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Dear Mr Souter

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 02-03 March 2009 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 staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of four lessons and an extension activity.

The overall effectiveness of ML was judged to be inadequate.

Achievement and standards

Standards are well below average and achievement is inadequate

- In 2008, at the end of Key Stage 3, standards in French were well below average. There has been a small, gradual improvement in each of the last three years. Students did less well in French than in their other subjects.
- Progress in ML at Key Stage 3 is inadequate.

- Standards in French at the end of Key Stage 4 were below average, having fallen from above average in 2007. This represented a significant shortfall against stated targets. Students in French achieve standards broadly equivalent to their other subjects.
- Indian and Bangladeshi students achieve the highest standards; White British the lowest.
- Standards in community languages, Dutch, Polish, Urdu, Bengali and Punjabi, were well above average. Students in community languages achieve standards well above their other subjects.
- Overall progress in ML at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory.
- Less than one student in four gains Level 2 accreditation in ML, including community languages.
- At both key stages, girls achieve significantly higher standards than boys, in excess of the difference nationally.
- The school assesses the great majority of current Key Stage 4 students to be on target to gain a Level 2 qualification, and seven in ten to meet their personal target grade.
- Similarly, the school expects to consolidate the 2008 percentage of students reaching the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 3 despite less than one in ten students currently working at this level.
- Students have studied a language in the school's main primary feeders but this is felt by the school to be of little significance in observed standards in Year 7.
- Progress in French lessons is inadequate because planning and delivery for the full range of students' abilities is not evident and assessment information is not used efficiently to plan ML lessons for the school's very wide range of students' ability. There is too little progression between activities in lessons to create a connected learning experience.
- Students' independent speaking skills are adversely affected by the lack of teachers' use of French in the teaching and students' consequent lack of practice and confidence.
- Grammar is taught out of context; although higher attaining students understand the patterns, they do not make use of this knowledge in their independent speaking or writing.
- Students say that they enjoy learning languages and the school's student surveys support this. In the case of Key Stage 4, these students were all language learners.
- In lessons, younger students display boisterous enthusiasm for French; older students are willing learners who do not always ask when they do not understand.
- Students respect each others' home languages and the very rich range of these languages in the school. However, these home languages are not viewed by the school as part of ML provision.
- Additional tuition of home languages through withdrawal and extension activities is good and supports students in reaching high standards.

Quality of teaching and learning in ML

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate.

- Teachers' ML skills are good overall but there is a lack of consistency in teaching methodology which makes too little use of French in the teaching and encourages students to speak too much English in the classroom.
- The level of expectations for different groups of learners is inadequate. Planning and delivery for the significant range of abilities often does not enable all students to make progress. However, a small group of students at Key Stage 4 make satisfactory progress as a result of good working relationships and small groups.
- Opportunities for speaking are limited and there is little evidence of students' extended writing.
- A group of higher attaining students said that they often find authentic French material on websites.
- Creativity is not planned for in students' work because students are over guided and given too little opportunity to use the language for genuine communication.
- Students with home languages other than English are not given sufficient opportunity to make any connection between the skills they acquired in learning English and their learning of a European ML.
- Assessment within ML is not founded on a robust understanding of criteria. Misleading messages are given to students about levels achieved. Recent assessment data was not in evidence as a basis for planning lessons.
- Students say that they know and understand their targets and current Levels. Key Stage 4 students understood what they needed to do to improve and understand their standards in the four skills.
- There is little evidence of cultural understanding being developed through the teaching.

Quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate.

- The curriculum in its present form does not meet the needs of the full range of students' ability nor is it responsive to local circumstances.
- Schemes of work lack detail on progress and continuity of learning. Reference to provision for the full range of ability is not consistent. They do include reference to individual skills and ICT.
- There is a lack of longer-term strategy to develop the curriculum to increase the attraction of studying a ML beyond Year 9.
- The school does not consider that the impact of ML teaching in its primary schools needs to be taken into account in its planning of the curriculum.
- Take up in Key Stage 4 falls well short of national targets. In 2008 18% of students followed a GCSE course, including those studying home languages.

This group contains a higher proportion of girls than boys. Currently only 5% of the cohort are studying French in Year 10.

- The school's target for September 2009 is 25%, although this has not been formally adopted by governors. The school is confident that this target will be achieved by the introduction of new pathways at Key Stage 4 and strong messages of encouragement to students and their parents/carers.
- Extra-curricular provision is good. It includes visits to France, although students say that these have not always been available to all year groups, extension lessons in Latin, German and Dutch, and support for Year 11 students in speaking. There is also lunchtime French cinema, and a business French club (CLBC). Enrichment is provided through the visit of a French theatre company and pen friend exchanges.
- The ML department has restructured its Year 7 curriculum to meet the new Key Stage 3 curriculum and reports that the increase in activities has increased students' enthusiasm.

Leadership and management of ML

Leadership and management are inadequate.

- The senior leadership team supports the ML department through regular review and planning. The self-evaluation of the provision in ML is inaccurate and fails to recognise the relationship between provision and outcomes.
- The departmental self-evaluation is not clear about national standards and only claims a trend of improvement, not a progress judgement.
- Policy statements in departmental documentation are not being consistently delivered.
- Targets for some students are ineffective because they are not up-dated regularly enough. Some students have targets below the level at which they are currently working.
- There is limited evidence of effective strategies to increase take-up at Key Stage 4 and boys' attainment.
- The development plan does not include specific reference to improving teaching and learning. The school's view of teaching and learning quality from its own observation is not substantiated by lesson observations.
- The languages department enjoys a good range of resources, particularly access to ICT and a selection of books in French, Spanish and a variety of dual languages covering home languages.

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

- The school is well short of the minimum benchmark for language take-up in Key Stage 4 and has fallen back in the most recent year.
- It has planned to begin the move towards 50% by targeting 25% in September 2009.
- New pathways in Key Stage 4 and a concerted effort to encourage students of the value of ML learning have been introduced.

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

- This is satisfactory.
- The department has a good range of ICT provision including ready access to a computer suite, a trolley of laptops and interactive white boards in most rooms.
- Teachers have good ICT skills and use them well to support students.
- Students demonstrate good skills and enjoyment in using these facilities; they display some creativity in the use of ICT presentational software and in producing posters.
- However, the French material often lacks challenge, with the result that ICT is used more to consolidate previous learning than to learn more.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- raising standards in Key Stage 3 by encouraging students to use French for real communication and by ensuring that teaching provides opportunities for students of all abilities to make progress
- reconsidering the structure of the ML curriculum to provide for the full range of students' abilities and prior experience, and to take account of local circumstances
- increasing the effectiveness of departmental self-evaluation and improvement planning in order to raise standards overall and increase the take-up in Key Stage 4
- improving the quality of assessment by establishing shared understanding of level criteria and make full use of assessment information in lesson planning.

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

Peter McKenzie
Additional Inspector