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Dear Mr Game

Ofsted 2009-10 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 25 and 26 November 2009 to look at work in ML.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on take-up in Key Stage 4, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve language learning.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, a telephone discussion with a primary school headteacher, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of eight lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in ML is good.

- Standards in ML have been below national average as measured by national examinations. However, considerably more students are entered for GCSE in a language than is the case nationally and overall standards in languages are broadly satisfactory by the end of Year 11. Higher-attaining students perform better in French than in Spanish and progress in French

is better overall than in Spanish. There was a dip in GCSE results in 2009 but intervention strategies have been put in place. The school's analysis shows that students in Year 11 are making good progress towards achieving challenging targets. Achievement in the sixth form is broadly satisfactory.

- In lessons, students mostly make good gains in their learning and show enjoyment. Some of the older students of Spanish are hampered by a lack of confidence.
- An analysis of examination outcomes, carried out by the curriculum leader, indicated that speaking and listening had been the least well-developed skills. This is being tackled at a department level. Teachers are using more challenging recorded material and this is improving listening skills. Speaking for some students remains too closely linked to the written word and students do not always develop to become independent speakers. Written work shows developing accuracy but mainly in controlled situations. Grammatical understanding is developing well.
- Students see the importance of language study but their broader cultural understanding is less well-developed.

Quality of teaching of languages

The quality of teaching of ML is good.

- Teachers' enthusiasm and support are valued by their students. Behaviour is managed well and relationships are positive.
- Lessons are planned well with specific learning objectives. Teachers employ a wide range of resources and a variety of activities to maintain interest and to practise new language. They provide a good model of French or Spanish for their students but the use of the target language by teachers varies. On occasions, teachers explain in English rather than model in the language what students should do. This reduces the opportunities for students to further develop their listening skills.
- Marking is generally regular but not all students' work is marked in sufficient detail and with detailed guidance on how to improve. Some very good guidance was seen on the work of students at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers are assessing regularly in lessons how well students have understood, but not always acting on the outcomes.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- Schemes of work for Years 8 to 11 are appropriate and provide a clear indication of what needs to be taught and how it should be assessed. Guidance on how to plan to meet different students' needs, other than by resource, is not as good. Schemes for the sixth form are thin. Curriculum plans for the new school-wide Year 7 programme are much more detailed and helpful and are the result of good collaboration. These have yet to be

embedded and evaluated in terms of students' outcomes. Curriculum plans are being supported increasingly well by the department's website.

- The ML programme is inclusive, offering a second language for all in Year 9 and a National Vocational Qualification for lower-attaining students in Year 10.
- The department has made a good start on acknowledging prior experience and achievement at Key Stage 2. This is valued by the feeder primary schools. The curriculum leader is well aware of the need to keep this under constant review.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a range of extra-curricular provision. The visits abroad are supported well and add considerably to students' enjoyment of languages.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in languages is good.

- There is a high level of support from the senior leadership team for ML. This is exemplified by the resourcing of smaller class sizes and the provision of foreign language assistant time. There is a good level of stability in the department and teachers work together well. Both the senior leaders and the curriculum team leader have a very clear idea of the strengths and the areas for development in ML. This is reflected well in the departmental self-evaluation document. The curriculum leader, who is relatively new in post, has acted swiftly to work with the department to tackle the key issues. Development planning is thorough but not all areas have precise targets and this makes measuring progress difficult.
- The work of the department is regularly monitored and data are analysed well to focus improvement. Data on students are being used increasingly well to inform the work of classroom teachers.
- Support for primary ML is very strong and is part of a comprehensive school-wide programme. In ML, support has been targeted well by the energetic teacher in charge and ensures a good match to schools' needs. The support is helping primary schools to create their own sustainable programmes.

How close the school is to reaching the benchmarks for language take-up in Key Stage 4

- Uptake at Key Stage 4 has been consistently high. In the current Years 10 and 11, 65% of students are learning French or Spanish. The number of those students studying two languages is also well in excess of the national figure. The option system is favourable both for single and dual linguists and languages are promoted well by the senior leadership team.

How well ICT is used to improve language learning

This is good.

- Teachers use ICT particularly well to support the staged presentation of new language, to correct work and to vary activities.
- Full use is made of the compact departmental ICT room, although less so with the higher-attaining students because of the larger class sizes.
- Students use ICT well to improve their work and to reinforce grammatical understanding and talk well about the impact of ICT.
- Use of ICT to develop students' cultural understanding is more limited.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing students as more independent speakers of French and Spanish
- ensuring that as much target language is used as possible by teachers to maximise listening opportunities for students
- broadening students' intercultural understanding.

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

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector