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Mrs S Turner
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Turner

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students during my visit on 8 and 9 November to look at work in modern languages.

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 seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages is good.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- As measured by national examinations, standards in 2010 varied considerably between languages and have varied over the last three years. Attainment in German has been consistently above average and, in some years, high. French is broadly average and Spanish below in this period. Overall, the performance of students at the higher grades is variable. In 2009 when students could opt for a modern language, attainment in all three languages was above average. The norm now is that the proportion of students entered for GCSE is significantly higher than the national figure. The school's current detailed data analysis indicates that the

current Year 11 cohort is set to make stronger progress overall. The numbers post-16 are too small for a statistical analysis to be reliable.

- In lessons, students make good gains in learning. They show positive attitudes and, even when a language is not their favourite subject, try really hard. They value languages for their educational, business and social importance. They are less secure in their intercultural understanding, particularly at Key Stage 3, although all students value the input by foreign language assistants and visiting native speakers into their learning.
- Students value the variety that language lessons bring and they can analyse well which skills they find hardest and why. They evaluate their progress well and know exactly what they need to do to improve. In lessons students work productively in pairs and groups and can be relied on to act maturely when given the chance to work independently.
- Although they listen well and have good comprehension, the development of their listening skills is somewhat impeded by too much use of English in some lessons. Reading is not developed as much as the other skills in the classroom. Students generally speak confidently and even students in Year 7 can conduct short conversations. They can write from an early stage with a good level of accuracy and have a sound understanding of relevant grammar. The progress made by the students seen in Year 12 in Spanish is good, particularly in terms of their oral confidence.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic advocates for their subjects and have very good subject knowledge. The strong relationships fostered by the teachers have a positive effect on the quality of students' learning.
- Lessons are planned well and lesson objectives are precise and relate well to the skills to be developed. Lessons are structured logically, have a variety of activities and learning is reviewed well at the end. Teachers apply their expectations of behaviour and learning consistently. Occasionally, not enough time is spent practising new language before students are asked to produce it.
- Teachers make good use of a range of assessment strategies throughout the lessons. Marking is very thorough and provides good advice and targets for improvement.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well by teachers for presentation and practice; students' use is less consistent.
- There is some good differentiation to support the development of writing but teachers do not match the work to students' needs as well in listening and speaking tasks. Teaching assistants support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities well.

- Teachers present a good model of language to the students but the use of the target language is not maximised in every lesson with teachers explaining rather than modelling to students what they should do.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- There is considerable breadth with three languages being offered. The schemes of work provide a good level of guidance on what to teach and how to assess. There are clear links to the Key Stage 3 Framework. The planning for progression is clear. The extent to which schemes make it explicit how ICT might be used to support language learning varies from language to language.
- The innovative 'opening minds' pilot in Year 9 has fostered a greater level of cross-curricular work in the development of students' broader learning skills. The project work has also allowed students a greater insight into German, French and Spanish culture.
- The taught curriculum is enhanced very well by a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. Numerous visits abroad are supported well and are valued highly by students.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- There is very strong support for modern languages from the senior leaders and this leads to languages having a high profile in the school. The commitment to the study of languages has always been there but the acquisition of the school's second specialism in modern languages has strengthened the position of the subject.
- There is a clear vision for the development of languages as a subject, as a significant part of the school's promotion of its international status and as a key element in language provision within the wider community. The school is playing the lead role in developing the work of the proposed Gloucester Language Immersion Centre which will provide opportunities to learn languages that are taught less commonly.
- The school makes excellent use of partnerships, including local community and business links, to promote languages. The school is currently hosting a teacher from France under the Jules Verne scheme as part of a project to develop links between the two educational environments. The school has been actively engaged in partnership working under the auspices of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and has facilitated sixth form support for primary languages. There is also extensive use of technology to promote long distance communication for learning.
- The line management structure ensures that senior leaders have a clear picture of the strengths and areas for development of the faculty. The

self-evaluation and improvement planning at subject level is well informed by data analysis, has precise targets and well-planned intervention strategies. There are very good systems of monitoring students' progress at subject level. There is a good level of delegation at middle-leader level and subject leaders have specific and appropriate areas of accountability.

- The faculty makes very good use of its spacious accommodation and uses displays very well to support learning and celebrate achievement.
- The uptake of languages at Key Stage 4 is consistently high and exceeds the government's requirements.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- maximising the use of the target language to support the development of students' listening and speaking skills
- ensuring that listening and speaking activities are matched well to students' needs.

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

Anne Looney
Her Majesty's Inspector