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### **Strong language in Redditch Classroom turns heads**

Managers from Redditch-based storage and logistics company, Oakland International Ltd, visited St Augustine's Catholic High School recently to encourage students to continue with their language learning.

Pete Vaughan, business development manager and Mary Whitehead, training manager and operations support, hoped to build on Oakland's previous success of doubling the intake of French GCSE students, when they recently visited the Hunt End-based school.

Pete Vaughan delighted with the level of enthusiasm shown by students said: "Having the ability to speak more than one language is an immense asset and anything Oakland can do to help promote this fact, we are more than willing to undertake."

After delivering a series of presentations to Year 9 students about how language can be used within industry and why such skills are valued by business and by Oakland International, a local employer, Pete answered students' questions on topics such as the impact on personal earning capacity for those with language skills.

"The world's global business community recognises that languages are of key importance," said Pete. "Other nations are actively working and exploiting this fact. We need to drive home the message to Britain's younger generation that having more than one language is vital and that in today's expanding business markets language can open up greater avenues for employment development and salary remuneration in the future."

The project is part of the Business Language Champions programme, which is co-ordinated by the Regional Language Network West Midlands (RLN WM). It is designed to bridge the gap between school and the workplace and to reverse the recent decline in the take up of modern foreign languages. The 'Champions' bring language skills alive by highlighting the problems local companies have recruiting staff that can speak more than one language and helping pupils to see how important these skills are in the workplace.

The presentations were well received and enjoyed by all, as Christine Marples, head of languages, said: “The visit from Oakland International has certainly set the students thinking about what they should choose for their options. There was a real ‘buzz’ of discussions and questions. Peter stressed the idea also that the students should think more about the long-term benefits of studying a language and how that will help them in future years. Last year when the company came to deliver the talks our numbers went up; we hope to see another increase this year, which will be fantastic for us.”

Chris Overall, RLN WM manager, added: “Although businesses in the West Midlands are increasingly seeking staff with language skills to succeed in international markets, persuading young people to study languages alongside their other subjects can be a challenge.

“Pete and Mary have done a great job in showing students how languages work beyond the classroom and we are grateful to Oakland for their continued support of the Business Language Champions programme.”

St Augustine’s Catholic High School, in Redditch, Worcestershire provides a Christ-centred learning community for thirteen to eighteen-year-olds.

Oakland International requires staff with language skills to work with manufacturers and retailers worldwide. In 2007 they began working with St Augustine’s in the Business Language Champions programme. Students took part in interactive presentations and language-based tasks set by the company to encourage them to pursue their language studies. The uptake for French GCSE doubled from 33 to 67 as a result of Oakland’s input.



Caption: (back, left) Christine Marples, head of languages, (back, right) Chris Everall, RLN manager and (front, right) Pete Vaughan, Oakland business development manager, with students from St Augustine's Catholic High School.

**Note to editors:** Business Language Champions is a programme funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and supported by a network of sponsors. Co-ordinated by the Regional Language Network West Midlands with the support of CILT, The National Centre for Languages. Further information on Regional Language Network West Midlands visit [www.rln-westmidlands.com](http://www.rln-westmidlands.com)

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