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Mr A Gray  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Gray

**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 28 and 29 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 seven lessons and a tutor time.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

**Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is good.

- The percentage of students attaining A\* to C grades and A\* to G grades in 2010 was above the national average in Spanish and in line for French. Average numbers of students took a language in 2010. However, above average numbers have taken a language in previous years and numbers in the current Years 10 and 11 are rising again. In French, the proportion of students attaining A\* or A grades as well as A\* to C grades has increased over the last three years. Results in Spanish have remained above average. The school's current detailed data show that students are on track to meet their challenging targets in both languages. At Key Stage 3, students achieve well in Spanish and satisfactorily in French. Although numbers taking a language in the sixth form are too small for data to be reliable, students make good progress from their starting points.

- Students make good progress in lessons. They like learning languages and the vast majority respond well and try hard in class, particularly when explanations are clear and the challenge is right. Some students in Key Stage 3 say that sometimes the work is too easy in French. All students interviewed understood the importance of languages for careers and in their personal life and those students who had been on school visits abroad showed particularly good cultural understanding.
- Students listen carefully and the skilful use of French or Spanish by teachers in classrooms means that they readily understand instructions. Students have good pronunciation and intonation because they are carefully taught sound-spelling links. Students write well and they improve because they are encouraged to give their opinions and to use more complex language. However, their grammatical accuracy does not always improve at the same rate.
- Students in the sixth form perform particularly well in oral tasks in both languages. They read well and show good comprehension skills but their grammatical accuracy is often not as good.

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

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Lessons are well planned with a variety of interesting resources and technology is used well to allow students to develop skills in drafting, presentation and research.
- Teachers expect students to keep comprehensive notes on grammar and useful vocabulary which students refer to when working independently in class and at home. Nevertheless, some explanations and instructions seen in French lessons were less clear and students occasionally had difficulty in remembering key facts and grammar when their notes were not available.
- Students are encouraged to develop their oral skills and are given many opportunities to practise their speaking with native speakers and other adults. Reading for pleasure and beyond the textbook is an aspect that is being developed and students say that they would welcome the opportunity to do more of this.
- Teachers know their students well and plan tasks which in most cases are suitably challenging, although in a few lessons in French, students could have been challenged to do more from memory and to expand on what they had learnt.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they ensure that students are well prepared for their coursework and examinations, often offering students extra help at lunchtime and after school. Older students in particular are very appreciative of this extra support.
- The teaching in the sixth form is lively and challenging and encourages students to discuss complex issues such as drug use. Students do not make as much progress in improving their written accuracy as this is given less priority in lessons.

- Students are well involved in the assessment of their learning in lessons and all know the level at which they are working. Marking of their written work is regular but the level of guidance on how to improve varies. It is better for students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

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

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- All students are offered both French and Spanish in Key Stage 3 but more time is devoted to French in Years 7 and 8. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students can study either French or Spanish or both. About 40% of students continue with a language into Key Stage 4 as they are encouraged to do this by the option system and this number is set to rise still further for students currently in Year 9. In almost every year, students are able to do AS and A level in both languages and students very much appreciate that the school does all it can to offer the courses even with low numbers. Students who speak another language are encouraged to enter for the GCSE and there have been entries in Polish, Greek and German recently.
- A very good level of guidance for teachers is available on the staff intranet, including information on new approaches such as the teaching of phonics. The department is beginning to take account of the primary experience of its students and to adapt its planning to take account of the mixed experience of these students. Several local projects have recently allowed staff from primary and secondary schools to work together to try to establish common expectations and ways of working.
- The department regularly tries out new ways of working: this year it has introduced a vocational course and it is at the forefront of the school's development of the use of technology. Students and parents have access to a wide range of online resources and information. Teachers have also been leading a video project with other local schools to encourage students to use their languages for performances and plays.
- The school organises various very successful trips and visits abroad and many students from every year group take part. The introduction of a 'Europe Week' in school has enabled students to learn about the culture of other countries and to consider the similarities and differences between languages. The school gained an International School Award in 2009.

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

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

- Support is good from members of the senior leadership team who stress the importance to students of learning a language so that the profile of languages is high in the school. Senior leaders and the head of department have a very accurate picture of strengths and areas for improvement of the languages department.

- Students' progress is monitored very well and systems are well understood and robust. The monitoring of classroom practice is good and the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in French in particular have been correctly identified with an appropriate action plan which has already led to improvements.
- The department is extremely well led, with much guidance and support for everyday activities, such as the teaching of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and on the use of the target language. There is a very concerted effort to keep up-to-date with new ideas and approaches and, once implemented, these are kept carefully under review. For example, the introduction of a new scheme to teach phonemes has shown to have improved students' pronunciation so it is being rolled out to other year groups and the new vocational course is being adapted to ensure that it meets the needs of all the students.
- The department works well with other departments in the school and is always keen to share expertise. For example, students in the sixth form were able to benefit from some joint work with the English department on the teaching of film.

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

- continuing to monitor the quality of teaching in French to reduce the inconsistencies in areas such as clarity of explanations and challenge
- continuing to develop the curriculum so that it meets the needs of all students and continuing to keep the vocational provision under review
- ensuring that students improve their written grammatical accuracy, especially at advanced level.

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**