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Mr N Ogden  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Ogden

**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 31 January and 1 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 good.

**Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is good.

- In both Spanish and French, standards are above average at the end of both key stages. In Spanish, standards have improved year on year. Students entered for GCSE in Spanish achieve well with more than 90% attaining the higher grades and about a fifth attaining the highest grades. In GCSE examinations in French, standards have been below average over the last three years and the proportion gaining the higher grades is much lower than average. Standards have improved significantly in French over the past year and are now in line with those in Spanish. In the work observed, standards are now above average in both languages and no

significant difference exists in performance in the two languages, in the performance of boys and girls or of different groups.

- Students are confident in the skills of writing, reading and speaking. They are less confident in listening skills in both languages. In Spanish pronunciation and intonation are good but in French pronunciation is sometimes adversely affected by their reliance on written notes. They have a very good understanding of grammar and a good range of vocabulary and structures in both languages. As a result, they are able to manipulate the languages they are learning effectively to express their ideas. They write at length and in detail for a variety of purposes, using a wide range of vocabulary and structures. They are able to access information from a variety of texts, including material from the internet.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards learning languages and have a very clear understanding of its importance. They are enthusiastic and confident linguists. Students greatly value the excellent relationships they have with their teachers and say that learning languages is fun. As a result, they are not afraid of making mistakes and are keen to participate in oral work both with a partner and in whole-class activities.

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

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent. Students benefit from excellent role models. Teachers generally use the languages being learnt effectively in lessons. Where this is the case, students' listening and speaking skills are well developed and the more able linguists are effectively challenged to interpret some unfamiliar or more complex language for others, thus developing higher-order listening skills very effectively. However, occasionally, opportunities are missed to do this and teachers are sometimes too ready to translate instructions, both oral and written.
- Students make good progress in developing their listening skills when they are given the opportunity to predict what they are going to hear and identify key vocabulary and phrases that they might hear. However, when opportunities are missed to enable them to do this, some struggle to pick up the main points and detail from extracts of speech.
- Teachers use a good variety of strategies to engage students and to enable them to build effectively on previous learning. Through the effective use of games and group work activities, for example, students develop in confidence and independence in using the languages themselves.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students and provide good levels of challenge and support. For example, students are routinely expected to identify and explain patterns for themselves from exemplars. They do this enthusiastically and are keen to volunteer their ideas.
- Teachers plan effectively for groups of differing abilities. Activities are well sequenced, are conducted at a brisk pace and with humour. Students have frequent opportunities to learn from each other and to use the languages

for real purposes with a partner or in small groups. Students are regularly challenged to refine the language they are practising during a series of linked activities. As a result, they rapidly grow in confidence and competence and their enjoyment is clear.

- Teachers make outstanding use of assessment information to plan their lessons and to provide appropriate support and challenge for different groups of learners. Teachers use questioning well to assess understanding in lessons. Marking is thorough, encouraging and gives excellent guidance about how to improve. Students themselves are fully involved in evaluating their own and each others' work and in giving each other detailed guidance about how to improve, closely linked to assessment criteria.
- Students receive good guidance and are very well informed about the choices they make at the end of each key stage.

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

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- All students study French and Spanish in Key Stage 3 and all have access to both languages in Key Stage 4. More able linguists are expected to continue their study of at least one language to GCSE and all students have a choice of a course leading to either GCSE or a vocational course in business languages in French or Spanish. Some students opt to do both.
- Provision is good for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for gifted and talented students.
- Links with other institutions and universities are well developed. Students in Key Stage 4, for example, talk with enthusiasm about the opportunities they have to experience intensive language days at local universities, other schools and colleges.
- The department provides drop-in sessions for students for extra help at lunchtimes and after school, including examination preparation. These are popular and well attended. Students wishing to follow a vocational course as well as GCSE can also take advantage of extra lessons after school to do this.
- Excellent use is made of information and communication technology (ICT) to support and extend learning in all four skills, and the department makes particularly good use of its website to allow students to access teaching materials outside lessons. Students also use ICT to extend their knowledge of the cultural aspects of the languages they are learning.
- Students benefit from their contact with native speakers to practise speaking and listening skills and to extend their knowledge of different cultures and current events, for instance in talking about the rescue of the Chilean miners as well as about festivals and celebrations.
- After-school clubs and language days provide students with opportunities to experience other languages, such as German and Italian.

- The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, including clubs, language days and visits to the European market in Manchester as well as residential visits to France and Spain.
- The school takes account of students' previous experience of learning languages and the curriculum in Year 7 ensures continuity and progression.

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

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

- You and the school's senior management team provide very strong support for modern languages and have a very clear commitment to enabling as many students as possible to continue their study of a language through Key Stage 4 and beyond and for them to achieve as highly as possible.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the department's performance, both by the senior leadership team and by the department itself, are very thorough and clearly focused on raising standards. This feeds directly into improvement planning and is linked to training. Students' progress is tracked very closely, underachievement is swiftly identified and triggers intervention.
- The head of department has been in post for a very short time but has acted swiftly and effectively to raise standards in French. She provides very clear direction and the action taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning in both languages has proved successful. Teachers routinely share ideas and best practice, for instance, through the department website that provides effective materials for both teachers and students. As a result, there is a good level of consistency across the department and across languages.
- Schemes of work ensure continuity and progression and clearly identify how work can be tailored to the needs of different groups.
- Performance in French has improved significantly over the past year to match that in Spanish. There is now no significant difference in standards between the two languages. The majority of students are on track to exceed their targets in both languages.
- Take-up in Key Stage 4 is good and increasing significantly year on year in both languages. The majority of students studying Spanish at GCSE in 2010 chose to continue their studies of the language post-16.
- There is a very clear rationale for learning modern languages which students understand and share. Teachers' enthusiasm for the languages they teach is clear. Students greatly value this and the time and help teachers provide for them, should they need it, outside lessons.
- The department is helping feeder primary schools to develop modern languages teaching and hosts intensive language days for them.

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

- increasing opportunities for students to develop their listening skills in both languages through:
  - more effective use of the target language in lessons
  - opportunities for students to predict what they might hear and identify key language in preparation for listening to extracts of recorded speech.

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

**Judith Tolley**  
**Additional Inspector**