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Mr R Badley
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Badley

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 21 and 22 February 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is good.

- Students make good progress and a greater-than-average proportion gain a pass at grade C or above in GCSE examinations. Studying a language makes a strong contribution to their personal development.
- Students demonstrate a willingness to speak in French or German in oral exercises, because relationships in classrooms are good and they enjoy the activities provided, which engage them well. Pronunciation in some of the groups with lower levels of literacy is weaker because the students are over-reliant on written prompts. Students sometimes lack confidence in dealing with the unexpected in conversations and in using French or German for normal communication in the classroom.

- More able students use grammar well to enable them to express what they want to say in writing. Listening is not as strong as other skills.
- Students have a good awareness of the countries where the languages they are learning are spoken. In this sense, their study of ML contributes well to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They understand the economic advantages of learning other languages through links with local industry and the academic advantages through partnerships with higher education.
- Students in the sixth form make good progress and the current Year 13 students are demonstrating above-average attainment, although numbers are currently very small.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is good.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and committed to their teaching. They produce high-quality resources and undertake thorough lesson planning, with different levels of challenge for different groups in the class. As a result, students are engaged and make good progress.
- Inconsistent use of the language being studied, in order to manage classroom activities, limits students' ability to develop strategies to cope with unexpected elements and to improve their listening skills.
- The department has developed a good system of regular assessment to check progress over time. Leaders are using data gathered through this process to monitor the performance of different groups of students and instigate effective actions where there is underachievement.
- Assessment opportunities are planned for and built into lessons well. Marking is of variable quality and has insufficient focus on how to develop the individual language skills.
- No teaching was seen in the sixth form, but students described their lessons as very effective and their attainment is above average.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is good.

- The curriculum is well informed by current initiatives and has been adapted to take account of new frameworks and developments. Opportunities to study more than one language are limited at present. The time allocation for ML is good.
- Progression is secured through basing the scheme of work on a commercial course, adapted to the needs of the school and students. Students are supported to gain qualifications in languages in which they already have skills. The school provides access to a good range of qualifications to suit the needs of the students.
- The subject makes a good contribution to developing students' literacy.

- The department has taken good account of local primary provision and adapted the scheme of work appropriately. The department provides a good range of enrichment activities including opportunities for students to interact with native speakers.
- The curriculum in the sixth form meets students' needs well and sensible use of partnership working allows the provision to continue with small numbers. Where classes are taught by different teachers, the process is managed well.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is good.

- The subject leader has a very good level of understanding of current initiatives and receives strong support from you and the other senior leaders. The very strong team spirit in the department allows and encourages teachers to share good practice. Languages have a high profile in the school and are at the forefront of new initiatives from time to time.
- The system for monitoring and evaluating provision and practice is regular and it leads to accurate self-evaluation which in its turn leads to good development planning. It is focussed clearly on raising attainment and improving provision.
- Good arrangements are in place for transition from primary schools.
- Effective work undertaken has significantly increased uptake in Key Stage 4 and this year more students have applied to study languages in the sixth form.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- improving students' listening skills and their ability to deal with the unexpected in conversations by increasing teachers' use of the language being studied in lessons and raising expectations of its use by students
- improving consistency in marking and strengthening the impact of feedback by focussing on the development of individual language skills.

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. A copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector