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Mr J Chaloner and Mr P Wheatley  
Executive Headteacher and Head of School  
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Dear Mr Chaloner and Mr Wheatley

**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 29 and 30 March 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 nine lessons and of a training session run by the advanced skills teacher.

The overall effectiveness of ML is outstanding.

**Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is outstanding.

- Attainment is high. In GCSE examinations in 2010, over half of the students gained A\* or A grades. About 98% gained grade C or above and 88% met or exceeded their challenging targets. All groups make similar progress.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and, as a result, students are confident speakers with good pronunciation and intonation.
- Students are very positive about ML and exceptionally aware of the advantages of learning languages for their future economic well-being and for their all-round development. One said that he wanted to carry on learning a language in order to 'keep my horizons wide open'.

- Students are supported well to apply grammatical rules to new situations and, as they move up the school, can write at length and use their language creatively.
- In some lessons, especially in the sixth form, students are able to use language spontaneously and, even in Key Stage 3, many are happy to try and express what they want to say in French or Spanish, because they feel it is safe to 'have a go'. They said that they trust their teachers.
- The students develop all four skills exceptionally well. By the end of Key Stage 3, most have exceeded their challenging targets and have passed the Foundation Certificate of Secondary Education, with grades equivalent to Level 5 or above. This includes all students as none is withdrawn from ML lessons.
- Students have an excellent awareness and understanding of the cultures of the countries and communities where the languages are spoken. They were able to give examples, not just of cultural events, but of broader cultural differences in social situations.
- In 2010, AS and A level results showed an improvement on 2009, but were disappointing, especially, in Spanish. The improvements in the main school are fairly recent and the benefits are only starting to support stronger outcomes and greater take-up in the sixth form.

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

The quality of teaching in languages is outstanding.

- Teachers' commitment in the department is exceptionally high and they ensure that students are enthused by the work. Excellent relationships promote very good behaviour which makes a very positive contribution to the learning.
- Lessons are inventive, full of action and include a wide range of different activities, including pair and group work. The pace of learning is brisk and engagement is high. Teachers make excellent use of the language being studied to manage the activities and routines in the classroom. They devise and produce excellent resources which contribute greatly to the students' enjoyment. Technology is used well to bring language to life with authentic resources and to make explanations very clear.
- There are no foreign language assistants, but the school has made innovative and highly effective use of parents with language skills to act in this role.
- Assessment is carefully planned and regular, which allows progress to be very accurately tracked. Students are very knowledgeable about how well they are progressing. The assessment policy is well written and clear. A strength is in the active promotion of assessment of learning in all lessons, which is carefully monitored by subject leaders through learning walks.
- Teaching in the sixth form is based on best practice in ML methodology and students are actively engaged. Topics are carefully chosen to appeal to students' age and intellectual maturity.

- Much has been done to ensure that transition from primary is smooth and that the department has the information on prior attainment that it needs in order to build on this information in Key Stage 3.

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

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- The curriculum is well informed by current initiatives and includes some recently created opportunities for learning more than one language. It broadly meets the full range of students' needs and ensures effective continuity and progression in learning. However, students have no opportunity to gain a qualification other than GCSE.
- Schemes of work are based on commercial courses. They are clear, specifically with regard to progression, and include good opportunities for assessment.
- Though the range of trips is good, extra-curricular options are limited to revision and examination support. The annual international week is a great success and trips are a regular feature for some year groups.
- The learning environment is excellent; it is interesting, eye-catching and extremely supportive of the students' intercultural development.
- The sixth-form curriculum is purely academic and there is a need to consider alternative provision to support those who go on to higher education and may need to have at least basic language skills.

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

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

- The commitment to ML is excellent at all levels. The subject leader has created a department where morale is high and all teachers are skilled and committed practitioners. ML has a high profile in the school and the pattern of rapid improvements confirms the leadership's ability and capacity to improve further.
- An exceptional aspect is the sharing of good practice not just within the department, but through the joint action research projects with other departments.
- Monitoring and evaluation are excellent and built on rigorous systems for gathering evidence, including students' views. The development plan, which has a very explicit link between evaluation and future actions, supports improvement exceptionally well.
- Resources and accommodation are very good with a suite of rooms well equipped with technology. Although quite cramped when used by large groups, the layout promotes conversation well.
- The department gives very good support to local primary schools.

- Leaders in the school are well aware of areas of strength and those requiring development and take a highly strategic approach to tackling weaknesses. An example of this is seen in the project to increase participation in ML which has had a marked impact on numbers taking a language at Key Stage 4. Numbers in the sixth form are also increasing.

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

- strengthening the curriculum by:
  - increasing extra-curricular provision
  - providing a wider range of accreditation routes.

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**