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Dear Mr Hickey

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 15 and 16 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory and improving strongly and securely.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is satisfactory.

- Standards are rising, particularly in the younger year groups. Numbers taking a language in Key Stage 4 had been falling drastically, until only two students were entered for a GCSE in an ML in 2010. Such small numbers prevent reliable comparisons with national figures. This trend has been dramatically reduced and 40% of the current Year 9 students have expressed a preference to study French or Spanish next year. Data collected by the school on students' current progress show that 77% of students in Year 11 are already working at grade C or above. However, some residual underachievement is still working through and most students are short of

their target grades. Nevertheless, across the school progress in lessons is good and similar across all groups.

- Students have very positive attitudes to ML and their behaviour in lessons is good. Students enjoy languages and are interested in extending their skills, as seen by the good response to the new additional language opportunities in after-school sessions. Students speak with accurate pronunciation, but are least confident in reading and listening. They willingly participate in pair and group work with little prompting from the teacher, although their use of the language being studied for normal communication in lessons is weaker. Books are generally well presented.
- In the work sample scrutinised, the range and complexity of structures being used extends steadily across Key Stage 3, so that, by Year 9, writing is at an appropriate level. However, students have limited opportunities to participate in creative and extended writing tasks. Great attention is given to the teaching of grammar and students can adapt and use some of the grammatical rules in new contexts. In Key Stage 4, accuracy is satisfactory, but even the more able students make many basic errors such as subject to verb accuracy and the position of adjectives.
- Students have an average awareness of the usefulness of learning an ML, seeing it mainly in terms of holiday or business travel. They are starting to develop their intercultural understanding, but have relatively little awareness of similarities and differences between cultures.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Teachers make clear their commitment to languages and have good subject knowledge. Lessons are characterised by well-organised learning experiences using good resources, so students engage well and make good progress.
- Lessons are planned to include a wide range of different types of activity, so there is little off-task behaviour. Good use is made of digital presentations with visuals to bring the language to life and develop the students' confidence in new structures and vocabulary. Students particularly enjoy the games and group activities that support their independence.
- Students are supported well to develop strategies for deciphering meaning. The use of reading to develop intercultural understanding is a weaker aspect of teaching.
- Books are marked regularly and thoroughly with helpful feedback on how to improve. Much work has gone into producing helpful lists and writing scaffolds in order to minimise the need for copying.
- Teachers present a good model of the language being studied, but do not have high enough expectations of its use for normal communication.
- Support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is good. Teaching assistants provide good support for all students who need additional help. Sometimes opportunities are missed to stretch more able

students, for example in listening activities, when all are required to elicit the same level of detail.

- Homework builds on prior learning well and supports the next steps students will be required to make.
- Assessment is satisfactory. Moderation is a challenge where the language specialist is working in isolation, but external support through examination board meetings and links with another school are providing support. Satisfactory use is made of questions to ascertain the progress being made in lessons and adjust teaching accordingly.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is satisfactory.

- There is a clear rationale for the provision in both key stages and opportunities for the study of two languages within the main curriculum. Currently, only GCSE is offered, but in the additional languages taught in after-school clubs, students are working towards basic accreditation.
- The very good extra-curricular activities and trips are well supported. Links with other countries through pen-pal or class links are underused to develop intercultural understanding.
- Good use is made of technology by teachers in classrooms. There is scope for much greater use of computers by students.
- The new subject leader has started work on the construction of detailed and helpful schemes of work, but currently these do not adequately identify opportunities for creativity or support reading for pleasure. There is currently too little reference to how the school will build on work done in primary schools or how opportunities will be created for more able students to be stretched.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- The huge improvements made in a very short time are as a direct result of the dedication and enormous hard work of the subject leader. She has accurately prioritised the improvements needed to focus on better outcomes for students with growing success.
- Data on students' progress are being used well in order to ensure that self-evaluation is accurate and the subject leader benefits from strong support from you and the other senior leaders.
- Self-evaluation has clearly identified the strengths and areas for development. Development planning needs more detail to support the next level of prioritisation and continue the pattern of improvements.
- Students are very aware and appreciative of the improvements that are being made. Languages are valued and make a good contribution to the ethos of the school.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the use during lessons of the language being studied
- increasing the use of information and communication technology by students
- ensuring that more opportunities are provided in lessons to extend and challenge more able students.

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