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Mr D Whyte
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Whyte

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 27 and 28 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Attainment is above average. In 2011, 91% of students gained grade C or above in GCSE French, with 84% doing so in German; numbers achieving A* and A grades in German were disappointing but the school has already put in place strategies for improving these. 100% gained grade C or above at A level.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and the use of the language being studied by all ML staff is a key strength, enabling students to begin to develop confidence in using it from Key Stage 3 through to Year 13, where it is impressive.

- Students express enthusiasm and enjoyment about ML lessons, plus a clear appreciation of the potential benefits of learning a language, particularly with regard to future career and education prospects.
- Appropriate to their stage of development, most students can adapt language structures and grammatical rules according to the context; by Key Stage 5 they do so creatively and spontaneously.
- Classroom displays reinforce students' understanding of the countries where the language is spoken. Extra-curricular opportunities provide excellent opportunities to enhance their knowledge and understanding.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- ML teachers demonstrate commitment and enthusiasm for languages and students recognise these qualities. Lessons are planned carefully and most teachers use a range of teaching strategies based on knowledge of their students' learning styles. Team games are a common feature to engage students and, in some lessons, good use of cooperative learning activities ensures students' participation.
- Most teachers use their excellent subject knowledge effectively to ensure high standards of teaching and learning. This is not yet consistent across all lessons but the school recognises that expertise and innovation could be shared more effectively across the department.
- Formative assessment is a strength and is used effectively to enhance students' progress across all four skills. Feedback in books to support further improvement is not yet consistent across the department.
- Excellent use of authentic online resources to engage students was observed in one lesson. However, overall the use of authentic resources is limited and students rarely use computers in ML lessons. They can access websites and resources provided by the school from home and subsequently receive feedback from teachers.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good, with personalised learning and active participation in lessons being key elements of this. High standards are also expected in the complexity and accuracy of written work, with targeted feedback supporting progress.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The curriculum is informed by current initiatives and includes the opportunity for some students to learn more than one language. It provides for a range of students' needs but external accreditation is limited to GCSE. Allocation of time is mostly appropriate, except for dual linguists in Year 9; this is currently being reviewed.
- Schemes of work are clear and show a balance across all four skills, with good opportunities for assessment.

- Classroom displays enhance the learning environment, providing windows into countries where the languages are spoken, celebrating students' achievement and assisting recall of key language structures. A wide range of opportunities to supplement learning includes visits abroad, languages booster sessions and clubs, languages events at higher education partners and interaction with foreign language assistants, trainee teachers from Germany and visiting students from exchange partnerships.
- Provision in the sixth form is planned and managed effectively to ensure that staff with complementary skills deliver the programme in each language. Opportunities for those studying German to do work placements in Germany build students' confidence and proficiency in using the language.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- You and the other senior leaders value languages and are committed to developing the profile and provision of ML. The department has been placed in the core collaborative EBacc group to develop and share good practice. Resources, including staffing, are being enhanced to ensure more students can study ML at GCSE and beyond.
- The determination of subject leadership to achieve high standards inspires confidence from students and staff. The department recognises the need to develop skills to engage a wider range of abilities in language learning.
- Regular monitoring and accurate self-evaluation of provision lead to appropriate action to address any areas of under-performance.
- Support for feeder primary schools is variable, but relationships are good and influenced the recent introduction of French for Year 7.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- ensuring that students have opportunities in lessons to use information and communication technology to enhance their progress
- developing strategies to engage students of different abilities by sharing expertise and innovation across the department
- extending the use of authentic texts to develop all four skills, particularly reading and listening.

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

Jackie Hill
Additional Inspector