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Mrs L Reed  
Headteacher  
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Dear Mrs Reed

### **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 2 and 3 November 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.

The overall effectiveness of ML is outstanding.

### **Achievement in ML**

Achievement in ML is good and improving.

- At the end of Key Stage 4, performance in French and German has been consistently above the national average. Data provided during the inspection demonstrate that students make at least good progress as they move through the school and the large majority meet or exceed the challenging targets set for them. In Key Stage 5, students speak highly of their language lessons and make good progress.
- Students show great commitment to and enthusiasm for the study of languages. They show curiosity and ask intelligent, perceptive questions of their teachers. Students can freely apply grammatical rules in new situations and enjoy playing with language, sometimes to create humorous and entertaining dialogues with their peers.

- Students exhibit good pronunciation and intonation because their teachers provide good models for them to imitate. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to practise speaking skills and therefore some students lack confidence, occasionally relying too much on written prompts. The use of the target language by students as the normal means of communication was underdeveloped in some lessons observed.
- Students listen well to their teachers and have opportunities to write at length, sometimes with considerable creativity and flair.

### **Quality of teaching in ML**

The quality of teaching in ML is outstanding.

- A concerted drive across the school to ensure high-quality teaching has had evident impact on the quality of the teaching of languages. All lessons observed were at least good, with the large majority being outstanding.
- All teachers are highly competent linguists and use their skills to good effect in the classroom, using the language being studied as the natural means of communication. Lessons are imaginative and well-constructed with a wide range of activities that engages students.
- Teachers use information and communication technology highly effectively to support learning. For example, in one outstanding German lesson observed, students watched advertisements from German television. They then used this information to discuss alcohol misuse. The lesson was intellectually challenging and also helped students to develop their awareness of how such issues have an impact on people throughout the world.
- The use of assessment to support learning is very well-developed. Lessons are designed with sufficient support and challenge to ensure that all students make good or better progress. Teachers plan activities that are carefully tailored to meet the needs of individuals. Students also benefit from highly skilled teaching assistants in the classroom. For example, in an outstanding Year 11 French lesson, the learning support assistant engaged several students in a dialogue about their recent work-experience entirely in French.

### **Quality of the curriculum in ML**

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The curriculum is broad and balanced and students can choose to study more than one language throughout the school. Ample time is allocated on the timetable. Students have also had the opportunity through enrichment classes to study other languages such as Mandarin.
- The school has produced resources for primary schools to support language learning and sixth-form students contributed to a local school's 'European Day'. Local businesses address assemblies to demonstrate to students the advantages of learning foreign languages for employability.

- The scheme of work is clear and ensures progression. However, it is over-reliant on textbooks and does not mirror the good practice observed in the classroom. Opportunities for assessment are highlighted but policies regarding the use of the target language by students and the promotion of reading are underdeveloped.
- Students have the opportunity to mix with their peers from other countries as the school organises many visits abroad and has also established email links with partner schools in France, Germany and further afield.

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

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is outstanding.

- Incisive and astute leadership of the school emanates from you as the headteacher. You have an able team of senior leaders who have provided appropriate support and challenge to the subject leader. A clear vision for the further development of this area of the curriculum is underpinned by a high level of understanding about language learning. As a result of your leadership, the proportion of students studying languages has increased year on year and the quality of teaching in the subject has also improved.
- At all levels there is discernible ambition to continue to improve outcomes for students. Subject leadership inspires confidence and there is a shared common purpose across the department. As a result, students enjoy their language lessons and are ambitious to achieve well in their studies.
- Thorough procedures are embedded to monitor the quality of provision and areas of underperformance are tackled swiftly and robustly. Development planning is sharp and clearly focused on improvement.

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

- ensuring that students have more opportunities to practise speaking skills and establishing the use of the foreign language as the routine means of communication by students in the classroom
- improving the scheme of work so that it reflects the good practice in the classroom and includes a policy to promote the use of the foreign language by students.

I hope that these observations are useful as you continue to develop ML in the school.

As 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.

Yours sincerely

**Joan Davis**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**