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Mr Colin Burnett
Headteacher
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Dear Mr Burnett

Ofsted 2010–11 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and that of the staff and students, during my visit on 15 and 16 November 2010 to look at work in modern languages.

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 nominated staff and two groups of students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of five lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- Students attain standards at Key Stage 3 that are usually above national expectations. However, results in Spanish are higher than in French. More able pupils achieve very well, as they attain good results as a result of early entry in Year 9 to GCSE exams. Results at Key Stage 4 are average in French but are well above the national average in Spanish, where the most able students attain particularly well.
- Students make good progress in lessons. They enjoy learning languages. Behaviour is good in lessons and students work well independently and collaboratively when required to do so. Students' listening, reading and

writing skills are developing well through good opportunities in lessons to listen to native speakers and to write at length. Speaking skills are less well developed and older students lack the confidence in using creatively the language they are learning.

- Students have a good awareness of the usefulness of languages. They appreciate that they can be beneficial in a range of careers, including those in business and commerce, and that they widen opportunities for study at university. Students' intercultural understanding is not as well developed as it could be, particularly in Key Stage 4.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is good.

- Teachers' pronunciation and subject knowledge are good. Key grammatical terms are used effectively. The target language is generally used well in lessons. However, opportunities to promote speaking in the target language by students are not always fully exploited.
- Expectations of behaviour are high and planning is detailed. Learning objectives are shared routinely with students and teachers use a good range of activities in lessons. While most activities were matched well to the needs of students, some were pitched too high and slowed learning.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to capture students' interest and provide opportunities for them to hear native speakers. Building work has limited students' access to ICT facilities.
- Assessment in lessons is a strong feature of teaching. Teachers frequently use a range of good strategies to check students' understanding. Effective questioning is used to check and extend understanding. Students' written work is mostly well marked. Mistakes are corrected, grammar points are emphasised and there is a good overall level of guidance on what students should do next to improve their work.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good.

- Students' preferences as to which language they study are taken into account on entry to the school. The time allocated for the study of languages is good. Additional time and revision classes are provided for those studying for GCSE qualifications. Teachers routinely provide extra time after school for students who have fallen behind in their learning. The learning environment for languages contains attractive and colourful displays of key vocabulary, exemplary work by students and guidance on how to reach higher grades. A good level of homework is set. Students also have access to foreign language magazines and books which they can read for pleasure and to improve their reading skills.
- The needs of more able students are met through an 'accelerated' course which enables them to take GCSE qualifications at the end of Key Stage 3.

Following this, they can study for a qualification at AS level or learn another language 'ab initio' to GCSE level. There are opportunities for all students to study two languages in Key Stage 4, but few chose to do so.

- The curriculum is enriched by annual trips to France or Spain and specific celebrations, such as Bastille Day and the European Day of Languages. There is a well attended Urdu class after school that prepares students for qualifications in that language. More able learners in one year group attend an annual 'languages' day at a local sixth form college which focuses on different aspects of language learning.
- Teachers promote the school's specialism well during 'enterprise weeks' and this contributes well to students' good understanding of the economic benefits of languages.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- The subject leader leads the department well with the good support of the school's senior leadership team. New study paths have been introduced to provide greater challenge for more able learners and staffing increased appropriately. There is a good range of departmental policies and these and schemes of work are updated regularly.
- Assessment systems have been extensively improved. For example, new assessment folders in Key Stage 3 give students a clear understanding of their targets and the level they are currently working at. There are good systems for tracking the students' progress. Data are scrutinised carefully to inform accurate evaluations of the department's effectiveness and detailed action plans. Training is targeted at improving weaknesses in provision and this has led to some improvements in results in French. Arrangements for the monitoring of teaching and learning are in place, although there is scope to make these more robust so that any inconsistencies in teaching and learning can be rapidly identified and tackled.
- Outstanding links have been forged with a local sixth form college. These include enabling students who have studied an AS course to continue seamlessly studying a language to A2 level and the delivery by staff of both institutions of an enrichment day to Year 7 pupils. Links with primary schools are satisfactory.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- providing students with more opportunities to practise speaking to increase their confidence and creativity in using languages
- developing procedures for the monitoring teaching and learning.

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

As I 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. Except in the case of academies, a copy of this letter is also being sent to your local authority.

Yours sincerely

Michael McIlroy
Her Majesty's Inspector