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Mr G Wybar  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Wybar

### **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 22 and 23 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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is outstanding.

#### **Achievement in ML**

Achievement in ML is outstanding.

- High attainment combined with good or better learning and progress secure outstanding outcomes for students. Students achieve highly in French, German and Spanish, particularly, but not exclusively, in Key Stage 3. The proportion of students gaining at least one A\* to C grade at GCSE in ML has increased sharply from 49% in 2008 to 93% in 2010. GCSE results, overall, in ML were significantly above the national average in French and German in 2010. The proportion of A\* or A grades in German in 2010 were relatively low but current data indicate an increase to above the national average in 2011.
- The proportion of students studying ML in the sixth form is low but students' achievement is outstanding.

- Students in all year groups demonstrate a strong commitment to learning ML and their enthusiasm is conveyed in lessons. Good intonation and pronunciation are common features of good and better lessons and language is used creatively both in writing and speaking activities, when the opportunity is given.
- Students have a good grasp of grammatical concepts, and written and spoken assignments demonstrate that they can express themselves in a range of tenses and draw on a broad range of vocabulary. Students are often empowered to take responsibility for their learning and rise well to challenges presented to them.
- Students encounter a range of opportunities where they can develop their awareness of other cultures and they are equally aware of the benefits of learning a modern language in order to secure future employment.
- The impact of the ML specialism on raising standards in the school is demonstrated by the outstanding achievement of students studying ML. The focus has effectively shifted from teaching to learning outcomes, and excellent deployment of authentic resources enhances the learning experience

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

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers in the ML faculty have high expectations of their students and demonstrate good subject knowledge. The subject director's former role as Advanced Skills Teacher informs the everyday good practice well and lessons are well structured to secure good progress.
- Teachers use a wide range of resources to make lessons varied and they maintain a good pace to secure students' engagement in their learning. They design their lessons to ensure students can access the learning and make good progress because the activities are often tailor-made to the needs of individual students. All four ML skills are developed well through a range of tasks which promotes both independent and collaborative learning. In less effective lessons, teachers still maintain an element of control over the learning and do not fully empower the students to be creative and make spontaneous use of the language. Additional adults in the classroom, including learning facilitators and foreign language assistants, are well deployed and play a key role in facilitating learning.
- The use of the target language by teachers in lessons is variable and although used to some extent in every lesson, opportunities are occasionally missed to use it when introducing new concepts of the language.
- The use of assessment information to plan for teaching and secure good learning and progress is effective. Students are fully aware of current levels of attainment as well as target grades, and regular marking makes constant reference to improving the quality of the work and how to achieve this. Students often use the assessment criteria on their own work to enhance their performance.

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

The quality of the curriculum in ML is outstanding.

- The curriculum is skilfully designed to secure better than expected rates of progress over a shorter period of time in Key Stage 3. The two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum necessitates an accelerated programme of study, which secures high levels of attainment in two modern foreign languages for all students. The three-year Key Stage 4 curriculum allows for the full embedding of skills and the potential to explore a variety of curriculum pathways, including alternative accreditation or fast tracking to Advanced Level studies.
- A vast range of extra-curricular enrichment provision develops students' understanding of the language itself and also creates opportunities to explore the cultures of the countries where the language is spoken. The highly popular visits to St Omer, Soustons and Aachen allow for students to practise their languages and to develop a greater understanding of cultural aspects of the country. Links with institutions abroad including in France, The Netherlands and China provide memorable experiences for students which broaden their cultural awareness.
- The school has skilfully targeted the development of enquiry-based skills through the provision of regular project work throughout all key stages. These projects develop skills and attributes including literacy, numeracy, independence and resourcefulness. Students in Year 9 were enthusiastically engaged in a project based on attracting foreign visitors from French speaking countries to visit Gravesend during the Olympic Games in 2012. Students in the sixth form embark on a creative 'Roots and Wings' project which covers the culture of the countries where the language is spoken.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is outstanding.

- Leaders and managers are fully committed to ML and the specialist ML status the school enjoys. The structure of ML with a director of modern languages who oversees the work of the three subject leaders secures excellent communication and a strong commitment to driving up standards. The role of the three Heads of School, who have oversight of the three key stages, is also crucial in securing outstanding outcomes, as all subject leaders report to them on a regular basis on the performance of individual students within their subject area. The school works very well with partner schools to ensure a collaborative arrangement for the delivery of ML in the sixth form.
- The focus on learning by the director of modern languages and the subject leaders, along with a shared vision for ML, has secured outstanding outcomes over a short period of time.

- The refined systems in place for tracking the progress of individual students ensure that there is no significant underachievement and that well-targeted intervention is implemented following referral from leaders and managers.
- Students play a key role in determining the structure of lesson planning and also in the development of schemes of work and their views on the ML provision are gathered to inform future planning.
- Highly accurate self-evaluation documentation and detailed improvement plans demonstrate a sharp awareness of strengths and areas for development.
- A weekly programme of professional development, as well as regularly scheduled subject area meetings where good practice is discussed, ensure that teachers are up to date with current initiatives.

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

- reviewing the use of the target language in lessons to maximise exposure to the modern foreign language being taught.

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**