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Ms H Mills
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Mills

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 29 and 30 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 eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is satisfactory.

- Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2011 was low in Spanish and below average in French. Students' progress in ML was also significantly below the national average. However, current available data indicate that students are making better progress in both French and Spanish and are expected to achieve levels of attainment which exceed last year's national average. Students in Key Stage 3 are working successfully towards achieving their challenging targets.
- Students are enthusiastic when speaking the foreign language but pronunciation is variable because teachers speak more English in lessons than is necessary. They are taught the key grammatical concepts but some cannot apply the grammatical rules because a few teachers do not

spend enough time ensuring that students fully understand them, before moving on to the next stage of the lesson.

- Students' understanding of the cultures of the countries where the language is spoken is sound. They also recognise the value of learning a language and how this can secure their future economic wellbeing.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is satisfactory.

- Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and demonstrate sound subject knowledge. They are aware of students' prior attainment and any specific need. However, not all use this information well to plan lessons which meet the needs of different groups of students and progress slows as a result.
- Teachers do not maximise the use of the language being taught for routine classroom communication. Students report they would welcome this, as it would develop their skills in listening to the ML.
- Foreign language assistants are deployed well by teachers and support students well in their learning.
- Assessment and marking are strengths across the department. Students are provided with clear guidance on how to reach the next level of attainment, with an additional literacy target for those in Key Stage 3.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is satisfactory.

- The curriculum is broad and ensures the balanced delivery of the four ML skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking. Students' choice of ML is restricted to either French or Spanish in Key Stage 3, depending on the year they enter the school. A second language is offered at Key Stage 4, but uptake is low. In addition, students report that their ML lessons are unevenly spread over the two-weekly timetables.
- Links with primary schools have not been fully developed to secure a rapid transition in ML between Year 6 and Year 7.
- Schemes of work have been rewritten recently and clearly reflect the school's high expectations of students as they progress through both key stages.
- Students in Year 7 have the opportunity to visit a Christmas market in Lille and the ML department has contributed to the school's Innovation Days in the past, where students learn about the cultural aspects of another country. Students report they would appreciate increased opportunities to visit the countries where the ML is spoken.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- Leaders and managers have correctly identified what has to be done to raise standards in ML and the impact of these actions is reflected in students' accelerated progress and in securing improved outcomes. The restructuring of departments into faculties has led to the creation of the languages and communication faculty. This decisive action has combined the English and ML departments and encourages the sharing of good practice across both subject areas.
- The performance of ML is monitored, evaluated and reviewed regularly through lesson observations, scrutiny of lesson plans and students' work. This has led to an improvement in the way students' work is assessed and has raised awareness of what constitutes good and better teaching. A development plan for the faculty is in place and a self-evaluation document is currently being reviewed.
- Leaders and managers have raised the profile of ML in the school which has secured an increased uptake in the number of students opting to study a ML in Key Stage 4.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- maximising the use of the language being taught in the classroom by teachers to increase students' exposure to the language
- providing more opportunities beyond the classroom for students to encounter the language and culture of the countries where the ML is spoken
- embedding more complex grammatical concepts so that teaching secures good progress for all students and secures a greater proportion of top grades
- forging links with primary schools to ensure that students in Year 7 build on existing knowledge acquired in Key Stage 2.

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