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Mrs H Dorfman
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Dorfman

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 29-30 September 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 information and communication technology (ICT) is being used by teachers and students to improve language learning. 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, observation of six lessons, and lunchtime sessions of Latin taught on-line and through video conferencing.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be good.

Achievement and standards

Achievement is good; standards are well above average.

- In 2008 Year 11 students entered the school with just slightly above average attainment; very few had learned a language in primary school. Their attainment in languages by the end of Year 11 was significantly above average.

- By the end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments show that attainment is well above national expectations.
- Standards reached in A level are consistently above national averages, including for A-B grades.
- Overall, students' progress in lessons is good; in two lessons it was satisfactory rather than good due to the lesson being too rushed, or conversely a slow teaching pace. In some lessons there is significant slippage in the length of the 50 minute period as students move about a large campus and so students cannot achieve as much as they might.
- Students listen attentively and are eager to respond.
- Where pronunciation is focussed on in lessons, students speak with some accuracy.
- Extended writing in Key Stage 4 and post-16 is good. There was less evidence in Key Stage 3 and there were inconsistencies in expectations across the department.
- Students respond very well to lively teaching and varied activities.
- Students enjoy learning languages and know why they are useful. However, they are perceptive about some of the work they do and younger students questioned the purpose of learning mundane items of vocabulary outside of a communicative context.
- Overall, languages contribute well to students' personal development and economic well-being.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

- Planning is mostly detailed and good.
- Learning objectives for lessons are made clear at the outset but are not always followed up, often a consequence of the shortened period.
- Most teachers use the target language a lot in lessons and it is clear that, for the most part, routines have been established to maintain teaching in the target languages.
- There were examples of very lively teaching which held students' attention very well.
- Teachers use very varied activities to reach the objectives of the lesson.
- The interactive whiteboard (IWB) is used consistently by teachers to present work and engage students. There was little ICT used during the visit by students.
- There are some good examples of marking, with helpful comments to support improvement. This was not consistent across all work scrutinised.
- Students say that knowing their assessed levels is useful and they consult these to know how well they are doing. There are some good examples of self-assessment such as the recently introduced traffic lights.

- Post-16 students are extremely enthusiastic about their language learning. They feel that they are encouraged to take risks and to learn how to learn a language.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good with outstanding features.

- The school's provision, both in time-tabled sessions and beyond, is very good and contributes very well to students' enjoyment of learning. It falls short of outstanding due to the small amount of time Year 8 students have to learn a second language, and periods which are shorter than they are time-tabled to be.
- Either French or Spanish is learned in Year 7. In Year 8 and Year 9 higher attaining students take a second language: French, Spanish or Urdu. A few take three languages.
- The school is piloting flexible provision in Year 9 where some lower attaining students have changed to either Spanish or French. This was at the request of the students, approved by parents/carers and subject to evaluation. The department is looking into possible accreditation at the end of Year 9; and beyond should these students choose to continue to learn a language.
- In Key Stage 4 students can choose from four languages, including Latin, through two broad pathways. Currently 21 study two languages and a few do Latin as well.
- Post-16 students opt for Spanish, French or/and Urdu. Whilst numbers are small, they are currently good for school sixth-forms. The school is looking for ways to increase further take up in post-16.
- Those who wish to learn Latin do so at lunch time through on-line provision and video conferencing. This provides a personalised curriculum with students working at their own pace and choosing to enter GCSE if they wish. One Year 9 girl told me how it helped her with her other languages and explained 'the infinitive' to me via her Latin work.
- Schemes of work are based on the newly purchased course books. Evidence shows that they are tailored to different classes but not always to a purposefully communicative context.
- Provision for extra curricular activities is excellent. A sixth former described them as 'brilliant'. They include seven trips abroad or exchanges, day trips, theatre and cinema outings, Urdu at lunchtime, and the celebration of various cultural events and the European day for Languages. French and Spanish Clubs run by the language assistants are due to begin next week. Trips and visits are regularly over-subscribed and Year 9 students were overheard speaking animatedly about the new Italian trip for Latin students and the one to Santander.
- The library holds newspapers, magazines and books in the target languages, including easy readers.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are good.

- Languages continue to flourish at the school because senior leaders provide good support and because the head of cluster¹ knows her job well.
- The head of cluster leads the department effectively and ensures that all members of the department play their part. This is not always easy with five part-time teaching staff. Distributed leadership via two deputy heads of cluster is clearly thought out.
- Leadership of the sixth form is shared by sixth form teaching staff. Given the consistent results, it is clearly effective.
- The department's self-evaluation is accurate.
- The development plan is good, reflecting school priorities. It is due for review in November.
- Monitoring and evaluation is not quite as sharp as it could be, hence some inconsistencies in teaching and learning.
- Documentation is in order.
- The head of cluster is well aware of the recent developments in languages and is prioritising development of the new Secondary curriculum.
- She has also targeted continuing professional development (CPD) for this year at the new examination processes in the first instance, but will review opportunities as teachers get to grips with the department's new technology and staff requirements.
- The department is well resourced. In particular, it has good ICT facilities including an IWB in each classroom, an ICT suite since the beginning of term and video-conferencing facilities.
- The department listens to its students, hence the flexibility introduced into Key Stage 3.
- The facilitation of Latin is a strong step in the direction of personalised learning.
- The school is in the process of applying for the International Schools Award (ISA), having established a link with India this year to add to their other international activities.

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

- The school exceeds the 50% benchmark. Year 11 has a 60% take-up this year; Year 10 has 70%.
- The school is looking into alternative accreditation and ways to motivate Key Stage 3 learners in order to maintain the subject's vibrancy and boost numbers opting next year.

¹ This school uses 'head of cluster' rather than head of department or subject leader.

How well is ICT used by teachers and students to improve language learning?

This is satisfactory and improving.

- Currently, Key Stage 3 students say they use ICT very little on a regular basis. Key Stage 4 students use it more regularly. However, not all use it regularly for basic learning such as improving accuracy and tailoring writing to different audiences. It is used for some presentation work during particular projects.
- ICT is highlighted in the Self Evaluation Form (SEF) as a priority area for improvement for 2008-09.
- IWBs in all classrooms and the new dedicated languages computer laboratory should go some way towards underpinning this.
- The head of cluster intends to monitor use and CPD will be targeted as necessary.
- During the inspection ICT was used very well to facilitate learning Latin, including video conferencing with a teacher in Cambridge.
- New software attached to the new course books was used to present and consolidate language in lessons and students said that they enjoyed this.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving consistency in teaching, learning and marking, including focussing lesson observations more keenly on learning
- ensuring that all work is purposeful and that students know how to use what they learn to communicate
- considering increasing time on the timetable for Year 8 second language learners.

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

Pam Haezewindt
Her Majesty's Inspector
Subject Adviser for Languages