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Mr J Crofts
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Crofts

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 21 and 22 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 students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is satisfactory.

- Standards are rising and are broadly average with some differences between languages and over time, due to the very small number studying a ML in Key Stage 4. A positive aspect of the improving picture is that the gap between the achievement of boys and girls has closed.
- During the visit, students were observed making satisfactory progress in lessons and, in some, it was good. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make less progress, but it is nevertheless satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Very few of these students continue to study a language in Key Stage 4.
- Students, especially in some of the lower sets, had weak or very weak pronunciation. Work in their books shows an increasing ability to write at

length and there are some limited examples where they demonstrate an ability to be creative with the language.

- Students' spoken language is satisfactory when supported by written prompts, but their weaker ability to make links between the sound and spelling of words reduces the accuracy of their pronunciation. They said they would appreciate the opportunity to develop conversational skills, about which they feel much less confident.
- Students' commitment to the learning of languages and their enjoyment is improving and in some year groups is good. They have a good understanding of the importance of learning a language and of some aspects of the culture of the countries where the languages are spoken, but would appreciate more opportunities to investigate issues of current interest to young people.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is satisfactory.

- The quality of teaching is improving. Much has been done recently to improve students' enjoyment and engagement in lessons and the students appreciate these changes.
- Lessons are planned with a logical sequence to activities, based on the text book course and supplemented by additional resources including the interactive whiteboards, which are used well in some classes. The plans do not sufficiently indicate a range of outcomes expected for different levels of ability or how individual needs will be met. The majority of tasks focus on developing one skill at a time and some activities fail to take account of some low levels of literacy.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and pronunciation are good and they make satisfactory use of the language being studied to manage activities in the classroom. However, their expectations of the use of the language by students are too low.
- In the more successful lessons, a good range of language learning strategies is used. In these lessons, students are actively engaged and enjoyment is high.
- Students confirm that they use information and communication technology regularly to support the development of their language skills and appreciate the helpful vocabulary books the department has created to develop independence in lessons.
- Students are adequately informed about the levels at which they are working and their target grades, but are not sufficiently clear about what they must do to improve their work. Marking does not regularly give helpful development points.
- Some good practice in the use of assessment was observed, which allowed errors to be picked up during the lesson and addressed. However, often assessment is superficial and all are required to move on at the same time

irrespective of whether they are ready. A strength of the department is the quality of the written reports to parents which are detailed and well written.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is satisfactory.

- The time allocated for learning languages is appropriate. All students study a language in Key Stage 3, but few continue to GCSE level. In Year 8, some take up a second language and continue with both until the end of Year 9. Hardly any study two languages in Key Stage 4.
- The curriculum is enriched by occasional trips to other countries. A particular success this year was the trip to a market in France where students used their enterprise skills developed through the school's specialism to sell goods. There are no email or pen-pal links to provide contact with young native speakers and encourage the use of the language for real communication. There is a very limited range of reading material available to encourage reading for pleasure or support further cultural understanding.
- Schemes of work are based on text book courses with little adaptation to suit the particular needs of students in this school. The courses provide structured and regular assessment opportunities. There is no reference to how the work will build upon the learning in primary schools.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is satisfactory.

- You and the other senior leaders in the school support ML well and the department benefits strongly from whole-school initiatives to raise attainment and improve the quality of teaching and learning, which is improving and becoming more consistent. Through the line management systems, lessons are monitored regularly and students' work is scrutinised.
- Some aspects of subject leadership require further development. The use of the data on student achievement provided by the school systems is not sufficiently rigorous in this curriculum area. Subject development plans are too vague to ensure that the improvements noted so far continue. The department's handbook has insufficient guidelines on: the features of effective ML teaching, requirements for developmental feedback in marking, the use of the language for managing the classroom, and the use of language by students.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the use students make of the language being studied for normal classroom communication
- ensuring that all students are appropriately challenged in lessons
- developing schemes of work which support teachers in creating learning routes that build on prior experience and meet the particular needs of students in this school

- developing self-evaluation that is securely based on an analysis of data on outcomes for students and leads to detailed development planning.

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

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector