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Dr J Campbell  
Headteacher  
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Dear Dr Campbell

### **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 9 and 10 February 2011 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages is outstanding.

### **Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is outstanding.

- GCSE and A-level results are well above average, although the proportion of students entered for GCSE is below average. Attainment in each key stage is high. All students meet and some exceed the ambitious targets set for them. Many perform better in modern languages than in their other subjects.
- Students make good progress in lessons and in some classes make very rapid progress indeed.
- They speak the foreign language with good pronunciation and have a very secure knowledge of the phonic system. They are able to carry out a

conversation at the appropriate level, but some lack confidence when dealing with the unexpected.

- Writing is excellent. Though Key Stage 3 students produce few pieces of extended writing, they have learnt to use accurately a good variety of tenses and vocabulary. Key Stage 4 students use an excellent range of structures and connectives. A-level students often combine different idioms very impressively in their discursive writing.
- Students enjoy the subject and understand why learning new languages is important.

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

The quality of teaching in languages is outstanding.

- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the languages they teach and a clear enthusiasm for teaching them.
- They use the foreign language consistently well, supported by a judicious amount of English, for conducting routine business, giving instructions about tasks, and explaining new work.
- Expectations are very high. The amount of work and the degree of accuracy that the teachers require are very demanding.
- The very positive relationships and the students' exceptional behaviour contribute to their rapid progress and good learning.
- Lessons are well planned. In particular, work is skilfully sequenced to enable students to build up their skills progressively as the lesson proceeds. The teachers' preparation is thorough, so that activities are carried out very efficiently with the minimum of fuss.
- In the very best lessons, students speak extensively in the foreign language, largely without the aid of written support. In the less effective lessons, the teacher does too much and the students speak too little.
- Assessment is used extremely well to promote high standards. In particular, students' work is marked thoroughly and frequently. Teachers take pains to explain every mistake and give clear advice on how students can improve their work.

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

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- The time allocated to the subject is appropriate.
- Able students have the opportunity to study more than one language. The least able students in Key Stage 3 follow a simpler course on a reduced time allocation.
- The strong emphasis on grammatical understanding is the firm basis for students' progress. At GCSE, it provides a secure grounding for students to proceed to A level, and above-average proportions do so. At Key Stage 3,

the scheme of work does not provide enough opportunities for students to apply their skills by doing extended creative writing.

- The use of information and communication technology is limited, largely because of technical difficulties since the department moved to the new building.

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

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

- The department is very well supported by senior leaders. In particular, the school's comprehensive arrangements for quality assurance provide a coherent framework for the department to evaluate and improve its effectiveness. Leaders use a wide range of evidence to assess the subject's performance, including students' views. They have an accurate view of the subject's many strengths but their analysis is not sufficiently detailed to identify all areas of relative weakness.
- This is a well-led and cohesive team, all successfully striving to make their teaching challenging and enjoyable and to maintain high academic standards.

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

- giving Key Stage 3 students more opportunities for extended creative writing and for spontaneous speaking
- developing the use of information and communication technology to enhance learning in the subject, once the school's technology problems are resolved.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Derek Neil**  
**Additional Inspector**