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Mr S Curran
Headteacher
Tong High School
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Dear Mr Curran

Ofsted 2012–13 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 8 and 9 May 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 five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is satisfactory.

Achievement in ML

Achievement in ML is satisfactory.

- Students enter the school with prior attainment significantly below the national average. Owing to substantial turbulence in staffing and subject leadership, historically students have not made satisfactory progress and performance in examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 has been below average. However, strategies to resolve these difficulties are proving to be successful and students are now making much better progress than in the past. As a result, attainment is rising to be more closely aligned with that seen nationally.
- Students appreciate these discernible improvements and for the most part enjoy learning languages; as one student commented: 'It has grown on us!' Students can cite numerous examples of the benefits of language

study, ranging from travel to improving their educational and employment prospects.

- Reading, listening and writing skills are reasonably well developed, but students have few opportunities to use the language creatively. Grammar rules are, for the most part, understood and applied accurately.
- Students' pronunciation and intonation are good when they read aloud. They benefit from the excellent model of pronunciation provided by their teachers and the foreign language assistant. However, the use of the target language as the normal means of communication in the classroom is underdeveloped and therefore students lack confidence when speaking without written prompts.
- Students have a good appreciation of wider aspects of Spanish life. As one student commented: 'The study of languages can help to build relationships with a diverse range of people from other cultures'.

Quality of teaching in ML

The quality of teaching in ML is satisfactory.

- While teaching is satisfactory overall, there is some of outstanding practice. Teachers have good subject knowledge and communicate their enthusiasm for languages effectively. Teachers are conscientious and have high expectations.
- Lessons are productive and have a clear sense of purpose. In the best lessons, imaginative activities engage students and there is a high degree of intellectual challenge. However, this good practice is not always seen and sometimes lessons fail to engage all groups of students.
- Students' progress is assessed in all four skills. Marking is thorough and gives clear advice to students on how to improve their work.
- Lessons are not always pitched to suit the needs and abilities of all students and therefore activities are sometimes too difficult, and, in some instances, too easy. The school recognises that this is an area for development.

Quality of the curriculum in ML

The quality of the curriculum in ML is inadequate.

- Students have the opportunity to study for a range of qualifications in Spanish, but no opportunities exist at present to study more than one foreign language except for a small cohort of students at Key Stage 3 who study French. In addition, there is no provision for languages in the post-16 curriculum. The school intends to provide students with the option to continue with languages in the sixth form from 2013.
- Although there is an appropriate allocation of time to languages on the timetable for most students, the spread of lessons is not conducive to ensuring achievement in this subject. In addition, a minority of students in

Key Stage 3 have only one lesson each week in languages, and this has a detrimental impact on their progress.

- There is very little extra-curricular provision at present and opportunities have been missed to enrich students' lives through contact with young Spanish people through trips abroad or links with Spanish schools.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in ML

The effectiveness of leadership and management in ML is satisfactory.

- As headteacher, you demonstrate a passionate ambition to improve provision in this curriculum area. Since your appointment, you have been relentless in your drive to tackle underachievement in modern languages. The department benefits from your astute vision and improvements are discernible in both provision and outcomes.
- The department has benefited substantially as a result of recent clarification regarding roles and responsibilities and there is now a shared common purpose across the department.
- The school's procedures for monitoring and evaluating provision are extremely rigorous. Plans for improvement at senior level are detailed and represent a substantial investment on the part of the school. However, departmental planning, although aspirational, lacks precision.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- raising achievement by:
 - disseminating existing good practice in teaching so that all lessons are engaging and address the needs and abilities of all learners
 - establishing and embedding the use of the target language as the routine means of communication in the classroom
 - addressing inadequacies in the curriculum.

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

Joan Davis
Her Majesty's Inspector