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Mr T Peacock  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Peacock

Ofsted survey inspection programme – modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and those of your staff and students, during my visit on 17 - 18 June 2008 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 on how reading skills are developing and how reading is used to develop language skills. 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 students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be outstanding.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is outstanding; standards are well above average.

- In 2007 at the end of Year 9, standards in the reported language were well above average.

- In the same year, standards at GCSE in French, German and Spanish were extremely high. Almost all students entered achieved a higher grade pass and two out of three overall achieved A\* or A.
- Standards at AS and A2 Levels were above average.
- High standards are attained by all pupils. Boys' standards are particularly high in relation to national averages. There is no identified underachievement.
- Overall, students achieved significantly better standards in ML than in their other subjects.
- The school's assessment, tracking and target-setting are robust and predict at least similar standards in 2008.
- Standards in listening, reading and writing are outstanding. Standards in speaking are good. Students speak clearly and with a good accent but have too little opportunity to speak for real communication.
- Progress is outstanding in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. Students are challenged to achieve high targets throughout the school.
- Progress is particularly impressive in the case of Key Stage 4 groups who achieve very high standards in Spanish in a very short time. Similarly, sixth form students, who only began Spanish in Year 12 under a former curriculum model, are on target for high standards at A2 Level.
- Students acquire a growing understanding of the culture of the countries whose languages they learn, through visits and in-school activities.
- Outstanding relationships in the classroom make a significant contribution to standards and progress. Students are committed, responsive and work effectively in pairs and groups.

### Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding.

- Teaching and learning are based on high quality planning and delivery which ensure that students of all abilities make progress equally.
- Levels of expectation for all students are very high.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is outstanding and in the great majority of lessons target language is at the heart of teaching and learning despite there not being enough opportunities for communication for real purposes.
- Time is used very effectively in all lessons. A range of activities and a high level of individual challenge contribute to outstanding progress.
- Assessment and target setting are strengths of the department. All students know the level of their present and projected outcomes. They praise the way teachers mark their work and give them help to improve.
- Reading is evident in most lessons. Students have good skills in extracting the overall meaning of a text. Older students identify key

vocabulary and analyse detail. All use reference materials to understand new words.

- Students' homework is accepted in electronic formats. The faculty is developing the use of interactive white boards (IWB) and the sixth form students are regular users of the internet.
- However, the regular use of information and communication technology (ICT) in teaching is hindered by the lack of availability of resources. An inventive partnership between ICT and ML faculties in Year 8 will begin to solve this problem from September 2008.
- Students are well supported in making outstanding progress. They appreciate the help and advice of staff, particularly at times of choosing courses.

## Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding.

- All students study two languages in Key Stage 3. This provides a high level of challenge and develops good language learners from the outset.
- Students may choose up to three languages in Key Stage 4, the first two and Spanish *'ab initio'*. Over 95% of all students learn a language at Key Stage 4. Two-thirds learn two.
- One in four of all students is currently studying a language at post-16. Of these, one in three is studying two.
- Accreditation is currently by GCSE and AS and A2 Levels. The school is actively considering other forms of accreditation in keeping with its intention to provide an appropriate learning programme for those students on the personalised learning initiative.
- There is an impressive range of visits abroad, notably French and German exchanges, and additional visits to France and Spain. The school aspires to become an International School and has established links with Venezuela and Mongolia.
- Theatre groups visit school; there are activity-based links with primary schools and lunchtime Latin.
- As part of the extended activity associated with its second speciality as a Language College, the school intends to introduce another language, probably Arabic, as an extra-curricular activity. It seeks to extend its already good partnerships with primary schools and is investigating joint working to include performing arts.
- Students already demonstrate real enjoyment in learning languages. These activities extend and develop this enjoyment.
- In all their learning, students are given the opportunity to be creative. Learning focuses strongly on more than one way to express ideas and, for older students, on style and links to literature.
- Sixth form students benefit from access to a good range of ICT facilities.

- Homework tasks are set which rely on ICT; facilities are available in school for those with no home access.

## Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are outstanding.

- The leadership and management of ML at all levels contribute significantly to the success of the faculty.
- You are deeply committed to achievement in ML and have taken a personal role in establishing ML as a second specialism.
- The rationale for development of ML is strongly supported by the senior leadership team (SLT) and there is a clear route for proposing innovation. The SLT sees ML as a flagship department. From September 2008 ML will take on the role of the school's second specialism.
- Whole-school self-evaluation of languages is very good. The new curriculum leader for ML is working with new approaches to self-evaluation, built around the school faculty review process and following the discontinuation of the previous processes.
- Improvement planning, following the appointment of the new curriculum leader, is strong and identifies appropriate areas.
- There is monitoring of teaching and learning through extended classroom observation and 'drop-ins', and evaluation of planning.
- The school is a member of the local network to support languages in primary schools.

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

- The school meets and exceeds national targets.
- Over 95% of all students follow a ML course in Key Stage 4, the exceptions being a group of students benefiting from a personalised learning programme.
- The school plans to make ML part of this programme.
- The school has about a third of its Key Stage 4 students studying two languages and plans to increase this figure.

The development of reading skills and how well reading is used to develop language skills

This is good.

- Reading is part of many lessons and students are proficient in scanning for overall meaning and identifying key vocabulary.
- Sixth form students read challenging material and build on structures and vocabulary for their own writing.

- Students, other than in the sixth form, are not challenged by the use of authentic materials in the target languages in lessons.
- The library and the languages faculty have a small but growing collection of books and periodicals.
- Students do not yet read in the target language for pleasure.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- increasing the challenge of reading as part of language learning by providing a range of authentic materials and by encouraging students to read for pleasure.

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 and local learning and skills council. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Peter McKenzie  
Additional Inspector

