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Mr A Davis
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Dear Mr Davis

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 13 and 14 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- The proportion of students achieving A* to C grades is above the national average in both French and Spanish. The progress that students make from their starting points is good, although boys have been making better progress than girls. Although there has been an increase in the proportion of students attaining A* and A grades, that proportion is still below the national average in French. The school is aware of this and is now setting earlier in Key Stage 3 and has made changes to the curriculum to ensure that there is greater challenge lower down the school. The school's analysis of the GCSE results indicates that speaking is still the weakest skill and teachers are working on building up oral confidence, although this is still an area for development. There is a good correlation between the forecast and actual grades and the school's detailed tracking records

indicate that the current Years 10 and 11 are on track to meet their challenging targets. Outcomes at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved significantly in the last three years

- Overall, students make good gains in learning in lessons. They enjoy languages; and students of all ages see the importance of learning a language for educational, cultural and career reasons. Students value the enthusiasm and support of their teachers and appreciate the amount of variety in, and the active nature of, language lessons. Those who have been abroad have benefited culturally and linguistically.
- Students are developing good grammatical knowledge and confidently use grammatical terms in the classroom. Their recall of language is good. They are able to produce quite lengthy utterances in French and Spanish but tend to be overly dependent on written prompts. Pronunciation is generally good, particularly when students are clear on sound spelling links. Students' listening skills are developing well. They report that teachers' regular and extensive use of the target language helps them to develop their listening skills by encouraging them to pick out key words. They are also able to use context and prior knowledge about language to decode written texts although their access to longer reading texts is limited. Students' written work develops well in its grammatical accuracy over the time they are studying a language. Some students are regularly writing in an extended fashion but for others, longer pieces of writing are associated more with assessment tasks.
- Students show a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, know how well they are doing and talk well about what they need to do to improve.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and convey that well to their students. They have high expectations of what can be achieved and regularly remind students of this. Relationships are good and classes well managed.
- Lessons are planned very carefully. All teachers give considerable thought to how learning objectives and resources should be differentiated to meet their students' needs. Lessons are well structured and activities are varied. Teachers prepare high-quality resources which provide both support and extension and which capture students' interest. Technology is used well for presentation and practice and to provide students with access to authentic materials.
- There is some good extended use of the target language but this is not always consistently maintained throughout the lessons. Where it is used well, it is supported by gesture and effective modelling which shows students what they are to do and learn and which avoids the use of English.

- Teachers use writing well as a cue for speaking, but students are not encouraged consistently or quickly enough to speak independently or more creatively without written support.
- Teachers make good use of a range of assessment strategies and involve students well in the assessment of their own performance. Teachers regularly check on progress by revisiting their learning objectives in 'mini plenaries'. Although this is an important strategy, it is occasionally overused and students have not had sufficient time to really learn the language between assessment points. Marking is careful and regular and students are praised where appropriate and given clear guidance on how to improve.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The curriculum in both languages is broad and balanced. Schemes of work and end-of-unit assessments are currently being reviewed and modified to ensure that they meet the needs of all students.
- There is an appropriate amount of time in the curriculum to learn languages and although many classes are shared this does not have a detrimental effect on students' learning. The school has worked hard to extend the offer at Key Stage 4 and this has resulted in a considerable increase in uptake for the students currently in Year 9.
- Many students enter the school with a knowledge of French. The school builds on this well and students do not feel that they are revisiting familiar material.
- Extra-curricular provision is good and is well supported.
- Good displays support learning and assessment, celebrate achievement and raise the profile of the subject around the school.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- There has been a commitment to, and concerted whole-school approach towards, improving uptake and you and the other senior leaders are aware of need to keep the profile of subject raised within the school.
- The line management structure ensures good support for the faculty. The faculty itself works well as a team and the team leader facilitates the sharing of good practice well. Continuing professional development is important in the school and opportunities for peer-observation have encouraged teachers to reflect well on their practice.
- Students' progress is regularly monitored and the data are used well by the faculty team leader to ensure that intervention and support are well targeted.
- You and the other senior leaders monitor teaching regularly and thoroughly and you have an accurate picture of the strengths and areas

for development in the subject. The faculty makes good use of students' opinions in its self-evaluation. The written self-evaluation document is comprehensive but insufficient use is made of the wealth of data available to set sharper targets for improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing independent speaking skills
- providing more consistent opportunities for extended writing
- ensuring that teachers use as much target language as possible, both as a model for students' oral work and to support their listening skills.

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

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector