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Mrs M Hunter
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Dear Mrs Hunter

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 15 and 16 March 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; a telephone conversation with the headteacher of a feeder primary school; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is satisfactory.

- The proportion of students attaining A* to C and A* to G grades as a percentage of the cohort is below the national average but is increasing. The success rate of those taking a language has also improved and was above the national average for students attaining A* to C in both languages in 2010. Numbers are small, particularly in French and this makes statistical comparisons unreliable. In the last two years, students have achieved better in French than in other subjects. They did less well in Spanish in 2010 but the school has identified the reason for the dip and put interventions in place to raise standards. The school's rigorous tracking

indicates that students in the current Year 11 are making good progress towards their challenging targets in Spanish. Progress for students in the French group is less marked.

- Overall, students make satisfactory gains in learning in lessons. In many lessons they make good gains. The majority of students in Key Stage 4 who have opted for a language are positive and see the importance of languages. They also value the cultural insight language learning brings. Younger students, in particular, like the variety of learning activities.
- Students say that they find speaking the most difficult skill. In lessons, their oral work is too often heavily reliant on the written word. This constrains the development of independent and creative speaking skills and, in French, is the reason for some poor pronunciation, as students have not mastered the rules of pronunciation when reading.
- Listening skills are developing well, particularly when students have regular and consistent access to hearing the language. Students in Spanish are able to read out loud confidently and accurately. They can use context to help them understand written French and Spanish, but they do a limited amount of extended reading.
- Writing develops in terms of breadth of vocabulary and complexity of structure as students move through the school. Students do not, however, consistently produce pieces of extended writing after the initial stages of language learning.
- Behaviour seen in lessons was at least satisfactory in all but one and in many lessons it was good. The majority of students have a good idea of how well they are doing in French or Spanish and what they need to do to improve their work.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is satisfactory.

- A significant amount of teaching is good but practice is variable across the department which means that teaching does not consistently promote good learning and progress.
- Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject, their subject knowledge is good and they present a good and accessible model of Spanish and French to the students. Where the target language is used well, it is supported by gestures and visuals and the teachers model what the students should do. Its use, however, is not consistent and this can cause issues of differing expectations as students move from class to class.
- Lessons are planned well to ensure that a variety of activities is provided to practise a range of skills and teachers use a good range of attractive, well-presented resources to maintain students' interest. They plan to meet students' different needs and there are some good examples of differentiated sheets to support lower attaining students. Not all teachers provide this level of support.

- Teachers use text as a cue for speaking but students are not encouraged quickly enough to develop independence from the written word.
- Relationships are, in the vast majority of lessons, good and this encourages engagement. In these lessons, teachers use effective behaviour management strategies and plan well to meet students' needs.
- Marking is regular and teachers pick up on key errors. The level of diagnostic marking is very variable, although there are some very good examples of specific and helpful targets on students' work.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- The curriculum in both languages is broad and balanced. All students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, learn a language at a level appropriate to their needs. The curriculum for the students in the area resource base is particularly well suited to their needs.
- The school has recently extended the proportion of students who can learn a second language in Key Stage 3. It has also been successful in providing opportunities for language study outside the normal curriculum time in Years 10 and 11. This has been well received by students who want to continue with language study, but whose inclinations or possible career choice determine their first-choice options.
- The department has acknowledged the difficulty of maintaining students' interest after they have made their options in Year 9 and is researching and piloting a project which aims, through extended use of information and communication technology, to improve motivation and facilitate transition into Year 10. The level of awareness of students' prior experience in a modern language in their primary school is good, but there is no formal recognition in the Year 7 curriculum planning of how the two key stages might be bridged.
- Cross-curricular links are good and the school's extra-curricular provision is going from strength to strength. The language exchange and visits abroad have a good impact on students' cultural understanding and build their linguistic and general confidence.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- There has been a commitment and a concerted whole-school approach to improve uptake at Key Stage 4. You have had considerable success in this area, but remain committed to the need to keep the profile of the subject high in the school. Languages also have a key role to play in the way in which you are developing your students to have an awareness of the wider world.

- The support is good for the department through the line management structure and through the quality of data provided for the middle leaders to underpin their self-evaluation. Leaders have, as a result, an accurate picture of the strengths and areas for development of the subject.
- You provide good support for a number of your feeder primary schools.
- Monitoring and development of teaching are good and you use coaching well to improve areas of weaker practice in the department. Teachers share their ideas well, but there is insufficient use of formal peer-observation to see that practice in action.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- creating a consistent approach in the classroom towards the use of the target language, the development of students' speaking skills, marking and target-setting and planning to meet the needs of all.

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

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector