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Mr D Rowlinson  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Rowlinson

### **Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages**

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 11 and 12 October 2010 to look at work in modern languages.

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 without their consent.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included: interviews with staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages is satisfactory.

### **Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is satisfactory.

- Standards in languages are broadly average throughout the school. The percentage of students attaining A\* to C grades in French is below the national average and has remained so for the last three years. The outcomes for the 2010 cohort were badly affected by staff disruption. Numbers taking Spanish are too small for data to be reliable. The school's analysis of data shows that for the last three years students have made satisfactory progress over their time at the school. The department has made good use of the new examination specification to tailor work to students' needs at Key Stage 4 and, as a result, the current Year 11 students are on target to make better progress.

- In lessons, students make mostly satisfactory progress. Their behaviour is generally satisfactory or better, although occasionally, the pace of learning is impeded by off-task behaviour of a small minority of students. Students respond well to their teachers and value the time teachers put in outside the classroom. They understand why a language is important to their future lives but have a less well-developed inter-cultural understanding. Students have a very good understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to move to the next level.
- They are developing a grammatical understanding and some high-attaining students are able to write at length and with a good range of vocabulary but their level of accuracy is not always commensurate with the predicted grades.
- Students of all ages acknowledge that they are less confident in speaking than in the other skills. They value the opportunities for speaking practice in lessons, although these vary in frequency from teacher to teacher. The head of department has analysed past examination results well and has identified that speaking is the weakest skill in GCSE classes. As a result, students have had appropriately intensive work in this area.

### **Quality of teaching in languages**

The quality of teaching in languages is satisfactory.

- Teaching is good in some areas and has no endemic inadequacies. Teachers have good relationships with their classes and manage behaviour effectively, consistently using school sanctions. Lessons contain a variety of activities and are well resourced. Written tasks are matched well to ensure lower attaining students have support. Planning is generally detailed. Learning objectives are specific in terms of what students are to learn but do not always identify the skills to be developed. Teachers are aware that they need to challenge higher attaining students and do so effectively. Teachers are particularly effective in the way in which they explain how they can improve their work. This is supported very well by marking that is detailed and informative.
- Although teachers all model the target language well, English is spoken too often and this deprives students of opportunities to hear the target language and develop better listening skills. Too often in the lessons observed, insufficient practice time was devoted to new language and students were asked to produce oral work before they were confident of the pronunciation and sometimes even the meaning. Students, as a result, are too reliant on the written word to support their speaking.

### **Quality of the curriculum in languages**

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- Schemes of work provide good guidance for teachers and are well referenced to the National Curriculum and examination specifications. Reference to how the strands of the Key Stage 3 Framework are to be developed is less specific. The introduction of the Foundation Certificate

on Secondary Education (AQA) has helped the department give added focus and targets to their teaching and has improved motivation

- The curriculum is well enhanced by opportunities for after-school study sessions and a well-supported range of visits for every year group. There are also links to a local university and a business partnership to extend students' knowledge of the use of languages outside the classroom. The departmental policies indicate that the subject contributes well to cross-curricular development. The school is supporting two modern languages but it is not clear why some students have chosen the second language. An appropriate range of information and communication technology is used to support language learning. The learning environment is good; displays celebrate success and support learning.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages**

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in languages is good.

- Senior leaders provide good support for the subject, particularly through the management structure. Senior leaders have, as a result, a clear picture of the strengths and areas for development of the modern languages team. The department is led well by the head of department who has had considerable success in building a team to the point where collaboration and professional dialogue are the norm.
- He has analysed data well to identify areas of underachievement and has focused well on recent examination results at class level to look at teachers' areas of strength and areas for development. This information is to be used to set up in-class support exploiting teachers' particular expertise. Teaching has been monitored and practice has improved, particularly in the consistency with which teachers share levels, grades and targets with students. The departmental implementation plan is appropriately linked to school priorities and to raising standards in speaking. There is a range of policies to support some areas of the department's work but no policies on, for example, a rationale for the use of the target language or on skills development.
- The proportion of students studying a modern language at Key Stage 4 has been well below the national average but has increased by 50% following the introduction of the Foundation Certificate in Secondary Education in Year 9.
- Teachers support the teaching of modern languages in local primary schools and they are aware of the need to consider the range of Key Stage 2 experience and expertise in their Key Stage 3 classes.

### **Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- ensuring that all lessons have really precise learning objectives, where appropriate, linked to the skill(s) to be developed
- making sure that sufficient time is devoted in lessons to practise speaking so that all students gain confidence in speaking without written prompts

- having a clear rationale for the use of target language in lessons to ensure maximum exposure to the language.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop languages in the school.

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Anne Looney**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**