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Mrs C Preece  
Principal  
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Dear Mrs Preece

**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 20 and 21 June 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 pupils'/students' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

**Achievement in ML**

Achievement in ML is good.

- Students enter the school with prior attainment that is below average. They make good progress in language lessons and students meet or exceed their targets in Key Stage 3. Students who choose to continue with languages in Key Stage 4 also make good progress. Very few students take a language in the sixth form, therefore it is not possible to determine accurately at present relative attainment at this level.
- Students enjoy learning languages and understand the value of doing so. They sustain concentration and effort in their lessons and enjoy the intellectual challenge presented by learning a language. For example, one Year 7 student spoke highly of learning to talk about events in the future

in Spanish. Students deal well with grammatical rules and apply them correctly in new contexts.

- Writing skills are well developed and students have access to a wide range of listening and reading materials. Teachers use the target language effectively in lessons which supports the development of listening skills.
- Students' pronunciation and intonation are good when they are encouraged to speak, because teachers provide a good model for them to imitate. However, students lack confidence in speaking because they do not have enough opportunity to use the language spontaneously, for example in group or pair work. The use of the target language as the normal means of communication in the classroom is underdeveloped.

### **Quality of teaching in ML**

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers have a clear understanding of the value of learning a foreign language which they communicate effectively to students. All teachers are well-qualified linguists, have high expectations and are enthusiastic about languages.
- Teachers plan lessons that address all skills. Lessons proceed productively with a clear sense of purpose, allowing all students to make good progress. Activities are often imaginative and engaging. For example, in one Year 8 lesson observed during the visit, students were writing real postcards in Spanish which they were going to post to their home address. Students were looking forward to explaining to members of their family what the Spanish phrases meant.
- Teachers use information and communication technology highly effectively to engage students and give them an insight into the life of people who live in Spanish-speaking countries. For example, in one Year 10 lesson observed, students were using a Spanish website on the internet to find out about hotels in Spain, as part of the planning for a business trip. This activity provided a real purpose and context for learning a language.
- Students are assessed regularly in writing, reading and listening skills. Their progress is tracked effectively to check that they are meeting their targets. They have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However, assessment of speaking skills is underdeveloped. The school does not at present assess progress in speaking formally and, as a result, the development of this skill has lagged behind that of other skills.

### **Quality of the curriculum in ML**

The quality of the curriculum in ML is satisfactory.

- Students have the opportunity to study for vocational and more traditional qualifications in Spanish. However, no opportunities exist at present for students to study more than one foreign language.

- The school has, in the past, adopted an unusual model in terms of time allocated on the timetable for languages. This has resulted in some students studying languages for less time than would normally be expected. This curriculum model has been changed and in future most students will study languages for two hours each week in Key Stage 3.
- Continuity and progression are addressed in the scheme of work which is fit for purpose. Students have the opportunity to take external examinations earlier than usual and they can study languages in the sixth form, although very few choose to do so.
- The school holds an annual International Day, which provides students with the opportunity to understand more about the lives of the people who live in Spanish-speaking countries and eat Spanish food which is served in the canteen. Students speak highly of school visits to Spain and participate in language-focused activities organised by local universities and Liverpool Football Club.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- There is a sharp focus on improvement in this area of the curriculum at all levels of leadership, including governance. The subject leader benefits from outstanding support from you and the Vice Principal, Curriculum, particularly in the proposed increased provision in Key Stage 3 and also in implementation of the English baccalaureate. As a result, take-up of a language in Key Stage 4 has doubled in less than a year.
- The school has shown sensitivity and vision in subsidising trips abroad so that all students can take part, whatever their means. Languages have a high profile in the school, as shown by the International Day, to which all departments contribute.
- Self-evaluation is accurate. Departmental plans are reviewed annually and the work of the department is monitored effectively. Procedures for whole-school development planning are currently under review.

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

- raising attainment by:
  - ensuring that all students have more opportunities to use spoken language creatively, independently and as the routine means of communication in the classroom
  - ensuring assessment addresses progression and development in all four skills
  - exploring the feasibility of providing at least some learners with the opportunity to learn an additional foreign language.

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

**Joan Davis**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**