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Mrs L Allen
Principal
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Dear Mrs Allen

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 19 and 20 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 six lessons and observation of an assembly.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good. The subject makes an excellent contribution to students' cultural and social development.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Outcomes for the very small number of students in GCSE exams last year were well below average, but represented satisfactory progress. Since then, staffing has stabilised and a key new appointment has been made. Numbers studying a ML in Key Stage 4 have increased significantly and students are making good progress across all key stages. Speaking is their weakest skill and a very small number of particularly disadvantaged students and those who have special educational needs make less progress than others.
- A strong focus on phonics means students are able to read aloud well with good pronunciation. Most students apply themselves well in lessons and enjoy learning languages. Their books are neat and well organised.

- Students in Key Stage 4 can apply grammatical rules to new situations and can write at length with support.
- Students across the academy have a very strong awareness and understanding of the cultures of the countries and communities where the languages are spoken. They are aware of the advantages of learning languages for their future economic wellbeing and for other social reasons.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers communicate high expectations, enthusiasm and passion about languages, showing awareness of the need to challenge students with increasingly demanding language. Occasionally the level of challenge is too high and a very small minority find it difficult to engage with the tasks without considerable support.
- Activities are very well planned and imaginative to support students to develop all four skills. Lessons include good opportunities to work in pairs, small groups and individually, and careful use is made of seating plans to allow different levels of ability to work together and learn from each other.
- Authentic resources are used well as a cue for speaking and writing and to bring native speakers into the classroom. Authentic reading texts are used well to develop intercultural understanding.
- Teachers use Spanish and French to manage their lessons with variable success. They consistently use the languages for praise and greetings. Examples of best practice were observed, but sometimes too much unfocussed listening was required or too much English used to set up tasks.
- Significant strengths are the use of technology and excellent resources to bring the languages to life, to support understanding and to enhance intercultural understanding.
- Students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing in languages and what steps they need to take to make progress because of regular feedback orally and through developmental marking.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The imaginative curriculum is designed to ensure a balance across all four skills and adequately meets the full range of students' needs, although currently no provision exists for students who would benefit from studying two languages.
- Students are provided with first-hand experience of different cultures through visits, visitors, and the use of technology. A satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities supports parents and carers, students wanting to revise and some aspects of languages for fun, but does not compensate for the lack of opportunities for dual linguists.

- The department and school learning environments give outstanding support to students through displays which feature the culture of other countries, support their recall of language and structures, demonstrate how learning a language might be helpful in their future careers and raise the profile of languages with posters about celebrities who are also linguists.
- Links with local businesses and with schools in a range of countries encourage students' engagement with languages.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- New subject leadership has strengthened both capacity and expertise and the team has a clear shared vision for the future development of the subject. Good practice and resources are shared well.
- Monitoring and evaluation of provision and practice are regular and lead to accurate self-evaluation and clear development planning. As a result, numbers taking ML in Key Stage 4 have soared and achievement improved.
- Transition from Year 6 to Year 7 is managed well for languages. Currently very few take a language in the sixth form, although good partnership working has retained the provision for those wishing to study ML at advanced level.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- refining teachers' use of the target language in lessons
- extending strategies to differentiate activities to make them accessible to all levels of ability.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML in the academy.

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

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector