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Mr C Richardson
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Dear Mr Richardson

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages (ML)

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of your staff and students, during my visit on 24 and 25 January 2012 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 11 lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Students make good progress and achieve well at the end of Key Stage 4 in both French and German. For the past three years, results have been slightly above the national average in French and consistently above in German. In French, girls have made better progress than boys, but the gap is closing. In German, the progress of all students is good. The small number of students who have low prior attainment make less progress than would be expected, but the much larger numbers with high prior attainment make good progress. In the sixth form, small numbers make comparisons difficult, but students taking German achieve well and make good progress. In French, where numbers are generally larger, they achieve average standards and progress is satisfactory.

- In all key stages, students like learning languages and know that they are useful. They write well and are mostly accurate but their speaking is much less fluent and confident. Pronunciation is sometimes anglicised and is not always corrected by teachers. Students have a good understanding of the culture of France and Germany but have less understanding of the culture of other French and German speaking countries.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and share their enthusiasm for the language well with students, using it often in class for instructions and asides. Teachers are less consistent in requiring students to use the language for everyday requests and comments. As a result, students are more confident in writing than in speaking.
- Lessons are well planned with a variety of fast-paced activities which students enjoy, such as creating presentations using software. However, speaking activities are less well planned. Too often they happen at the end of a lesson and so are shortened if other activities overrun. Sometimes, opportunities are missed to allow students to work in pairs and groups. Students listen to a wide range of recorded material but opportunities to work with native speakers and say what they want to say are more limited, especially for sixth form students. Higher attaining students often have tasks that are challenging and interesting, such as being taught to give their opinion on marriage. In a few lessons, lower attaining students are given insufficient help and struggle to complete tasks.
- Students are developing good independence. They learn to look up things they do not know using their carefully designed booklets well as a reference source, as these contain both grammar and vocabulary. Students behave well and have positive, productive relationships with staff and other students. Marking of written work, especially in the sixth form, is detailed and helpful.
- Teachers have excellent procedures to measure students' performance and to track their progress in Key Stage 4. They use this exceptionally well to target individuals who need help and the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities has improved markedly this year. However, students in the sixth form who are frequently absent find it difficult to keep up despite the best efforts of their teachers and do not always make the progress they should. Assessment across Key Stage 3 is not as robust as in other key stages and teachers find it difficult to adapt lessons based on the information available.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- All students study either French or German or both on entry to the school in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, increasingly large numbers of students

choose to continue with a language, having been guided to do so by the school option system, although few students do two languages. Higher attaining students are given an accelerated course in two languages and make good progress in Year 9.

- The subject is well planned to ensure it meets the requirements of the examination. Imaginative activities which appeal to students are built in whenever possible, for example students use information and communication technology to design posters.
- Students are given opportunities to go to both France and Germany on school trips and these events are oversubscribed. After-school clubs and revision sessions are very well attended, helping many students to improve their work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- Leaders at all levels have a very accurate view of the strengths and weaknesses in the department. Through lesson observation and the use of data tracking, they have identified areas for improvement, such as the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Measures put in place have already had a positive impact. Parents and carers are kept well informed of students' progress and also of any difficulties students are experiencing. In the sixth form this has had a positive impact, as problems are identified early and tackled effectively.
- Staff work well as a team and are keen to develop further, with plenty of opportunities to attend training and also to learn from others within the school. Take-up at all key stages is good and liaison with feeder middle schools has improved.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' fluency and confidence in speaking French and German in all key stages by ensuring that opportunities to speak, including with native speakers, are more frequent
- ensuring that students' progress across Key Stage 3 is tracked accurately so that the curriculum can be adapted earlier in Year 9.

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

Joanna Peach
Additional Inspector