

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 J Rogers
Headteacher
Eston Park School
Burns Road
Eston
Middlesbrough
TS6 9AW

Dear Mr Rogers

Ofsted 2011–12 subject survey inspection programme: modern languages

Thank you for your hospitality and cooperation, and the assistance of the staff and students, during my visit on 27 and 28 June 2011 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 six lessons.

The overall effectiveness of modern languages is inadequate.

Achievement in languages

Achievement in languages is inadequate.

- GCSE results were once broadly in line with the national average but, since the introduction of an early-entry policy, have deteriorated markedly and are now below average. Because of the policy, many students do not achieve their potential in the subject.
- By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is below average. Students' progress varies according to the language that they learn and the teaching group they are in.
- Although students' pronunciation is satisfactory, it is often adversely affected by their reliance on written support. Their knowledge of phonics

is stronger in Spanish than in French. They lack confidence orally and need a lot of help to produce some basic sentences.

- Writing in French by the most able students is satisfactory. They produce extended text from an early stage. By the end of Key Stage 3, they can write simple paragraphs about themselves, mostly in the first person, sometimes applying knowledge of some basic grammatical structures.
- Students who have chosen the subject in Key Stage 4 understand the importance of learning languages and are aware of a range of benefits.

Quality of teaching in languages

The quality of teaching in languages is inadequate.

- Teachers have good knowledge of the language that they teach, are well prepared for their lessons, and, on the whole, have good relationships with the students. In some lessons, the teacher tries to use the foreign language for giving instructions but this is not consistent.
- Teaching lacks enthusiasm and excitement. Staff use a limited repertoire of strategies. Some activities are too easy. Often they are repetitive, based on single words, and lack a clear purpose. They do not enable the students to use the language creatively. Consequently, students' interest is not engaged. In some lessons, their boredom results in misbehaviour.
- Teachers do not use assessment well to accelerate students' progress or to motivate them to achieve ambitious targets. Many students are uncertain of their current level of performance or what they are aiming for.
- Marking is inconsistent. Sometimes the teacher makes effective use of praise for good work with advice on how to improve its quality, but this is rare. In class, the teacher does not monitor how well students are doing their work.

Quality of the curriculum in languages

The quality of the curriculum in languages is inadequate.

- The school has recognised that its early-entry policy has resulted in low achievement at GCSE and falling numbers in Key Stage 4.
- The course book's scheme of work is not tailored to reflect the school's context. It gives little guidance on teaching strategies or how work can be differentiated. The department has not made the content more imaginative, interesting or relevant to its students.
- The school offers no opportunity for students to learn a second modern language.
- The department makes limited use of information and communication technology (ICT) to develop students' skills and interest in the subject.

- The department is supporting partner primary schools in teaching a modern language but this has not yet affected grouping arrangements, target-setting, content or teaching styles in Year 7.
- The department provides a modest range of extra-curricular activities. It has not organised a study visit to France for some time, but plans to do so shortly.

Effectiveness of leadership and management in languages

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

- Self-evaluation is weak. It is overgenerous and fails to identify some obvious weaknesses. Leaders have not produced a clear and accurate analysis of GCSE results or performance data in Key Stage 3.
- Improvement plans are not based on the main priorities for the department. The current plan pays too little attention to teaching or to students' achievement. It has not achieved some of its key aims.
- Inconsistencies in departmental practice have not been tackled.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, include:

- increasing students' motivation at Key Stage 3 by:
 - ensuring that teaching is more exciting
 - helping teachers to use a wider range of strategies
 - making activities more purposeful
 - making better use of assessment
- improving the curriculum by:
 - ensuring that all students get enough time for learning the language to reach their potential
 - making the content more interesting and relevant
 - developing the use of ICT
- planning better for improvements by:
 - ensuring that self-evaluation is more analytical and honest
 - making certain that improvement plans focus on teaching and students' achievement.

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 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

Derek Neil
Additional Inspector