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Dr A Minard  
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Dear Dr Minard

**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 25 and 26 January 2011 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 and an enrichment session.

The overall effectiveness of ML is inadequate.

**Achievement in languages**

Achievement in languages is inadequate.

- For the last three years, students have attained below the level expected nationally at the end of Key Stage 3 because they have had too little time to make the expected progress and the scheme of work has not been adapted to cover the full programme of study. No students have chosen to continue with languages in curriculum time in Key Stage 4 or the sixth form. Those who have taken the GCSE as an enrichment option beyond the school day have achieved in line with their predictions although numbers are too low to make valid comparisons with national data.
- Students have better reading skills than speaking and writing skills. They are able to make sense of texts which are reasonably complex and are able to use strategies such as using the context and looking for words that

are similar to English. They enjoy reading and are given some longer texts but do not often read independently.

- Students' spoken work is developed less well with some pronunciation being very anglicised. Students in Key Stage 3 participate willingly in role-plays and conversations but are not given many opportunities to write at length without support.
- Students are aware of how languages can be useful to them. However, only those who participate in the trips have a well-developed sense of what life is like in French speaking countries.
- Higher attaining students are not making as much progress as they could; they are unable to write extended paragraphs and their understanding of tenses is weak. Lower attaining students make satisfactory progress as they are given support and plenty of revision. Boys do not do as well as girls as they do not always have positive attitudes to language learning.

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

The quality of teaching in languages is satisfactory.

- In the lessons seen, teachers used resources well, the materials were clear and explanations, although mostly done in English, ensured that students understood the work.
- Students used the language for themselves, rather than for the tasks that teachers had set, for example to say they had finished or to ask for help on only a few instances.
- Teachers managed the behaviour of students well; students listened attentively and were expected to work hard to complete their work.
- Teachers planned to use a variety of games or activities such as recording their conversations using digital microphones which students enjoyed. Nevertheless, some students, especially boys, said that in a few lessons too much time was spent copying and not enough time was spent practising speaking.
- Computers are generally well used to help students improve areas such as their vocabulary but they have few opportunities to use authentic texts from the internet, books or magazines or to develop their reading skills still further.
- Some teachers are non-specialists and have had insufficient training to enable them to correct errors made by students, especially in pronunciation. Students also make errors when reading aloud as they are not aware of the difference between French and English sounds.
- Students receive accurate feedback on their written work, although they say that homework is not regularly set. From work done in class, students know what they need to do to improve but much of the written work is confined to answering questions or short passages. This means that higher attaining students are not always challenged as much as they should be in writing.

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

The quality of the curriculum in languages is inadequate.

- The curriculum is currently unsatisfactory because students have a very restricted time allowance for languages and the scheme of work has not been adapted so that they are able to cover the full programme of study. Students in Key Stage 3 have one hour a week and no student has chosen to study a language in Key Stage 4 for the past three years. Only a small number (between four and seven students over the past three years) has studied a language to GCSE level in enrichment time beyond the school day. No students have continued with languages in the sixth form recently.
- The scheme of work does not give enough weight to progression, building on work done at primary school and ensuring that the higher attaining students in particular are appropriately challenged with a range of tenses and content.
- The curriculum has been improved recently so that students in Year 11 have the opportunity to study for a GCSE in French this year. Planning for this has ensured that students have access to native speakers and about four hours of language work a week. Nevertheless, it is unlikely this intensive course will be sufficient for students to achieve the level necessary to gain higher grades at GCSE in such a short time.
- Well developed plans are in place to change the curriculum in subsequent years to ensure that all students in Key Stage 4 study a language and that the number of hours is increased for students in Key Stage 3.
- Students have opportunities to travel abroad on trips and visits, which they enjoy. The school has achieved the intermediate international schools' award.

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

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

- School leaders are well aware of the weaknesses in the curriculum and have planned carefully to resolve these. This plan forms part of a whole-school improvement plan which has already successfully tackled areas such as improving literacy and numeracy as a priority and is now focusing on languages.
- A vision for developing languages is led by the senior leadership team. Monitoring of teaching has given a clear picture of where improvements are needed but, as yet, plans to arrange further training of staff, especially of non-specialists in Key Stage 3 are underdeveloped.
- Speaking has been identified as an area that is in need of further work but the development plan at departmental level does not identify precisely how this aspect will be improved.

- Targets are set well for students and, using the whole-school systems, an accurate picture of how students are performing is used to inform planning.

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

- developing the curriculum so that students have more time to learn a language in Key Stage 3 and so that the majority of students in Key Stage 4 continues to learn at least one language
- developing the scheme of work to ensure progression, particularly to enable higher attaining students to develop their extended writing and all students to improve their spoken French
- ensuring that non-specialist teachers have access to training so that they can help with improving students' pronunciation.

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 published on the Ofsted website. It may be used to inform decisions about any future inspection. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

**Joanna Peach**  
**Additional Inspector**