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Mr R Marsh
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Marsh

Ofsted 2011–12 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 11 and 12 May 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Attainment in languages is average. Staffing disruption had a considerable impact on previous cohorts and the percentage of students gaining A* to C grades in 2010 in both French and Spanish was below the national average. Stable staffing and a firm commitment by leaders and managers to ML are now securing average attainment across the school. Current data indicate that attainment is expected to rise in 2011. Because of the size of the school, cohorts in Key Stage 4 are relatively small but increasing. Reliable data show that students are on track to meet their targets in both languages across both key stages.
- Learning and progress are good in both key stages. Students enjoy their lessons and demonstrate commitment and enthusiasm when learning languages. The recent introduction of a two-year Key Stage 3 has resulted

in challenging targets which students meet and sometimes exceed, as a result of teachers' high standards and expectations. Students are aware of the importance of studying languages and an increasing number of older students expressed an interest in pursuing their language studies post-16. A large number of students show a good intercultural understanding.

- Lessons allow for all four skills to be developed equally. If an assessment highlights any weaknesses in one of the four skills, teachers focus more on the weaker skill to regain students' confidence. Students enjoy speaking the language and pronunciation is generally good, with any errors being addressed as a whole-class issue. Listening skills are good and the quality of writing is often impressive covering a wide range of vocabulary. Reading is developed well through a variety of tasks and the use of dictionaries.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers display a confident level of subject expertise and this, in turn, secures good teaching because the planning takes into account progression and teachers check for understanding at various points in the lesson. Teaching assistants, where present, are a valuable resource for facilitating learning. Students' needs are identified clearly in plans but some inconsistency exists in the clarity about what activities teachers will use to meet those needs.
- Lessons promote active learning through a variety of tasks which cater for a range of learning styles. Students particularly enjoy problem-solving activities and work well individually, in pairs and in groups.
- Grammar is being taught in English, which reduces the proportion of target language used in the lesson.
- Teachers make the best use of available resources. Information and communication technology is somewhat limited and opportunities are missed to enhance the delivery of the subject due to a lack of interactive whiteboards in the department. Students make effective use of dictionaries and some use a commercial online language programme which supports their learning.
- Systems for assessment are embedded. Regular gathering of data on both attainment and attitudes ensures that any student, at risk of underachieving, is identified and intervention strategies are implemented. In formal assessments, teachers offer constructive advice on how to improve the quality of work. Routine written work in class is often marked by the students themselves. They are also involved in the target-setting process.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The curriculum allows every student to experience both French and Spanish before selecting one language for study in Year 9. Both languages

are offered at GCSE level and teaching groups are small and of mixed ability. No additional accreditation is currently available.

- The curriculum is enriched by additional activities including the much enjoyed themed lessons which are linked to aspects of the culture, such as festivals and food. While there are currently no language clubs, students have participated in reading competitions and links exist with the Education Business Partnership. Year 7 students have the opportunity of spending a day in Boulogne to practise their language skills.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- Leaders and managers at both senior and middle level communicate high expectations. Systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the quality of ML are in place with action plans and self-evaluation processes correctly identifying areas for improvement. Success criteria are not yet entirely measurable and self-evaluation documentation is not yet finely tuned.
- The vision for ML is clearly communicated and is realised through high expectations and standards. The head of department has skilfully raised the profile of ML in the school and students speak positively about their language-learning experience. She has developed good links with a local primary school where she teaches languages to pupils in Key Stage 2, and both teachers work with a local secondary school to standardise coursework in Key Stage 4.
- Professional development is strong and both members of the department are fully up to date with the latest initiatives. Peer observations have enhanced the quality of teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- investigating alternative accreditation apart from GCSE, particularly with a view to targeting students in Year 9
- ensuring that success criteria identified in department action and improvement planning are more measurable
- reviewing the provision of ICT to enhance the language-learning experience of all students.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML 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

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector