

## **ISMLA Conference – Manchester Grammar School, Saturday 7 February**

### **Attended by Alice Harrison on behalf of NALA**

On Saturday 7 February, I attended the ISMLA conference, held this year at Manchester Grammar School. It was a very busy and well-attended event, with well over 100 delegates and a thriving exhibition. In the opening address Adele Vintner referred to NALA saying they were grateful for our presence.

The conference began at 10:30am, and notably there were no PowerPoint presentations until midday. ISMLA held its AGM at the start of the day; this was open to all attendees and was very brief.

The High Master of Manchester Grammar School opened the conference with a strong endorsement of the importance of languages. He spoke about curriculum design that enables pupils to study multiple languages if they wish, including the flexibility to study only one science to make this possible.

Adele Venter, Chair of ISMLA, then outlined the organisation's vision and the collective influence it can have on national policy. She emphasised the need to reframe the narrative around languages, moving away from a focus on difficulty and challenge.

The keynote address was delivered by Sir Nick Gibb, who spoke passionately about the importance of a knowledge-rich curriculum. He criticised the decision to make languages optional in the early 2000s and highlighted the missed opportunity of the 2007 Dearing Report to reverse this. He was a very strong advocate for languages throughout.

This was followed by a panel discussion with Sir Nick Gibb, Adele Venter, the Head of Languages at Manchester Grammar School, and another panellist whose name I unfortunately missed. The new GCSE was broadly welcomed, although concerns were raised about ongoing severe grading and whether the new GCSE will adequately prepare students for A level.

Lunch was excellent.

In the afternoon, I attended the German session. Parallel sessions were also running in French, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, and for junior schools. The junior schools session showcased the work of John Cloughton and WoLLoW.

The German session focused first on the generous range of support offered by the Goethe-Institut, followed by a session led by a Head of Department on maximising performance in A level essay writing. It was interesting to note that, unlike many state-sector discussions which often centre on GCSE outcomes, much of the informal discussion at lunch and in sessions focused on sharing ideas around A level teaching and learning.

The final keynote of the day was delivered by Jonathan Mumford, who spoke about using QR codes to provide verbal feedback. He presented this as both a time-saving and a more effective approach to feedback.