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Mrs Garside
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Garside

Ofsted 2009-10 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 10 and 11 March 2010 to look at work in ML.

As outlined in my initial letter, as well as looking at key areas of the subject, the visit had a particular focus on take-up in Key Stage 4 and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve language learning.

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.

The evidence used to inform the judgements included interviews with staff and students, scrutiny of relevant documentation, analysis of students' work and observation of seven lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average in French and German.
- In examinations, A* to C and A* to G grades are well above national averages. However, the proportion of candidates attaining the highest grades at GCSE is smaller than average. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.
- Students make particularly good progress in reading and writing; they are able to read for understanding and detail, identify patterns and apply them

in their own writing. They pay attention to accuracy, have a good understanding of grammar in both French and German and use a very good range of structures and vocabulary.

- Students speak confidently; they respond promptly and competently to questioning in lessons. Pronunciation and intonation are good. Listening skills are developed less well. Some students have difficulty identifying detail from extracts of speech and need considerable support in doing so.
- Students who have previously studied French at primary school make good progress in Year 7.
- Students say they enjoy learning languages. They say that they have excellent relationships with their teachers and do not want to let them down.
- They know how they are getting on and how to improve their work. Most of the students interviewed said that they want to continue with at least one language in Key Stage 4. Several students in Key Stage 4 expressed an interest in continuing with a language post-16.
- Students have a very good understanding of the importance of learning a language and a good understanding of cultural aspects of the languages they study.
- In lessons, students' behaviour is exemplary; they listen attentively and concentrate on tasks set. In most lessons, they are keen to participate in whole-class oral work.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Students build effectively on previous learning as a result of good planning and well-sequenced activities.
- New language is presented very clearly so that students identify and apply patterns with ease. They learn from each other when they are given the opportunity to complete tasks in pairs and small groups and then share their ideas with a wider audience.
- Activities are very well planned and sequenced to ensure good progress in speaking, reading and writing. As a result, students have a very good understanding of grammar, use a good range of structures and vocabulary in both languages and are able to transfer these from one context to another with ease.
- Opportunities to develop listening and responding skills are less frequent and less effective. Activities are often teacher-led, which decreases opportunities for students to use the language themselves.
- The target languages are not always used systematically in lessons so that students do not always benefit fully from excellent role-models.
- When students have the opportunity to practise informally in pairs, they increase their confidence in speaking. However, sometimes these

opportunities are missed or are restricted to rehearsal rather than for real purposes.

- Assessment is used effectively to check understanding and monitor progress. Teachers reshape lessons where necessary to improve learning. Students are fully involved in the process of evaluating their own and each other's work. As a result, they are very much aware of how they are progressing and how to improve their work. Although this is not always evident in day-to-day marking, the quality of feedback is good.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- The curriculum is organised and planned well to ensure progression from Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 4. Languages teachers are fully involved in teaching French and German at the feeder primary schools. Students have a broad range of experiences, which contribute well to their achievement and their personal development and lead to GCSE or OCR accreditation.
- They are able to take either or both languages to GCSE and the take-up is satisfactory overall at Key Stage 4.
- The curriculum is enhanced by a range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities such as The Languages Week. Activities organised through links with local universities and Routes into Languages workshops, which are open to all, further enrich students' experience. Students also value the extra help after school and at break times as well as annual trips abroad.
- Although ICT is used effectively by teachers in lessons, its use by students to consolidate or extend their learning through independent work is underdeveloped.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

The effectiveness of the leadership and management in languages is good.

- Subject leaders have an accurate picture of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject and teachers work together extremely well to plan and share good practice. This ensures a high level of consistency within the department.
- Good monitoring systems identify underachievement and support is provided where necessary to raise standards and improve achievement. Leaders regularly report to the senior leaders and governors.
- Schemes of work and improvement planning are regularly updated and adjusted in the light of regular checks on students' progress.

Take-up in Key Stage 4

Just over one third of students opt to continue with a language in Year 10. This is below the first benchmark set by the Secretary of State. Very few students opt to continue with two languages.

The use of ICT to improve language learning

This is satisfactory.

- ICT is used well by teachers to monitor students' progress and to complete administrative tasks.
- They use the interactive whiteboards effectively in lessons to present new language clearly and to engage students' interest through a variety of activities. Students are keen to participate in these activities and increase in confidence and competence in using the languages as a result.
- However, opportunities for students to use ICT independently or to work at their own pace are limited.
- They are able to access programs at home or in the library but opportunities in lessons are rare.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing opportunities for students to improve their skills in listening and responding through more systematic use of the target languages in lessons
- raising standards further in speaking and listening by increasing opportunities for students to use the languages themselves both for rehearsal and for real purposes
- increasing opportunities for students to work independently, using ICT, to consolidate and extend their learning in languages.

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

As I explained previously, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on the Ofsted website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

Judith Tolley
Additional Inspector