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Mr J Tippett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Tippett

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 1 and 2 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with above average levels of attainment in core subjects. They make satisfactory progress and achieve above average standards in ML in Years 7, 8 and 9. The relatively small number of students studying French and/or German in Years 10 and 11 continue to make satisfactory progress and achieve above average standards in GCSE. Attainment is slightly higher in French than in German and, particularly in German, the proportion achieving at the highest levels is below average.
- Students acquire an imbalance of standards in the four skills because of an overemphasis on writing in lessons. They have a good understanding of the spoken and written word and many write well for their age and stage. However, their speaking is less good because too little emphasis is placed

on speaking French or German in lessons. As a result, minimal use of the language is made, other than that directly related to tasks, and students are less able to respond to unpredictable questions and comments.

- A very small number of students whose home language is not English make good progress in ML and are successful in gaining accreditation in their home language.
- The great majority of students visit France in Year 7 and further opportunities to visit Germany and France are offered. From these visits, students gain an understanding of the culture of these countries.
- Those students who continue with the study of a language understand the advantages of language learning, both in the business world and for developing their understanding of other cultures.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is satisfactory

- Teaching has many good characteristics: careful planning, good use of peer-assessment to motivate students, and a range of different and imaginative activities which students really appreciate. However, the lack of French or German used for real communication, particularly by students, limits their progress.
- Assessment is good at whole-school and departmental level. Students know how well they are doing and regular reference to levels during lessons increases students' awareness of how to improve. Marking of students' work, although routinely completed by teachers, is variable in quality. The best examples encourage, praise and set good targets for improvement; the minority offer very little guidance.
- While teachers are aware of their students' prior attainment and identify a range of outcomes in their planning, most lessons provide all students with the same task. As a result, the higher attaining students achieve below their best. Lower attaining students may struggle to complete the task, although, when available, high-quality work from teaching assistants has a positive impact on their progress.
- The school employs foreign language assistants to support teaching in French and German. Although students appreciate their work, this valuable resource is underused with the whole class, where language for communication is not well developed.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- All students have the opportunity to study French and German in Year 7 and to choose either or both languages for Years 8 and 9. A Spanish club provides further opportunities for ML learning.
- The department is well resourced. Good, spacious accommodation in a suite of rooms allows for a range of learning activities. Access to

information and communication technology (ICT) resources is good, although use of interactive whiteboards is usually restricted to the teacher.

- Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 in both French and German are comprehensive and of a good quality. They do not make specific reference to assessment, but this aspect is well provided for by strong school and departmental procedures. Schemes of work at Key Stage 4 fulfil the requirements of examination courses.
- Extra-curricular provision is good. Students have the opportunity to take part in clubs, a national competition and impressive opportunities to visit France and Germany.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is satisfactory.

- Management of the department provides good administration and day-to-day organisation. Regular meetings ensure compliance with examination board requirements and school assessment and reporting procedures.
- Leadership is insufficiently focused on teaching methodology, particularly a shared policy of the use of target language and a balance in teaching of the four skills.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing and implementing a shared policy to increase the use of the spoken language
- planning and delivering tasks to ensure the progress of students' of all abilities
- ensuring that the quality of marking is consistent and helps all students to improve.

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

Peter McKenzie
Additional Inspector