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Mr I Morris
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Dear Mr Morris

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 12 and 13 June 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.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Students' levels of attainment have been consistently above the national average for the last three years in both French and German. The proportion of students achieving the top grades at GCSE was below the national average in 2011. However, current data indicate that the proportion of students gaining A* and A grades at GCSE is set to exceed last year's national average. Students in the sixth form achieve well and some have gained places at prestigious universities in order to continue their ML studies.
- All groups of students make expected progress and any remaining gaps in attainment between different groups of students, for example disabled students and those with special educational needs, are being narrowed successfully.

- Students are enthusiastic about studying ML and they become more confident in speaking French, German and Spanish as they progress through the school. They show determination when tackling longer extracts of the spoken language. They produce some good examples of extended writing in Key Stage 4.
- Discussions with students demonstrate a limited awareness of the cultures and customs of countries where French, German and Spanish are spoken.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers have high expectations of students and have a confident level of subject expertise. Lessons are skilfully planned to take into account the needs of different groups of students. All teachers make effective use of the language being taught to manage lessons.
- A good range of resources is used effectively to engage students and to develop their reading and writing skills. Students report that they particularly appreciate the work of the two foreign language assistants who have helped them increase their confidence when speaking in the ML.
- The department's assessment policy is implemented consistently. Consequently, marking is regular and assessments are carried out in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Detailed feedback from teachers conveys clearly what students have to do to move up to the next level of attainment.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is satisfactory.

- The recent review of the curriculum has restricted choice to one ML at Key Stage 3 and has resulted in mixed-ability grouping. Teachers have, nevertheless, responded positively to this challenge when planning lessons and continue to secure positive outcomes. The possibility of studying two ML in Key Stage 4 remains, but uptake is very small.
- Productive links exist with primary schools and students from Highfield have played a key role by teaching ML to primary pupils both at Highfield and in their own schools. However, the Year 7 curriculum does not take sufficient account of knowledge gained in French by pupils in Year 6.
- Schemes of work are under review and are being re-written to address amendments to the curriculum. Limited opportunities are provided to develop students' intercultural awareness beyond the classroom. Successful excursions abroad have taken place in the past, but the new head of department's priority this year has been to identify existing areas of good practice and to drive forward improvements in teaching, so that standards in ML continue to rise.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- Senior leaders have supported ML by providing additional staffing and by offering sixth form provision for very small numbers. A clear rationale lies behind the decision to move to only one ML for all students in Key Stage 3. The impact of this action has been a sharp increase in the proportion of students opting to study a ML in Key Stage 4.
- The head of department has successfully managed the transition from the setting of groups by ability to mixed ability groups. In addition, he has ensured that lessons are planned which incorporate appropriate levels of challenge and support.
- Self-evaluation processes are accurate and strategies to secure improvement are efficient. Meetings between senior leaders and the head of department are effective in raising standards, and department meetings are used well to share good practice.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' intercultural understanding by:
 - developing more links with institutions abroad
 - working with external organisations which provide in-school activities, for example, theatre workshops in ML
 - making full use of information and communication technology
 - ensuring classroom displays promote intercultural understanding
- strengthening transition from Year 6 to Year 7 by modifying schemes of work to build upon students' knowledge and skills 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