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Mrs J Götschel
Headteacher
Lordswood Girls' School and The Sixth Form Centre, Harborne
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Dear Mrs Götschel

Ofsted 2011–12 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 13 and 14 June 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is outstanding.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is outstanding.

- Students attain standards which are well above average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. In 2010, 95% of students entered for French GCSE achieved grades A* to C, as did 91% of those entered for Spanish. Significantly more students than would be expected nationally have been entered for a language for the past three years. At Advanced Level in 2010, students performed in line with their predicted grades but numbers were very small. There are no students studying a language post-16 in the current cohort.
- Students have done variable amounts of language work at primary school and they all make excellent progress in both French and Spanish by the

end of Key Stage 4, especially lower and middle attaining students. They have particularly well-developed oral skills; they are confident and speak with good pronunciation although higher attainers are less confident in using the language more spontaneously. From an early stage students write at length. For example, in Year 8, they produce a web page of information about themselves much of which is accurate and includes some complex language and interesting ideas. Listening is well developed with lots of practice in class and, when reading, students readily work out meanings and deduce facts.

- Students have a well-developed sense of the similarities and differences between France, Spain and England but they are less clear about other French and Spanish speaking countries. They are very enthusiastic about learning languages, many choose to continue with them in Key Stage 4 and they know that languages are important for their future both socially and economically.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is outstanding.

- Teachers transmit an infectious enthusiasm for languages and relish using French or Spanish in class to explain tasks and make humorous asides. This means that relationships in class are outstanding with high expectations and a real sense of enjoyment from both staff and students. Teachers take every opportunity to find interesting and imaginative activities which motivate students. For example, students spoke animatedly about creating a film on Cinderella in order to use language they knew for household chores. Students listed many such activities which they had enjoyed in class, from 'beat the clock' games to producing presentations on aspects, such as French fashion, which they said made learning languages 'challenging but fun'.
- Teachers use a wide range of extremely well-chosen resources and activities, including technology in all its forms, to ensure that students make progress in all aspects of their language learning. Students rise to the challenges that they are given, for example two girls volunteered to perform a poem, one had put it to music and the other had dramatised it, doing so with great creativity and enjoyment. Nevertheless, the students would like even more opportunities to use authentic materials which are of interest to teenagers, and they would especially like to be able to read more magazines or books and watch films.
- The pace of lessons is extremely brisk and purposeful. In one of the outstanding lessons, students did not waste a minute when asked to get on with a task and they persevered, asking each other for help while trying to work out how to do the tasks and so made excellent progress.
- Teachers know their classes very well and support middle and lower attainers particularly well with clear instructions, timely interventions and modified tasks. Most tasks seen were challenging but, on a few occasions, higher attaining students could have been asked to work more quickly

from memory or use language more spontaneously to let the teacher know that they had finished or needed more work, for example.

- The department has been trialling different types of homework and, following feedback from students, has moved away from longer, research-based homework in favour of more effective, shorter tasks which help students to consolidate what they have learnt. Assessment is extremely good. Students are given very clear feedback in class so that they know how to improve their accuracy or pronunciation, for example, and they also have a very clear idea of how they are performing overall and what they are aiming to achieve over the next year.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is outstanding.

- All students in Key Stage 3 study Spanish and well over half study French as well from Year 8. The number taking two languages is increasing as the school believes that as many as possible should have this opportunity.
- Students appreciate the different opportunities that they are given to see how languages are used beyond the classroom. They meet native speakers as many of them take part in visits to France and Spain and they enjoy meeting visitors to their school, taking every opportunity to practise their language skills. They have visits from theatre groups who perform plays in the language and they visit local businesses; a particular highlight mentioned by the students was the trip to the local Spanish restaurant.
- Students who have another language are offered the opportunity to take a GCSE in this wherever possible and some students who are fluent are able to take the language early.
- The school works closely with other secondary schools locally and offers languages post-16 within a consortium. However, this year no students from this school are taking advantage of this. Work with feeder primary schools is not as well developed for languages, and information about what students have done at primary school is not available until students arrive, so planning to take account of this is under development.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is outstanding.

- The senior leaders and governors have a deep-rooted interest in and commitment to languages that are reflected in the high take-up in Key Stage 4. Despite languages being optional, a significantly larger percentage take a language than would be expected nationally and students achieve extremely well because they are taught very well and because the leadership at subject level is outstanding.
- There is a clear vision of how languages can continue to develop and the department is continually seeking ways to evaluate what it has done and to find ways to improve. There is a very consistent approach to teaching and a commitment to languages for all shared by all staff.

- Self-evaluation is very accurate and is based on rigorous monitoring of the quality of every aspect of provision. Students' views are sought and acted on, so for example the school has taken students' dissatisfaction with the current arrangements for coursework at GCSE very seriously and has implemented alternative approaches and a new syllabus.
- The school has used the attainment information it has from primary schools to design a general test of students' potential in language and to place them in sets. Performance is tracked very carefully and individuals who are at risk of underperforming are given support. Overall, trends are carefully analysed and used to improve the provision and take-up.
- The school acts as a hub for languages in the local secondary network, sharing ideas on how to increase uptake at all levels. Recently, it has increased the number offered a second language in Key Stage 3 and changed its qualifications to ensure that they meet students' needs and interests. At sixth form, this approach has been less successful but the school is actively seeking ways to address the problem.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- encouraging more students, especially the higher attainers, to work on a wider range of texts and to use language more spontaneously to talk about things of interest to them
- continuing to explore ways to build on work that students have done at primary school to accelerate progress in Key Stage 3.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML 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