

The MFL Curriculum

At the Thomas Hardy School we believe that all students should have the opportunity to study a modern foreign language and that for most the study of a language to GCSE level should be expected. For our highest attaining linguists, we believe that an A Level language is an outstanding qualification which has the potential to make them stand out from their peers when moving to the next phase of education or training. Being able to speak another language is a real asset in the world of work and we ensure that all students have the opportunity to consider careers involving languages. We believe that above and beyond the practical skill of being able to communicate in a language other than our own, the study of languages broadens horizons and encourages tolerance of and respect for other cultures and nations. We believe that through languages teaching we can open students' minds to ways of living which may be different to their own and encourage them to appreciate and celebrate these differences.

Key Stage 3

A modern foreign language is a compulsory part of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 and at THS virtually all students study either French or Spanish in year 9. Around 12% of the cohort, high attaining linguists as determined by our feeder schools, have the opportunity to learn both in year 9 (one from beginner level). The curriculum is organised in conjunction with our three feeder middle schools to ensure progression in the learning of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary over the years 7 to 9.

We use the Pearson Studio/Viva resources to promote consistency and facilitate planning across the main middle schools. Teaching is organised in topics, allowing regular recycling of key grammatical structures in different contexts and enabling students to communicate about things relevant to them but also to learn about the culture and society of French and Spanish-speaking countries, for example by looking at festivals and traditions. Authentic resources such as songs, poems or extracts from stories are frequently used. Regular assessment in listening, speaking, reading and writing is carried out to monitor progress and set targets for development, in reference to a set of language learning Steps. In addition, assessment styles begin to prepare students for the types of task encountered in the GCSE examination.

Key Stage 4

The fact that MFL is essentially a core subject for the majority at THS underlines the importance we ascribe to the learning of a modern foreign language. With less diversity than some more urban settings, we believe that language learning at GCSE level helps to develop more outward facing young people and that a MFL forms an important part of the broad, balanced and aspirational curriculum which we offer. A few students continue their study of both French and Spanish from year 9.

As at KS3, the KS4 curriculum is taught in topics, building on prior learning and revisiting and developing the non-negotiable grammatical structures at the same time as introducing new content. Topics, although determined by exam specifications, allow students to learn about the culture of the target language country and social and global issues as well as the more student focused themes, such as talking about daily life. Regular assessment using exam style tasks ensures that we monitor progress and can intervene to consolidate when necessary. Mock exams using GCSE papers take place at the end of year 10 and at Christmas in year 11 in common with all subjects and help to provide drive and focus and a sense of progression.

Key Stage 5

We are proud to teach both French and Spanish to A Level and although relatively small, our cohorts in the sixth form develop an exceptional degree of independence and expertise in the target language. A few students study both languages to A Level, and a good number take their study of languages further. Teaching continues to be topic based, with themes again determined by exam specifications, but authentic resources are used throughout, allowing students to really explore French and Spanish-speaking culture. There is real expertise in the department in teaching to advanced level and the focus is on developing students who can use the grammar of the language accurately and communicate confidently on a wide range of real-world issues and who are amply equipped for further study.

Enrichment

Teachers offer lunchtime and after school clubs to students in years 9-13 to help them improve, prepare for exams or simply to enjoy languages outside of a classroom setting.

Students have the opportunity to learn Japanese in twice-weekly after school clubs, as well as the possibility to participate in virtual exchanges with students from our partner school in Japan. A trip to Japan is being planned for the next academic year.

The department runs exchanges to France and Spain in the lower school and the sixth form, giving students the opportunity to experience life in the target language country for real. Unfortunately, these trips haven't run since 2019 and their future is uncertain in a Covid era. The aspiration is to restart them as soon as possible.

We organise talks from former students and members of the community to inspire students in years 11-13 to pursue their study of languages and seek careers using languages.

Finally, 6th formers volunteer in lower school lessons to support teachers in developing speaking skills with their classes.

All of this reflects our belief that languages should be for all and that the study of a modern foreign language should be a way in to an appreciation of cultures other than our own.