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Mr R Sheriff
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sheriff

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and the assistance of the staff and students, during my visit on 5 and 6 July 2011 to look at work in modern languages.

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 modern languages is outstanding.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is outstanding.

- Attainment in all key stages is high. A-level results are above average. The extremely high numbers entered for GCSE produce results that are, in the main, well above average. Students make outstanding progress to reach these standards, achieving and often exceeding their ambitious targets.
- In writing, students can produce extended texts of high quality from an early stage of study. Their work is accurate and shows good skills in manipulating verbs in different persons and tenses, and a wide range of structures and expressions to relate facts and opinions. Their books are neatly presented, if cluttered by an accumulation of worksheets.

- In speaking, students have very good pronunciation and can carry out a simple conversation spontaneously with a good level of confidence and fluency.
- Students enjoy learning a modern language and have a very good understanding of the benefits.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is outstanding.

- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the languages they teach and of how to help their students achieve high grades in examinations. They usually use the foreign language as the main means of communication in class, taking care to ensure that students understand them. In the very best lessons, the students and teacher speak the language a lot, including for classroom routine, but this is not consistent across the faculty.
- Lessons are very well planned, carefully structured, and taught at a brisk pace. Teachers prepare imaginative activities designed to make learning enjoyable, purposeful and challenging. For example, in one lesson, students considered a collection of French jokes to practise different ways of asking questions.
- Relationships are very good. Teachers use humour and praise very effectively to motivate the students, present work with enthusiasm and energy, and provide much-appreciated support for individuals in and out of class.
- Assessment of students' progress is rigorous and enables staff to plan timely support when a student is at risk of underachieving. Students know their targets well and know what they need to do to achieve them.
- Most students' work is marked regularly and thoroughly. The faculty has achieved a good and improving degree of consistency in that marking is increasingly linked to National Curriculum or examination criteria and feedback gives advice on how to improve. Students, however, do not routinely respond to this guidance.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is outstanding.

- The curriculum provides students with an unusually rich array of opportunities in the subject. Four languages are taught on the timetable. Others are available as extra-curricular activities. All students learn two languages and very high numbers continue with both to GCSE. An early-entry policy for the most able is extremely well managed: the school ensures that students achieve the highest grades and then continue with a worthwhile programme that provides a powerful springboard to sixth-form study.
- An extensive range of enrichment activities gives students further opportunities. From the international atmosphere in the dining hall to the regular study visits and exchanges to many different countries, students

are able to develop their language skills and their understanding of different cultures.

- Schemes of work are well designed and regularly updated. They help to ensure that the content of lessons is varied and challenging, makes good use of new technologies, and includes interesting material about the culture of the foreign country.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in languages is outstanding.

- The faculty enjoys very strong leadership and works well as a team. Senior leaders and faculty staff show great commitment to the subject. The school's intention to continue its language college work when the dedicated funding expires is testimony to this. So too is the faculty's constant drive to pioneer new ideas and resources as it strives to improve its provision.
- Extensive monitoring activities ensure that leaders have an accurate knowledge of the faculty's strengths and weaknesses. The subject's development plan sets out suitable objectives and effective actions that have led to significant improvements. However, the link between identified shortcomings and the priorities in the plan is not always clear.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students and teachers use the foreign language as much as possible in all lessons, including for classroom routine
- strengthening the link between self-evaluation and the development plan.

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

Derek Neil
Additional Inspector