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Mr P Mulholland  
Principal  
William Hulme's Grammar School  
Spring Bridge Road  
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Dear Mr Mulholland

### **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 22 and 23 June 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 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.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

#### **Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is good.

- Students are supported well to gain A levels and GCSEs in nine languages, including Persian, Urdu, Arabic and Dutch. Most A-level students are successful.
- In 2009, students gained broadly average results at GCSE. Results for German GCSE are good and are significantly above national averages. Spanish GCSE results are around the national average while those for French are significantly below. Students whose first language is not English performed very well at GCSE. The school is aware of the differences in performance and has put measures in place to improve Spanish and French. Early indications show these measures have had a positive impact.

- Students acquire good language skills overall and make good progress in lessons. Many show good pronunciation and a satisfactory understanding of grammar. Students enjoy speaking and embrace opportunities to use their languages as much as possible.
- Some students make good progress with their speaking and listening skills. They show a good understanding of how to process language to help them with their language production. They know a good range of vocabulary and can express ideas and opinions well. However, others rely too much on specific cues and are unable to respond to variations in the language they hear.
- Students have very good cultural awareness and understanding. This is promoted well through lessons as well as through other initiatives such as the 'teach a friend a language' (TAFAL) scheme, trips abroad, community involvement and the International Schools Award (ISA).

### **Quality of teaching in languages**

The quality of teaching in languages is satisfactory with good features

- Teaching is good in the sixth form. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the languages they teach and model them well. Students benefit from engaging work that stimulates and extends their interest in languages and culture. Their language skills are generally well developed. Overall, the target language is used well to promote understanding, though this could be extended to challenge students further.
- Teaching is satisfactory in the rest of the school. In the best lessons, there are some innovative and engaging exercises that students benefit from and enjoy. Activities are generally well paced to maintain interest and to consolidate learning. Students collaborate well to develop individual language skills. The target language is used for some purposes, but this is not consistent, and students have insufficient opportunities to hear their teachers speaking the target language or to respond in it themselves. Too many lessons end abruptly without summarising and testing learning, and some lessons are undermined by low-level disruption. Students report that they would appreciate more practical learning activities with less reliance on text books.
- Marking and feedback are satisfactory. Some feedback is useful and developmental, and students use it well to improve their performance. However, in some cases, feedback is insufficiently specific, and students do not fully understand what they have to do to improve.

### **Quality of the curriculum in languages**

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good

- The school has a good range of language-learning opportunities. Students benefit from having several progression paths, including the option of doing qualifications such as BTEC and Asset languages, where appropriate. Suitable time is devoted to ML in all key stages.

- Resources are good and support language learning well. The school's virtual learning environment (VLE) is well developed and has a wealth of listening resources that students use and appreciate. Some students extend their reading in the foreign language through the use of books, magazines, journals and online resources. The school makes particularly good use of human resources by accessing native speakers to help students with their oral skills.
- The school has plans to update schemes of work. Current schemes of work are based heavily on topics in the textbooks being used.
- Students can access extra help with their studies through additional classes after or during school hours. Students appreciate and benefit from trips abroad, though these have been infrequent in recent years. Students promote languages well to each other through the TAFAL scheme, covering such diverse languages as Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Finnish and Pashto. Links with the junior school on site enable students to use their language skills to teach younger learners.

### **Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages**

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

- The senior leadership team is highly supportive of languages. In discussion, it demonstrates an accurate view of the current effectiveness of modern languages, although this was graded over-generously in the school's self-evaluation document.
- Teamwork in languages is good, and teachers place satisfactory emphasis on the acquisition of language-learning techniques, the development of the four skills and autonomous learning.
- The school has good mechanisms to link language provision in its junior school. It also supports some local primary schools in their delivery of languages.
- Take-up in Key Stage 4 is above the requirement for language specialist colleges. Those students who choose not to continue with accredited languages have some language provision through other aspects of the curriculum, for example, through BTEC in travel and tourism.
- Although the languages team agrees on the importance of some aspects of teaching and learning and students have access to the digital language laboratory once a week, it does not have departmental policies for important aspects of work, such as the use of the target languages in lessons, the development of listening skills, reading, the quality of marking and feedback, and target-setting. Practice in these areas is variable, and is not subject to scrutiny under quality improvement measures.
- The use of ICT to improve language learning is satisfactory. Students have satisfactory access to computers and use the internet to extend their cultural and linguistic understanding. The school's VLE is resourced well and useful. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to present language points clearly.

- Target-setting as a motivational tool is underdeveloped, particularly with regard to the setting and monitoring of individual incremental targets. Longer-term targets are set, but it is difficult for students and their teachers to monitor their progress towards them effectively.

**Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:**

- tackling differences in outcomes between languages
- ensuring that all teachers and students use the target languages as much as possible to fully develop comprehension and production of language
- developing strategies and policies to ensure that improvements are implemented and good practice is fully shared
- developing target-setting, marking and feedback to ensure that they are motivating and drive forward improvement.

I hope that 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 funding body 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

**Jill Szutenberg**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**