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Mr S Devlin
Principal
Blessed Edward Oldcorne Catholic College
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Dear Mr Devlin

Ofsted 2012–13 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 16 and 17 May 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; a discussion with an adviser from the local authority; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is outstanding.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is outstanding.

- Students clearly enjoy learning ML and speak the language well with good intonation. Their achievement over time, and by the end of Key Stage 4, is well above the national average. Progress made by disabled students, and those with special educational needs, is also well above the national average.
- The school's 'group talk' initiative has strengthened students' confidence when speaking the ML. A few students are now starting to use language imaginatively when communicating with each other and without direction from the teacher. Students' effective development of listening, reading and writing skills secures outstanding outcomes.

- Students make highly effective use of supplementary resources to develop their independent learning skills. For example, all students make good use of information and communication technology by using a commercial language programme to expand their range of vocabulary and build up their idiomatic phrases.
- Students demonstrate a strong awareness of the cultures of the countries where the language is spoken. They are particularly knowledgeable about the advantages of being able to speak a ML and the importance of being able to do so in securing future employment.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is outstanding.

- Teachers' high expectations and strong subject knowledge are a common feature of teaching. Teachers challenge students in their learning through a wide range of activities which are exceptionally well matched to their individual needs. The support provided by the adviser from the local authority has had a noticeable impact on developing teachers' awareness of addressing the needs of different groups of students. Teachers draw on a full range of resource materials to motivate students and stimulate their desire to deepen their understanding of the ML and the culture of countries where it is spoken.
- A contributory factor to the quality of teaching is the teachers' highly effective use of the ML in lessons. This exposes students to the ML for the majority of the lesson and develops their confidence in speaking and listening to the spoken language.
- Assessment is rigorous and regular. Students report they find the high-quality marking very useful in identifying their strengths and areas for improvement. The 'two stars and a wish' initiative is a key factor in motivating students to achieve high standards.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is outstanding.

- The imaginative curriculum is skilfully structured to allow all students in Key Stage 3 to study two languages from a choice of French, German and Spanish. Good provision is made to support students in gaining available accreditations in their heritage language. A significant proportion of students study one or two languages at Key Stage 4. The curriculum for students in Year 7 has been successfully amended to build on knowledge acquired in Key Stage 2.
- The curriculum is enriched through the provision of lunchtime clubs including in Greek, Polish and Japanese. Many of the 18 languages prefects run these clubs which are well attended. In addition, residential exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain are flourishing and highly effective in developing students' knowledge and understanding of cultures where the ML is spoken.

- The school has forged productive links with local primary schools and Worcester Sixth Form College. Students report they enjoy specially themed learning days. Projects include French theatre workshops, podcasts in the ML and producing animated films in French. Students recently secured success in a national vocabulary spelling competition.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is outstanding.

- The highly competent head of department has successfully raised the profile of ML in the school and is ably supported by senior leaders. Procedures for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the performance of the department are rigorous and inform improvement planning. Teachers are actively encouraged to enrich their professional development through attending courses aimed at securing improved outcomes for students.
- Students' performance in ML is monitored on a regular basis and the progress of different groups, for example those known to be eligible for free school meals, is scrutinised. Any underperformance is identified and rectified in a timely fashion and support strategies are put in place. The department is also effective in engaging parents and carers in their child's study of ML.
- The learning environment for ML has been very carefully developed to support all students in their learning. Walls are adorned with key phrases and prompts in the ML, colourful displays which celebrate students' achievements and subject grade descriptors which motivate students to succeed in meeting their challenging targets.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing strategies to increase the proportion of students who use the ML to communicate with each other spontaneously and without direction from the teacher.

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