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Mr P Wayne
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Dear Mr Wayne

Ofsted 2009-10 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students during my visit on 24 and 25 February 2010 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; scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in ML is satisfactory.

- Standards in ML are above average at Key Stages 3 and 4 and high in the sixth form. The percentage of students attaining grades A* and A has risen steadily in the last three years as a result of the department's focused support for higher attaining students. There remains, however, a significant proportion of students attaining D grades. This was considerably higher than predicted in 2009. Boys' attainment is lower than that of girls and this difference in attainment is larger than that found

nationally. Standards by the end of Key Stage 4 are higher in French and German than in Italian. Students make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11.

- In lessons, students make satisfactory gains in learning. They respond positively to their teachers and value the time and hard work their teachers put in on their behalf. Although there was some off-task behaviour seen during the inspection, the vast majority of students try hard and want to succeed. They value the importance of a language to their future, but not all show such a strong cultural understanding. They are aware of how well they are doing and can talk of how well they are progressing in different skills.
- Students are developing a good grammatical understanding and show good listening skills. They speak out in class but their pronunciation is sometimes adversely affected by a lack of understanding of sound spelling links. Students are developing extended writing skills well by the end of Key Stage 3. Higher attaining students are writing with a good level of accuracy and complexity in French and German by the end of Year 11.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress and they are confident and sophisticated speakers and writers of the language by the end of Year 13.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching is satisfactory

- Teaching is good in some areas. Teachers' enthusiasm is conveyed well to students and expectations of behaviour are high. Their consistent use of the target language supports students' listening and speaking skills. There is a great deal of creativity in the department and lessons are planned to include a variety of tasks. Lessons are not always planned carefully, however, in terms of exactly what students should learn, or of how each activity will help them to reach their learning objectives. This can make it difficult for teachers to assess progress at the end of lessons.
- Marking is regular and detailed in French and German, but less so in Italian. Some very good practice was seen in books where teachers set clear, specific targets on how to improve. However, this is not consistent.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good and is particularly effective when students are allowed to take control of their own learning.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory.

- Schemes of work for Years 7 to 11 provide a good level of guidance on what to teach. There is less detailed guidance on how to assess.
- Time allocation is appropriate and the recent decision to focus on one language in Year 7 has been considered carefully.

- The curriculum meets students' needs although there is a lack of emphasis on the development of extended reading skills.
- The curriculum is enhanced well by extra-curricular activities and popular and well-supported exchanges.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in ML is satisfactory.

- The language department receives a high level of support from the senior leadership team, and you and the subject leader have worked well together to improve elements of provision. This has led, for example, to an increase in foreign language assistant time and better computer access.
- The subject leader is aware of the areas of strength and areas for development for his department. The departmental development plan identifies specific targets for improvement but it is not clear exactly how these will be achieved or how they will be monitored.
- Teaching is monitored regularly, with an appropriate focus relating to the professional development of the teacher. Good feedback is given on teaching and helpful guidance given on teaching techniques. There is an insufficient focus in these monitoring records on how well students are learning or making progress.
- At present, there is little contact with primary schools with regards to languages and the Year 7 curriculum does not yet consider prior learning.

Subject issue: take-up in Key Stage 4

- Uptake at Key Stage 4 has been consistently high and exceeds the Government's benchmarks. Languages are core, although the school reserves the right to provide a more appropriate learning experience outside languages for a very small number of students. There is a higher than average proportion of students studying two languages.

Subject issue: the use of ICT to improve language learning

- The use of ICT is satisfactory. Teachers' use of interactive whiteboards to present and practise language is good. Some teachers make good and varied use of ICT with their students to practise language and for research.
- Students' use of ICT, however, is inconsistent. The subject leader is aware of this and ICT is a key element of development planning. The vision for the use of ICT to enhance language learning is not yet sufficiently clear.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving the achievement of boys and ensuring that lower attaining students make as good progress as their peers

- planning lessons with precise learning objectives in mind and relating planned activities to those objectives
- sharing the good practice in marking
- ensuring that departmental monitoring of work consistently focuses on students' learning
- developing a clear rationale for the use of ICT and ensuring that it is planned in a way that benefits language learning.

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

As I explained previously, 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