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Mr S Lehec
Headmaster
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Dear Mr Lehec

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 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 including three joint observations with senior leaders; two series of shorter visits to a further 12 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is outstanding.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is outstanding.

- Attainment is well above average at each key stage and students become fluent and committed linguists. They are extremely confident speakers with good intonation and pronunciation. Many are studying more than one language and an above-average proportion goes on to study language-related courses at university.
- Students are particularly able to adapt language to new contexts and very quickly develop the ability to write at length accurately and with flair.
- Students have a strong awareness and understanding of the cultures of the countries and communities where the languages are spoken. They use the internet for research and are independent in their learning. They have

a sophisticated understanding of the usefulness of ML, including its contribution to their literacy.

- Students in the sixth form are extremely fluent and able to apply language-learning skills to other languages.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is outstanding.

- Teachers communicate high expectations, enthusiasm and passion about languages consistently across all three subject departments. They have a high level of subject knowledge and understanding of effective language teaching and learning, especially in providing excellent models of spoken language for the students to emulate. Routine classroom communication is in the target language, but the spontaneous use by students is less common.
- Teachers plan a wide range of interesting activities in their lessons, in particular those designed to appeal specifically to boys. A good range of resources, including new technology and authentic materials, is used creatively in lessons and for homework to develop students' intercultural understanding and their knowledge and understanding in all four skills. Homework links well to the work done in class and is set and marked regularly.
- Teachers are very aware of the needs of all groups of students and plan and teach with good differentiation, especially noticeable in the support for more able students or for those who have a need to catch up following illness or other absence.
- Very good use is made of foreign-language assistants to work with individuals and as in-class support.
- Assessment is carried out regularly and marking is particularly good in the sixth form.
- Sixth form teaching is appropriately focussed on developing independence, but continues to require active participation and a high level of linguistic competence, especially orally. Some particularly effective use is made of video and visuals to stimulate thought-provoking discussions and make an outstanding contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their intercultural understanding.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is outstanding.

- The curriculum includes excellent opportunities for learning a wide range of languages and a very high proportion learns more than one language. It has many strong features such as content and language, integrated learning and cross-curricular opportunities. The provision builds on primary well.

- Students are provided with a variety of first-hand experiences of different cultures through visits and visitors, and a wide range of extra-curricular activities and imaginative enrichment events.
- The department learning environment supports students well with good use of displays to support their recall of language and structures, celebrate their achievements and demonstrate how learning a language might be helpful in their future careers.
- The languages curriculum for sixth formers is very well planned and managed. They become enthusiastic and dedicated linguists. It includes opportunities to study several languages or start to learn new ones.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is outstanding.

- Leadership at all levels is informed by a high level of understanding about language learning, especially in the specific context of this selective school.
- A clear vision for language development comes from strong subject expertise, and a powerful driver is the structure of distinct subject departments with strong inter-departmental links and collaboration.
- Subject leadership inspires confidence from students, parents and teachers. Languages have a high profile in the school and are at the forefront of new initiatives from time to time.
- Monitoring and evaluation of provision and practice are regular and are focussed clearly on sustaining the very high attainment.
- Resources to support language learning are good, especially the new computer suite and data projectors in all rooms.
- The departments give good support to primary schools and transition is well managed, so students get off to a flying start.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- enhancing the students' already high levels of fluency by developing their ability and desire to use the language being studied for normal communication between each other in the classroom and beyond.

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.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector