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28 October 2010

Mr I Clayton
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Clayton

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 12 and 13 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 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages is good.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- Standards in both key stages are above average and rising. This is particularly evident in the increasing number gaining the top grades at GCSE.
- Progress is good both in lessons and as indicated by the school's monitoring data. The very small numbers of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those known to be eligible for free school meals also make good progress. Girls make better progress than boys.
- Achievement is satisfactory in the sixth form, but the small numbers prevent the reliable analysis of trends in improvement.

- The majority of students enjoy learning languages. An above average number choose to continue to study one or two languages in Key Stage 4.
- Students are able to work independently and cooperatively in groups. In written tasks, they show creativity but need more opportunities to use the language being studied to routinely communicate with the teacher and with each other.
- Students are very aware of the value of language learning and their inter-cultural understanding is developing well. They make a strong, positive contribution as language leaders in Year 10 and in post-16 where they support younger students.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- All teachers demonstrate high levels of commitment to and enthusiasm for their subject. They have good or better subject knowledge which they demonstrate through their clear explanations. Their use of the language being studied for routine communication is variable and their expectation of its use by students in response is not high enough.
- Teachers have high expectations of behaviour in lessons across Key Stages 3 and 4. It is good and outstanding in the sixth form.
- All four skills are developed during lessons, but sometimes there is an overemphasis on writing. This is unpopular with boys in particular.
- Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support in lessons.
- Assessment procedures are good. Students receive good developmental feedback through marking.
- Teachers make learning objectives clear to students but there is often insufficient distinction between what the least and most able will then do in lessons.
- Despite the fact that outcomes in the sixth form are less strong, teaching is at least as good and in some cases better. Small groups allow a personalised approach and the development of very positive relationships. In the best sixth-form lessons, the level of intellectual challenge inspires the students to persevere with the productive use of language which they find challenging.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- Opportunities are good for students to study two languages and opportunities to pick up additional languages out of the main curriculum and in the sixth form. Home languages are supported as appropriate.
- Students have many regular opportunities to interact with native speakers and experience the cultures of the countries where the languages are spoken at first hand. Students extend their understanding through internet

research, and foreign language assistants provide up-to-date contact with the culture.

- Transition from primary to secondary school is supported well through good links across feeder schools. A programme of taster lessons at the start of Year 7 allows the school to identify able linguists and ensure the curriculum builds on work done in the primary schools.
- Students have good opportunities to use information and communication technology to support their learning. The good-quality learning environment and attractive displays support their progress well.
- A weaker aspect is the lack of resources for reading for pleasure.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- You and your senior team provide strong support for languages.
- Subject leadership is good and the team shares good practice well. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on a wide range of evidence.
- Resources are good, apart from for wider reading, including new technologies.
- Good links with other agencies support the understanding of the use of languages beyond school well.
- A strong team spirit is evident among members of the department and they are highly committed to improving provision and raising standards. The pattern of improvement shows a good capacity to improve further.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- accelerating progress for all groups by matching learning opportunities to all abilities in lesson planning, including for the most able
- raising expectations of the use of the language being studied for routine communication in lessons
- exploring ways of increasing take-up post-16 and ensuring students have the necessary communicative skills to cope with the greater demands of A-level work.

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

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector