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Ms M Holt
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Holt

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 14 and 15 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; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of four lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with prior attainment that is broadly in line with the national average. Performance in GCSE examinations in ML has improved over time and is now in line with the national average overall, albeit with small numbers of entries. Progress in the lessons observed was satisfactory. Robust data provided by the school during the inspection indicate broadly satisfactory progress in both Key Stages 3 and 4 with the majority of students in line to meet or exceed their targets.
- Students show enthusiasm for learning languages and can give many reasons why it is useful to do so. Take-up in Key Stage 4 has improved year on year.
- Students can apply grammatical rules to new situations and they have the opportunity to use language of increasing complexity as they move up

through the school. Reading and writing skills are reasonably well developed and students listen attentively to their teachers and to pre-recorded materials.

- Intonation and pronunciation are an impediment to communication. Students are often over-reliant on written prompts when speaking and have insufficient opportunity to use the foreign language spontaneously and creatively.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is satisfactory.

- Teachers are diligent and communicate their enthusiasm for languages effectively.
- Subject knowledge is sound on the whole. Some good practice in the use of the foreign language in the classroom was observed but it is variable, being largely dependent on teachers' confidence in the language.
- Teachers plan a range of varied and imaginative activities that engage learners and students say that 'learning languages is fun!' Students speak enthusiastically of watching films in the foreign language, and information and communication technology is used effectively in lessons. For example, in a Year 8 lesson students watched an amusing Spanish television advertisement, which was then used as a stimulus to a piece of writing.
- Work is marked regularly and students receive clear advice on how to improve. However, teachers do not always make best use of the wealth of assessment information available to them. As a result, lessons do not always provide sufficient support or challenge so that all students can make good or better progress.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced but at present students do not have the opportunity to study more than one foreign language. Ample time is allocated to languages on the timetable.
- The scheme of work ensures progression but opportunities have been missed to create a stimulating learning environment that intrigues students and enriches their appreciation of other people's cultures.
- The department works effectively with other subjects across the school. For example, students spoke highly of the trip to Barcelona organised with the physical education department and with enthusiasm about the forthcoming visit to France, a joint project with the history department.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is satisfactory.

- The languages department has benefited enormously from your astute leadership and the concerted drive across the school to improve outcomes for students. Subject leadership is satisfactory but improving because of the support and challenge provided by senior leaders.
- Monitoring and evaluation of provision by senior leaders are thorough, robust and rigorous. Self-evaluation is accurate and plans for improvement are sharply focused on raising achievement.
- A shared common purpose exists in the department and colleagues work well collaboratively.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement in languages by:
 - ensuring that lessons are designed to suit the needs and abilities of students so that they can all make good or better progress
 - establishing and embedding the use of the target language as the routine means of communication in the classroom.

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