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Mr P Freat  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mr Freat

Ofsted 2010-11 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 20 and 21 May 2010 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.

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 languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- Standards, as measured by the proportion of students attaining grades A\* to C in GCSE, are above average for both languages. The proportion of students attaining an A\* in French has risen steadily. However, the numbers of students studying a language at GCSE have been below the national average. Value-added measures show that students have generally made good progress in both languages over the last three years. The school's own data and monitoring figures indicate that students in the current Year 11 are on track to achieve challenging targets in French. The progress in German towards those challenging targets is less marked.
- Because of small cohort sizes in the past, it is difficult to judge trends in achievement in languages post-16.

- In lessons, students generally make good gains in learning. Students respond well to their teachers and value the extra time they receive from all their teachers outside lessons. This is particularly valued by students doing an additional language at Key Stage 4. Behaviour is good but is also well managed. Students realise the importance of languages and are developing good inter-cultural understanding and a secure knowledge about language, particularly at Key Stage 3. Students can identify well what helps them learn and also what hinders them. They are all very well informed about how well they are doing and most can talk in detail about their areas for improvement.
- Students in the sixth form feel very well supported in their transition to A-level work.
- Students listen well in class and make an effort with their pronunciation. They benefit from the clarity of linguistic models they receive from their teachers. Students' oral skills are developing well through classroom practice and because teachers encourage them to take risks and experiment. Written work shows an increasing confidence with grammatical structures. Some higher attaining students in Year 11 can write at length with a good level of accuracy and range of language. Some students' work shows that they are not learning from their errors as they repeat the same, often basic, mistakes.

#### Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Planning is good. Lessons are carefully planned and have precise learning objectives. Although there is a good level of variety, occasionally, focus is insufficient on the range of learning needs in a class. Resources are attractive and well prepared and teachers make good use of the interactive whiteboard to present new language.
- Teachers' good relationships with students contribute well to the response in lessons. Teachers show a consistency of approach to rewards and sanctions and this supports their good behaviour management.
- Target language use is generally high and supports the development of students' listening skills. Occasionally, however, English is used to explain rather than modelling in the target language. Students identify being challenged by teachers' use of the target language as a key factor in helping them to learn.
- The level of verbal feedback is high. Teachers have an extensive understanding of level descriptions and examination specifications and teach good strategies for approaching examination work. Marking is more variable. While there are some very good examples of target-setting, a few students' books include little marking and limited guidance on how to improve.
- The quality of verbal and written feedback in the sixth form is high.

## Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 provide good guidance for teachers and are well adapted to take account of curriculum changes and changes to the Key Stage 3 framework for languages. The use of the learning bridge is a particularly helpful addition to the Year 7 curriculum as it allows the department to focus on skill development and language-learning skills. Schemes of work for Years 10 and 11 support examination specifications well but have less detail on the skills that they still need to develop.
- The department has been creative in the use of alternative curricular ideas, such as project work in both languages and the 'Making Primary Languages our Business' project in Year 9. The impact of the primary project on students' oral confidence is very good and the manner in which students evaluate their peer-groups' work supports their understanding of language learning very well.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well by some teachers and students access materials remotely to support study at home. Overall, the use of ICT in lessons as a support for language-learning is inconsistent.
- Students highly value the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. It is clear that they really appreciate the opportunities to apply their language study. This enhancement has had a considerable impact on students' enjoyment of languages.

## Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- Support for the languages department from the senior leadership team is strong. Regular monitoring ensures that senior leaders have a clear picture of what is happening in the department.
- The proportion of students studying a language at Key Stage 4 has been well below the national average. The subject leader has worked hard to encourage students to continue with a language. The significant increase in uptake next year is a good indicator of the success of the range of strategies and learning opportunities she has employed.
- The department works well together and there is a good level of consistency supported effectively by a helpful and practical departmental handbook. The section on the value of feedback is particularly well considered and supportive of practice. The department, under the reflective leadership of the subject leader, is open to new ideas and makes full use of professional development opportunities. Teachers reflect well on practice when they observe other colleagues as part of the school's peer-observation programme.
- The current improvement plan is succinct and has a limited and appropriate set of objectives for Key Stage 3. Those for other years focus

almost exclusively on examinations rather than the areas of teaching and learning which might need improving. The formal lesson observation form focuses well on students' learning but not as effectively on the learning and progress of groups.

- The provision for languages at Key Stage 3 is well considered and the school has concentrated well on ensuring that progression is secured as well as possible.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- exploiting all opportunities to use the target language
- continuing the good work done on skill development at Key Stage 3, ensuring that this continues into Years 10 and 11
- ensuring that target-setting is regular and focused on individual needs.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop languages 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 under the URN for your school. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Anne Looney  
Her Majesty's Inspector