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Mr D Sibbit
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Sibbit

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 28 and 29 February 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 significantly below the national average. They make good progress in French in Key Stage 3 and the majority of students meet or exceed their targets. Students who choose to continue with French in Key Stage 4 make outstanding progress and attainment is well above the national average. Students' progress in the sixth form is satisfactory and improving.
- Students enjoy learning French and show enthusiasm for the subject. They appreciate the intellectual challenge of learning a language and also the rewards in doing so. As one student commented: 'It's demanding; you have to put the effort in, but then you get a sense of achievement.'

- Reading, listening and writing skills are well developed. Students' written work demonstrates originality and inventiveness. Grammar rules are, for the most part, applied accurately, because the department has a sharp focus on this area of language acquisition. Students feel that, while understanding grammar may be difficult, it helps them in other subjects, such as English.
- Students' pronunciation and intonation are variable. Some students do indeed demonstrate excellent speaking skills; however, others lack confidence because they do not have sufficient opportunity to use the language spontaneously, for example in group or pair work. 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.

- Teaching is good and in some instances outstanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and communicate their enthusiasm and passion for languages highly effectively. Teachers have high expectations. Students speak highly of the quality of teaching in their language lessons, saying: 'Teachers make the lessons fun – but we always learn!'
- Teachers plan lessons that address all four ML skills. Lessons proceed productively at a brisk pace. Teachers use information and communication technology effectively to engage students in lessons and also to provide individual resources to support their learning, such as listening materials that they can use at home.
- Students' progress is assessed in all four skills. Marking is extremely thorough. Students appreciate the detailed and precise information they receive from their teachers on how to improve their work.
- Lessons are not always correctly pitched to suit the needs and abilities of all students and therefore activities are sometimes too difficult, and in some instances, too easy. Students are not always given sufficient opportunities to practise skills independently. The school recognises this as an area for development.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is satisfactory.

- Students have the opportunity to study for qualifications in French. However, no opportunities exist at present to study more than one foreign language.
- The allocation of time for French is appropriate. Continuity and progression are addressed effectively in the scheme of work. The school is at the early stages of establishing more productive links with primary schools in order to build on prior learning.
- Students enjoy the many opportunities they have to visit France. However, they do not have sufficient contact with young people who speak French

around the world, and therefore their intercultural understanding is limited.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- Leaders at all levels demonstrate ambition and drive to continue to improve provision in ML. A shared sense of purpose across the department results in consistently good practice.
- Senior leaders are committed to continuing to improve take-up in this subject as it is one of the strengths of the school. Students express confidence in their teachers and, as a consequence, take-up has improved each year in both Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5. School leaders have generously subsidised trips abroad, so that all students can participate.
- Self-evaluation is highly accurate at all levels. Development plans are aspirational but lack clarity regarding the actions required to achieve the objectives. The department's work is monitored effectively by senior leaders.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' speaking skills by:
 - establishing and embedding the use of the target language as the routine means of communication in the classroom
 - giving students more opportunity to use the language spontaneously and independently of the teacher, for example by incorporating more pair and group work in lessons.
- improving students' intercultural understanding by providing more opportunities for them to have contact with young French-speaking people from around the world.

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