

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr D Trimmer
Headteacher
Mayfield School
Mayfield Road
North End
Portsmouth
PO2 0RH

Dear Mr Trimmer

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 7 and 8 February 2011 to look at work in ML.

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 seven lessons, including a joint observation of one lesson.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is satisfactory.

- Over the past three years, students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has been below the levels that would be expected because many of them only study a language for two years. However, progress for those who continue is satisfactory, as is the progress of students in the current Year 7 who are able to build on the work they have done at primary school. At the end of Key Stage 4, only a small percentage have taken French at GCSE and these students have made good progress.
- Students have less well-developed speaking skills in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. Their pronunciation is anglicised because they are not taught systematically how to make the links between sound and spellings. In Key Stage 4, teachers are able to give students more individual attention to correct their pronunciation and fluency in class and so progress is better.

- Students particularly enjoy writing for the school website, and produce high-quality, interesting work on trips that they have been on or are planning, for example. Students have a good understanding of what life is like in France as many participate in trips and visits. Students' knowledge about countries where Spanish is spoken is less well-developed.
- Many students are used to working independently in class. They learn to organise themselves and to work out which resources to use to help them with their tasks. They have good dictionary skills and use computers well for research.
- In Key Stage 3, some boys are not making as much progress as would be expected because they misbehave in class but by Key Stage 4, when students have opted to take a language, boys make good progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are given good support in class to help them understand the work and the small classes mean that they get a lot of individual attention. Higher attaining students do not always achieve the very highest grades at GCSE because they find listening difficult.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is satisfactory.

- Most teachers have enormous enthusiasm for languages which they pass on well to students by drawing on their own experiences, telling students about their school life in France, for example. Students appreciate how hard most teachers work for them, especially the extra support for examination preparation after school and at weekends.
- In most lessons seen, teachers planned a variety of activities which allowed students to practise a range of skills. Students had frequent opportunities to practise their spoken French in Key Stage 4. Good use was made of other adults such as the trainee teacher to encourage students to work from memory and to improve their pronunciation in preparation for the examination.
- In one lesson in Spanish, some boys did not behave well and the teacher did not deal with this effectively. The pace was slow and students did not enjoy the work. In the majority of lessons, however, students behaved well, persevering and completing a lot of work.
- Students use computers regularly in class for a range of activities. For example in one lesson, they used headsets to listen out for the difference in intonation between a question and a response, in another, they were able to re-draft their work to make it more complex. In a third lesson, they had researched the town of Boulogne so that they could plan a forthcoming visit. Students are given a range of reading material in French, including some from the internet, but students said that in Spanish they did not regularly read fiction or authentic texts.
- Teachers know their classes extremely well, especially those in Key Stage 4 which are often small, and so they are able to support the students well. Lower attainers are encouraged to be accurate in the written work that

they produce, with helpful and clear advice from teachers. Higher attainers in some lessons do more complex work, using a range of tenses and opinions when speaking and writing. However, in one lesson seen, higher attaining boys did not make as much progress as they were not encouraged to work from memory or to go beyond the confines of the task set.

- Listening is an area that is inconsistently developed. Although in some lessons students listen to tapes and to the teacher, in others too much English is used even for the most basic comments or instructions.
- Marking in books and feedback in lessons are better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 but there is some inconsistency across the department. Generally, students were well aware of their grades or levels and knew what they needed to do to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is satisfactory.

- In Key Stage 3, the current option system allows students to drop a language at the end of Year 8 or choose to do either French or Spanish in Year 9. This has an impact on results at the end of Key Stage 3 which are below average because about two thirds of the cohort only study a language for two years.
- Students are given outstanding opportunities to take part in a wide range of events, from trips to competitions. They work with representatives from the local university and businesses to find out how languages can be used once they leave school. They have a well-developed sense of how important it is to learn a language. This is leading to an increase in the numbers opting to take a language in Key Stage 4.
- The curriculum is well designed and balanced at Key Stage 4 so that it meets the needs of the students in the current cohort well. The school is actively looking at ways to ensure that more students continue with languages into Key Stage 4 and has well-advanced plans to ensure that at least 50% will do so next year. Numbers opting for languages have been low for the past three years at about 17%. This has increased to around a 22% in Year 10 and about half of students in the current Year 9.
- The school is beginning to take account of the languages that students have learnt at primary school and is benefiting from students who are motivated and whose parents are keen for them to continue. Students who already speak a language are able to enter for a GCSE; recently there have been entries for at least five other languages.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- The senior leadership team and the head of department have an extremely accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses and a good

capacity to improve. Their view is based on rigorous analysis of data and monitoring of performance which has led to improvements in the teaching of speaking in Key Stage 4, for example. There is a good vision of how languages should develop and the number of students taking languages in Key Stage 4 is increasing. Inconsistencies in teaching, for example in behaviour management, have also been correctly identified as an area for development and are currently being addressed.

- The department is beginning to adapt the Year 7 scheme of work to take account of language learning done at primary school and progress in Year 7 is improving as a result. Nevertheless, plans to improve progress at Key Stage 3 as a whole are less well-developed than they are at Key Stage 4.
- Staff have access to a wide range of professional development opportunities and use these well to inform themselves about the latest teaching techniques and ideas.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that the school continues to use its rigorous systems of monitoring to address the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching that have already been identified
- continuing to adapt the curriculum in Key Stage 3 to ensure that all students have sufficient time to make good progress
- continuing to explore how teaching approaches and the curriculum can be adapted at Key Stage 4 to take account of the wider range of interests and abilities of students who are opting to take a 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

Joanna Peach
Additional Inspector