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8 July 2010

Mrs M Diffley
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Diffley

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 29 and 30 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 nominated staff and two groups of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of six lessons. At the time of the inspection, Year 11 students had left the school.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is satisfactory

- Students' attainment is average overall. In Key Stage 4, it is above average. In 2009, the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C at GCSE level was above average in French and German, with results in the former being higher. The proportion gaining the highest grades was above average in French and average in German. However, students in Key Stage 3 attain below national expectations because of the limited time they study each language. Students who are entered for examinations in their home and heritage languages achieve very well.
- Students' progress is satisfactory. In Key Stage 4, it is good. Although progress in lessons observed was good overall, students in Key Stage 3

make satisfactory progress over time as a result of the limited time devoted to each language.

- Students' speaking skills are underdeveloped, partly due to limited opportunities to practise speaking. While pronunciation is satisfactory, many are unsure of some key phrases and lack confidence in speaking independently and in longer sentences. Students have a satisfactory understanding of grammar. They know key features of German, such as umlauts and the ezsett, but are less sure about French accents.
- Reading and listening skills are satisfactory. Students can read and understand instructions and short texts. They understand most verbal instructions in the target language. Writing skills are satisfactory. Students in Key Stage 3 can write short sentences and more able learners can write longer passages with conjunctions and tenses. In Key Stage 4, writing is developing well. However, students have few opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) to draft and edit writing.
- Students' intercultural understanding is good. They know the countries and areas of the world where French and German are spoken, have a good grasp of historical figures and events and know about foods, school-life and key industries, such as viticulture. Their understanding of the usefulness of ML is good. They know it enhances their prospects in many jobs and in careers, such as translating and international commerce.
- ML makes a satisfactory contribution to students' personal development. They enjoy learning a language. Behaviour in lessons was satisfactory.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good, as is their pronunciation. The target language is used extensively throughout lessons and students are given good opportunities to practise new words. However, students have fewer opportunities to practise speaking in sentences, or at length in creative activities, which would develop their ability to speak confidently and independently.
- Marking is good. Mistakes are corrected and students are given good guidance on how to improve. Homework reinforces classroom learning.
- Learning objectives are clear and linked carefully to a wide variety of activities to make learning interesting. However, plenary sessions are too short.
- ICT is well used by teachers to introduce topics and new vocabulary and to enable students to hear native speakers. However, students have few opportunities to use ICT in ML lessons regularly.
- Teaching of grammar is good. In a good French lesson in Year 7, the teacher carefully explained why 'j'aime' was written with an apostrophe and drew a good link with an English language construction to help students to understand. Language-learning strategies, such as cognates

and 'false friends', are used well to help students to remember the meaning of new words.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is satisfactory

- The time allocated to learning languages in Key Stage 4 is good. All students in Key Stage 3 study two languages. The time allocated for each language is limited and slows students' progress. The school has recognised this and plans are in place to enable students to study languages in greater depth. Students receive good guidance about studying French or German in Key Stage 4. Students can study both languages to GCSE level, but to date none has done so.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is good, and includes an annual exchange with a German school and visits to a German market. Visitors include speakers who explain the value of studying languages, native French speakers and a French theatre troupe. Some students have entered language competitions and the International Day of Languages is celebrated.
- There are supportive displays in and around classrooms. Students can subscribe to language magazines but few books or reading resources, that they can browse or read for pleasure, are available.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- You and the governing body are very supportive of languages and have supported small classes in Key Stage 4. Senior leaders have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department.
- The new subject leader provides good leadership. Self-evaluation is accurate. Weaknesses in provision in Key Stage 3 have been rapidly identified, and solutions carefully considered and agreed. Extra-curricular activities and additional lessons for students in Year 11 have been increased and some improvements have been made to the departmental website. Action plans are regularly evaluated and reviewed.
- Regular, thorough assessment procedures have been introduced which give a more accurate picture of students' performance and progress. Resources and the teaching space for ML have been increased. A survey of students has also been conducted.
- Schemes of work have been amended to identify opportunities for more teaching of intercultural understanding and new schemes have been drawn up for Key Stage 3.
- Links have been strengthened with local primary schools by including them in extra-curricular activities, such as the visit of a French footballer. The school has worked closely with another secondary school to enable some students to learn Chinese.

- The take-up of languages at Key Stage 4 in the current Year 10 is less than one in five students; the school has appropriate plans to increase this.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- developing students' skills and confidence in speaking
- enabling students to use ICT regularly to develop their skills in and knowledge of languages
- developing the use of plenary sessions.

I hope that 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

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector