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8 November 2011

Mr K Higgins
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Higgins

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 12 and 13 October 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.

- Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is average in French but weaker in Spanish. Performance in Key Stage 5 is variable. Nevertheless students generally make satisfactory progress given their starting points. Turbulence in staffing in the past has had a negative impact on attainment, but this situation has now been resolved. Students in Key Stage 3 now make good progress and a large majority meet or exceed their targets. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make good progress. Therefore, although achievement is satisfactory, it is improving strongly.
- Students are committed to learning languages. They can give many reasons why it is useful to learn a language and some students show enthusiasm for their studies. Students willingly use dictionaries and

reference materials independently to enrich their vocabulary and to write accurately.

- Many students lack confidence when speaking in the foreign language, because they do not have sufficient opportunities in lessons to practise this skill. They listen well to their teachers and to a range of listening materials. Students apply grammatical rules in new contexts and can write at length with varying degrees of accuracy.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is satisfactory.

- Teachers communicate high expectations to students and have excellent subject knowledge. They are enthusiastic about their subject, but opportunities are sometimes missed to engage students by providing a context and purpose for learning.
- Teachers plan a range of varied activities and lessons proceed productively. However, sometimes teachers do not use the wealth of assessment information available when planning lessons and, therefore, certain activities lack challenge for some students while being too difficult for others.
- Information and communication technology is used highly effectively by all teachers. For example, in one Year 10 Spanish lesson students sang the endings of the preterit tense to the tune of 'La vida loca!' to help them to memorise this point of grammar. There was a tangible sense of fun and students clearly enjoyed this activity.
- Teachers speak fluently and provide a good model of pronunciation. For example, in one outstanding Year 12 Spanish lesson, the teacher's skilful use of questioning helped the student to refine her ideas and justify her opinions, eliciting responses of a high quality. However, for the most part, students rely too much on written prompts when speaking and the use of the target language as the natural means of communication is underdeveloped.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and students have the opportunity to study both French and Spanish throughout the school. Ample time is allocated to languages on the timetable.
- Schemes of work have recently been re-designed and are now much more imaginative, providing many more opportunities for students to use the foreign language creatively.
- The school builds well on the knowledge and skills that students have acquired at primary school, ensuring that students re-visit, not repeat language they have previously learnt. In Year 7, students follow a 'How to learn a language' course which is highly innovative, teaching them to draw inferences and extend their knowledge of other languages. Students speak

highly of the opportunity to learn Latin words and phrases, which improves their understanding of English, as well as French and Spanish.

- The school runs a wide range of trips abroad and students have the opportunity to meet people from other countries. For example, during the visit, students had the opportunity to watch a dance performance given by a group of dancers from Georgia. The school also benefits from the highly effective deployment of foreign language assistants. As a result, students' intercultural understanding is well-developed.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- The languages department has benefited from your astute leadership and vision for the further development of this area of the curriculum. You are supported by a capable governing body and senior leadership team who are highly focused on improving outcomes for students.
- Procedures for monitoring and evaluating provision are extremely rigorous and areas of underperformance are tackled robustly. Senior leaders have provided excellent support and challenge to the languages team. As a result, substantial improvements have been implemented which are beginning to have an impact. For example, numbers of students opting to study languages have increased year on year and now almost half of all students in Key Stage 4 study a modern foreign language.
- Subject leadership inspires confidence from students and teachers. There is a shared sense of purpose in the department and ambition to drive further improvement.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising attainment in languages by:
 - improving the quality of teaching by using assessment information to design lessons that better meet the needs and abilities of all students
 - ensuring that all lessons engage students by providing a relevant context and purpose for their learning
 - providing more opportunities for students to practise their speaking skills.

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