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Mr D Callaghan
Headteacher
St Bede's Roman Catholic High School
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Dear Mr Callaghan

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 14 and 15 September 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 good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Students enter the school with prior attainment that is broadly in line with the national average. They make good progress in language lessons and the large majority of students meet or exceed their targets in Key Stage 3. Students in Key Stage 4 make good and sometimes outstanding progress in lessons. Most students taking an external examination in a language in 2011 gained a good qualification in the subject.
- Many students enjoy learning languages and understand the value of doing so. They sustain concentration and effort in lessons, working productively and cooperatively. Students deal well with grammatical rules and apply them successfully in new contexts.

- Reading and writing skills are well developed and students listen attentively to their teachers and to pre-recorded listening materials. Students appreciate the fact that they can gain access to materials at home to support their language studies, via the school's website.
- Students' pronunciation and intonation are good, and in some instances, excellent. Some students can speak at length, without prompts, in the target language. For example, in a Year 10 Spanish lesson, students described in detail a holiday that they had undertaken. However, some students lack confidence in speaking, because they do not have enough opportunity to use the language spontaneously and 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 highly effectively to students. All teachers are well-qualified linguists, have high expectations and are enthusiastic about languages.
- Teachers plan lessons that cover all four language skills. Lessons proceed productively with a clear sense of purpose. Activities are imaginative, varied and designed to encourage all students to participate and enjoy their learning. For example, in one Year 8 Spanish lesson, students had to move round the classroom to music and, when the music stopped, had to introduce themselves, in Spanish, to the person facing them. There was a tangible sense of fun in this activity, while all students had ample opportunity to practise the language that they were learning.
- Teachers use information and communication technology effectively, although opportunities are sometimes missed to engage students by giving them an insight into the life of their peers in French or Spanish-speaking countries, for example by video-conferencing or through email links with other schools.
- Students are assessed regularly in reading, writing, listening and speaking. However, their progress is not always tracked sufficiently effectively to ensure that they are meeting their targets and some students are unclear as to what they need to do to improve their skills.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- All students have the opportunity to study at least one foreign language, and a further language is offered to some students in Years 8 and 9. All students who have studied French and Spanish in Key Stage 3 study a language in Key Stage 4.
- The curriculum meets the needs of learners well and is designed to engage and motivate students. Continuity and progression are addressed through the scheme of work which is fit for purpose. However, in the past, the scheme of work did not build on work done in the primary school. As a result, some

students feel that there is some degree of repetition in Year 7. The school is aware of this and is taking steps to address the issue.

- Students appreciate the wide range of trips, visits and cross-curricular projects which engage and enthuse them. Most students have participated in these activities, to a greater or lesser extent. These have included the European Day, the trip to Paris organised jointly with the Art department and the project with physical education on the forthcoming Olympic Games. The subject leader led the organisation of an International Day, held at a local football ground, which was open to all students in the local authority.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- The appointment of a new subject leader, in conjunction with additional staffing has reinvigorated the department, which now has a clear and unified sense of purpose. The ambition to drive forward improvements in outcomes for students is evident at all levels of leadership.
- Procedures for monitoring and evaluation are rigorous throughout the school and, as a result, development planning is highly focused on improving students' achievement. The subject leader benefits from astute guidance at senior level regarding the further development and improvement of language provision.
- You have demonstrated passion, determination and commitment in your vision for improvement in this area of the school's work. As a result, all students now have the opportunity to benefit from provision that suits the needs and abilities of all learners.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that all students have more opportunities to use spoken language creatively, independently and as the routine means of communication in the classroom
- improving procedures for tracking the progress of students against their targets
- ensuring that all students have clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their skills in languages.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML in the school.

As 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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Joan Davis
Her Majesty's Inspector