progress in all languages. They have good pronunciation and speak fluently and accurately. In Spanish they are often given the right amount of time to think about their answers which results in more pupils volunteering to answer.
- In reading pupils cope well with texts in the text book. In Spanish they are given regular opportunities to read authentic materials and books which have been adapted for learners. They enjoy this and the highest achieving pupils write clearly and well about what they have read, expressing their opinions and recounting the story in their own words, while others use the tick sheets to express their opinions. This system will be introduced in shortly in German.
- In writing in Spanish pupils regularly produce brochures, presentations, and have good links with Spanish pupils, with whom they exchange messages and emails. Gifted and talented pupils are allowed to work on an extended project of their choice and they produce some excellent work, for example describing their school in great depth and using surveys and photos as a stimulus for their work. They write in a range of styles and use complex language and a wide variety of tenses and structures very accurately. In French and German this is less well developed although pupils have links with schools and are encouraged to write to pen-friends abroad, mostly using ICT.
- Current pupils studying AS and A2 are making good progress, producing some excellent work in German, for example, which showed careful, independent research, an ability to write in a range of styles and demonstrated a flair for arguing and persuading.
- Pupils enjoy learning languages but they are not always aware of how languages can be useful to them in the future. They can only name a few jobs such as translator where they might use their language skills, although they understand the importance of being able to communicate when they are on holiday and appreciate that different cultures have different customs.

## Quality of teaching and learning in ML

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall.

- In Spanish, teaching and learning are good. Pupils are given a very varied and rich diet at all Key Stages and the reading programme helps to ensure that their vocabulary is wide and that they are used to dealing with extended texts. In German and French, teaching and learning are satisfactory.
- In all languages pupils use ICT well to develop speaking, with tasks being designed so that they can hear a model dialogue and then produce one themselves. Pupils at all levels, but especially in the sixth form, benefit from being able to take listening tasks home as data files. This means that revision is made much easier for them. Pupils often use an internet forum or email to exchange information with children their own age abroad.
- In lessons pupils regularly have opportunities to speak in pairs and groups, which they enjoy. Pupils say that they prefer lessons when they are allowed to practise speaking and they especially like it when it involves playing games.
- Teachers are well aware of pupils' progress as they keep very good records and are able to track which pupils are doing better or less well than expected. Pupils in Key Stage 3, however, feel that marking is not as helpful as it could be. They do not always know exactly what they have to do to improve even if they know the level at which they are performing. In class there are a few missed opportunities to give pupils very clear criteria for marking their own work.
- Teachers do not consistently use the foreign language in class and so there are some missed opportunities for pupils to hear the language. In French pupils had difficulties with some of the listening tasks they were given because they had not had enough practice.
- Tasks are not always pitched at the correct level and sometimes the pace is too slow. This adversely affects the progress of the higher attaining pupils.
- Pupils have the opportunity communicate with people from other countries both through the internet and on visits and trips. They are well aware of the differences and similarities between the different countries.

## Quality of curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good.

- In Year 7 many pupils arrive with some language skills but as yet the scheme of work has not been adapted to take account of this. Nevertheless, staff from the school are involved with some of the training of primary teachers in local schools and so are aware of what the pupils have learnt. The school has altered its curriculum to ensure

that all pupils learn French, German and Spanish for part of the year during Year 7 so that pupils can have the opportunity to progress in any of the three. This system has been effective in ensuring that all pupils experience all three languages before choosing which two to take in Years 8 and 9.

- In Key Stage 4 all pupils have to study one language and about 14% choose to study two languages. There are no alternatives to the GCSE and no pupils are entered early. Numbers for French and Spanish at AS generally reach double figures but numbers for German are typically around three or four. At A2 about half the pupils continue with a language.
- The schemes of work have been adapted since the previous inspection and now all pupils are expected to work in at least three tenses by the end of Year 9 which has raised the levels pupils achieve.
- Pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form often work in the computer room and these tasks are an integral part of their learning, supporting the development of speaking and listening in particular. In Key Stage 3 pupils do not get as much access to computers until half way through the final term so their speaking and listening skills are less well developed.
- There is a good scheme to help pupils read for pleasure in Spanish and this is being planned for German.
- Extra curricular provision is good, especially for Spanish. Every year about 40 pupils from Years 9 to 13 go on a study trip to Spain and return with much improved spoken skills and an understanding of the Spanish way of life. A large group of pupils is also involved in a British Council funded project to forge links with Spain; pupils from both countries have exchanged information and used an internet forum to communicate regularly. Most of the sixth form students studying German do a work shadowing programme in Germany and pupils lower down the school take part in trips every other year. In French there is a day trip for pupils in Year 7.
- There are clubs every week to help pupils who are not making as much progress as would be expected and these are successful, especially in Spanish and for pupils in all languages in Key Stage 4. Pupils in the sixth form help with younger pupils, both at these clubs and by working with pupils in the primary schools.

#### Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall.

- In Spanish leadership and management are good. There has been excellent progress since the previous inspection. Results have risen consistently and pupils achieve well. The quality of the teaching is much improved and there is a careful focus on encouraging pupils to read for pleasure and to communicate with Spanish people.

- In French and German leadership and management are satisfactory. Results have fluctuated over the past three years. In French the drop in the percentage of pupils achieving the highest grades was very marked in 2006. In German results also fell overall but these pupils also achieved lower grades in their other subjects.
- The department tracks the progress of individual pupils well but does not always use this to give an overview of whole cohort strengths and weaknesses, for example in reading or listening, or to spot trends in groups of pupils such as higher attaining pupils.
- Self-evaluation is accurate but the key areas for development are not always reflected precisely enough in departmental planning.
- There is strong support for languages from the senior management team who make it compulsory for all pupils to take two languages in Years 8 and 9 and at least one during Key Stage 4.

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

- All pupils take at least one language from a choice of French, German and Spanish in Key Stage 4 and about 14% take two languages. This figure has remained stable over the past few years.

The development of speaking skills

Pupils develop good speaking skills.

- Pupils have good pronunciation when speaking the language because they are following a good model from the teacher and are often expected to work from memory. They get regular opportunities to practise speaking and they particularly enjoy the pair work and group work which form part of almost every lesson. The trips and visits also contribute to developing pupils' spoken skills.
- Pupils have the opportunity to perform during assemblies which helps to build their confidence in speaking. Pupils also have opportunities to take part in drama workshops in all languages, which they enjoy.
- ICT is very well used to enable pupils to speak more often because they use headphones with microphones to record their voices individually. They also listen to model answers and are able to work on this at home as they can transfer the data easily. Pupils are encouraged to use presentation software when speaking and this helps them to structure their talks clearly.
- There is currently no Foreign Language Assistant which means that pupils in the sixth form do not have as much opportunity as they would like to practise their speaking.

## Inclusion

- Almost all pupils achieve in line with their abilities and there is no significant difference between most of the different groups in this girls' grammar school.
- The higher attaining pupils in 2006 in French did not do as well as would have been expected.
- In Spanish higher attaining pupils make good progress because they are given specially designed tasks that require them to write at length and to do their own research.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving the performance of higher attaining pupils in French and German, especially by increasing the pace and challenge of tasks
- giving pupils in Key Stage 3 clearer feedback on what they need to do to improve their work
- considering the possibility of allowing some pupils in Key Stage 4 the flexibility to enter for the GCSE early.

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

Jo Peach  
Additional Inspector