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Mr P Costello
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Dear Mr Costello

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 31 January and 1 February 2012 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 good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Students enjoy learning languages and make good or better progress by the end of Key Stage 4. They speak positively about their learning experience and can see a clear connection between learning a language and securing future economic well-being.
- Skills in listening, reading, writing and speaking are equally well developed. Scrutiny of students' work showed good examples of extended pieces of writing. Good use is made of texts in the foreign language to build up a wider range of vocabulary. Students are encouraged to speak in the language as much as possible, although inaccurate pronunciation is not always corrected. They concentrate well when exposed to the spoken

language, and many can extract key information to demonstrate understanding.

- Students demonstrate a good awareness of the cultures of the countries and communities where the language is spoken.
- The proportion of students studying ML in the sixth is in line with the national average. Those who choose to continue their studies are committed and many achieve or exceed their challenging targets. A small number go on to study ML at university.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers have high expectations of their students and demonstrate good subject knowledge. The communicative approach adopted by teachers is supported through a wide range of activities which engages students, so that they both enjoy and achieve. Teachers make effective use of the language being taught in the classroom and students often communicate with each other in the language without having to be prompted to do so.
- Teachers plan their lessons well, taking account of the specific needs of groups of students. They actively encourage students to work independently and collaboratively. Good use is made of resources, including information and communication technology. Teaching is supplemented by commercially produced language magazines and reading books.
- Marking is regular and developmental. Students know what level they are working at and how to move up to the next level. Regular formal assessments check their progress and their targets are adjusted accordingly.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The well-structured curriculum offers students in Key Stages 3 and 4 the opportunity to study two languages. Those in the sixth form can study up to three. The school is committed to offering French, German, Spanish and Italian. Some students who plan not to continue with their language studies beyond Year 9 are offered the opportunity to gain an Asset Language qualification. ML remains a popular choice of subject for students at Key Stage 4, although the proportion of those who opt for German both in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is lower than in other modern languages.
- The school enjoys productive links with the Royal Grammar School and the University of Surrey which have hosted useful seminars relating to ML. Students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form speak positively of the impact of these seminars on their studies. Links with primary schools are less well developed. Apart from a successful project with primary schools two years ago, which involved the school's specialist music department

working alongside ML in producing their own version of the Eurovision Song Contest, potential primary school links have not been fully maximised.

- Students enjoy the annual visit to the Christmas market in Aachen and the school hosts regular visits from Spanish students. Some students have established pen friends abroad. Students in the sixth form benefit from work-experience placements in countries where the foreign language is spoken.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- The department is well supported by senior leaders and ML has a high profile in the school. The director of languages demonstrates a good understanding of the key aspects for sustaining improvement and all members of the department support her vision. Good practice is regularly discussed and shared and teachers use up-to-date methodology in the classroom.
- Systems to monitor, evaluate and review the impact of the work of the department are secure. The improvement plan reflects whole-school priorities, as well as issues pertaining specifically to ML, and the department is making good progress in implementing the plan.
- The department has supported a local secondary school in its ML provision but recognises the need to further develop this aspect of its work.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing links with other local schools, particularly in the primary sector, with a view to gaining a deeper insight into ML provision in Years 5 and 6, which will inform the school's programme of study for Year 7
- developing strategies to promote the study of German to encourage an increased uptake in Key Stage 4, and particularly in the sixth form.

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

John Daniell
Her Majesty's Inspector