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Mr P Millington  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Millington

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and for the help of your staff and pupils, during my visit on 26 January 2010 to look at work in modern languages.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on how well the school is implementing entitlement in Key Stage 2.

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 pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of pupils' work and observation of three lessons.

#### Achievement in languages

- Pupils have learned a satisfactory amount of vocabulary, given the time they have been taught French. They recall the words well and, on the whole, pronounce them correctly.
- Most of their writing and reading in French is accurate, though confined to single words. Their understanding of spoken French is limited because they have had little exposure to it.
- Pupils can use numbers and the alphabet well, for example to do mental arithmetic or to spell their names. However, they cannot use their vocabulary to create simple sentences.
- They have a good knowledge of and interest in the culture of Francophone countries.

- Their personal development is very good. They enjoy French lessons, behave extremely well, have good levels of concentration, and work responsibly with partners. They show great keenness and enthusiasm for the subject, and have a sound understanding of the benefits of learning additional languages.

#### Quality of teaching in languages

- Lessons have an impressive variety of enjoyable activities, such as singing in French and playing games. These give pupils a real purpose for speaking the language and help reinforce the vocabulary they have been taught.
- Teachers plan lessons well. They make it clear what the pupils are meant to learn, and structure the work skilfully to build up the learning step by step as the lesson proceeds.
- The different teachers have different strengths. One observed lesson featured good knowledge of the subject, intelligent use of cultural background information, inventive use of music, and very high expectations. Others had a useful focus on teaching phonics, and lots of emphasis on getting the pupils to speak the language as much as possible.
- Some lessons had clear weaknesses. In one, the teacher's incorrect pronunciation of some words was being learned by the pupils. In another, the teacher did not involve the pupils sufficiently in the learning and did not create opportunities to assess whether they had all understood the work. Another lesson missed an opportunity to help pupils speak in full sentences.

#### Quality of the curriculum in languages

- The time allocated to the subject is adequate.
- The school uses a commercial scheme of work. Its experimentation with this has meant that progress for some year groups has been fairly slow and that the work has been quite repetitive. The scheme has not been adapted to reflect the school's own circumstances; for example, it does not specify work for the mixed-year class. Overall, the curriculum places too little emphasis on helping pupils to build their own sentences.
- Staff develop pupils' intercultural understanding very well through a range of interesting events in and outside French lessons. These include researching information about the Haiti earthquake on the internet, planning and presenting an assembly about France, and interviewing a group of French visitors.
- Planning for transition with the partner secondary school is rudimentary.

#### Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

- You provide a good level of support for the subject's development. This is reflected in the allocation of resources and teaching time, and the training opportunities for the staff who are involved.

- Although monitoring and evaluation of the subject have been relatively informal, you have an accurate view of its principal strengths and weaknesses and have laid firm plans to involve a subject specialist in a more formal evaluation later this year.
- Documentation is of good quality. The subject policy helpfully describes in detail the intended approach to teaching and learning. A very thorough action plan accurately identifies the main priorities for the subject and lists suitable actions to develop it this year.
- The subject leader has begun to develop an assessment system but there is some way to go. Pupils do not know what they have to do to improve. Teachers tend not to correct pronunciation errors in class, and in some written work pupils' errors have been marked as correct.

Subject issue: how well the school is implementing entitlement in Key Stage 2

- The school has made good progress with introducing a modern language. All pupils in Key Stage 2 learn French. After a period of experimentation, the school is well placed to plan a coherent four-year course. It has adopted a sensible approach to teaching the new subject, given the level of staff's skills. Its use of a visiting specialist has advantages but the arrangement brings challenges too; for example, the specialist spends too little time in school to build up knowledge of the pupils or of the school's policy on teaching and learning in the subject.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- planning to make more rapid progress through the scheme of work in each year group
- raising teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve in all four skills
- developing a more consistent approach to teaching by sharing expertise across the staff who teach the subject.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop languages 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

Derek Neil  
Her Majesty's Inspector