

Aviation House
125 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

T 0300 123 1231
F 020 7421 6855
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Mr R Vasey
Headteacher
Ashfield Comprehensive School – specialist language college
Sutton Road
Kirkby-in-Ashfield
Nottinghamshire
NG17 8HP

Dear Mr Vasey

Ofsted 2010–11 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 21 and 22 September 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 staff and students; scrutiny of relevant documentation; analysis of students' work; and observation of nine lessons.

The overall effectiveness of ML is good.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is good.

- Standards are rising and are above average overall. This is particularly evident in Key Stage 3 where the impact of collaborative work with the primary schools is raising standards.
- Across Years 7 to 11, students make good progress, including those eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. A lower than average proportion attains the highest grades. The small numbers in the sixth form also make good progress.

- Students enjoy learning languages. This is clear from the large numbers who choose to study one, or in a small number of cases two languages in Key Stage 4.
- Students are able to work independently when given the opportunity. In some of the imaginative aspects of the curriculum, such as the 'Linguavision' song contest, they show the ability to be highly creative.
- Students are very aware of the value of language learning not just for pleasure and employment prospects, but also as a means of raising aspirations.
- Their writing is largely accurate and more able students are developing well the ability to write at length as they move up the school.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is consistently good or better.

- All teachers demonstrate high levels of commitment, have good subject knowledge and use the language being studied to communicate routinely in lessons. They have insufficiently high expectations of students using the language in their spoken interactions with them and each other.
- They have high expectations of behaviour in lessons, which is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form.
- All four skills are developed well during lessons. Students are happy to read aloud and participate in class discussions, in pair and in group work.
- Assessment is used well to establish baselines from which to evaluate progress and to place students on the best courses and in the best groupings. The moderation processes are very secure.
- Teachers make learning objectives clear to students. Peer- and self-assessment are frequent features in lessons and make a positive contribution to the progress students make.
- Teachers do not always ensure that the level of challenge for the most able is sufficiently high.
- Teaching in the sixth form is stimulating and involves challenging and interesting tasks. Even in beginners' classes, the intellectual challenge injected compensates for the comparatively simple language levels.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is good with outstanding elements.

- The range of languages on offer is good in all three key stages with a number of different languages offered at different levels and leading to different types of accreditation.
- A major strength is in the extensive range of opportunities to interact with native speakers and experience the cultures of the countries where the languages are spoken.

- A number of innovative cross-curricular projects make an outstanding contribution to the students' personal development.
- Schemes of work have been carefully adjusted to ensure the school builds upon the work done in primary schools and the school ensures those who have not studied French are not disadvantaged.
- Students currently have limited access to computers, but confirmed that technology is used productively, especially for homework or research.
- Good links with local businesses and work experience abroad in the sixth form increase the development of workplace skills and an understanding of the world of work.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- All teachers share the vision for the development of the department which is enthusiastically articulated by the subject leader.
- Self-evaluation is accurate and based on thorough monitoring systems.
- Specialist languages status enhances both provision and outcomes and is led with passion.
- You and the other senior leaders are committed to language learning and support the department well.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing the percentage of high grades by providing more activities that challenge the most able students
- developing strategies to enable students to use the target language in their interactions with each other.

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

Elaine Taylor
Her Majesty's Inspector