

Modern Languages: Middle School Booklet

All pupils will have experience of up to three modern languages (French, German and Spanish) by the end of Year Nine. The underlying principle of your GCSE language option is that of choice. Having tasted a variety of contrasting languages, you are now free to choose the one in which you feel most at ease. There may be compelling reasons for you to feel drawn to a particular language or country; when making your choice it is important to bear the following point in mind: you should not choose a particular language because it seems easier in Year Nine. All GCSE languages are examined at the same level and you will end up doing work of equal difficulty for French, Spanish and German.

As you will be aware, the GCSE courses are changing from September 2009. At the time of writing, no final decision has been reached as to the particular exam board we will be following. Although it is, therefore, impossible to be too specific at this stage, the fundamental elements of the course remain unchanged. At the heart of each language the four examined skills are those of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Each of the four carries an equal weighting.

The major change from 2009 for the main examination boards is to the speaking and writing assessment. This will now take the form of controlled teacher assessment throughout the course. The actual content of the speaking assessments will be less reliant on pre-learnt chunks of text; instead, you will be expected to think on your feet as part of a more spontaneous discussion. However, the Department is also considering the merits of the increasingly popular IGCSE exam. Currently we are attending courses on both types of examination and a final decision will be reached at the start of the summer term.

The precise content of the courses will have no bearing on which language (or languages – many boys opt for two GCSE languages) you choose. This is a summary of the three taught GCSE languages:

French

You have studied French at least since Year Seven and perhaps before. You have possibly spent time on the Exchange visit to Laval. Over the next two years, you will begin to express yourself with increased fluency and creativity. In the GCSE year, there will be a weekend cultural trip to Paris. French remains the second most taught foreign language worldwide.

German

Some people are suited to German because of its phonetic spelling. During the GCSE course, you have the option of taking part in the Year Ten Exchange to Minden and we run an annual cultural trip to Berlin in Year Eleven. Germany is the fourth largest economy in the world (and the largest in Europe).

Spanish

Spanish is, like French, a romance language, which means that they are both direct descendants of Latin. Therefore the early stages of Spanish will come more easily to you after some years of studying French. Of course the GCSE course necessarily moves at a quick pace. Spanish is spoken widely across the globe, especially in the USA and in South America. There will be a study trip during the course either to Barcelona or Salamanca, when pupils stay in families and receive intensive tuition in the language.

Further details of the three main Departments can be found on their individual pages on the school website (www.eltham-college.org.uk)

There is also the option to take **Russian** to GCSE, but only as a second language in addition to French, German or Spanish. This is a stimulating, but demanding option and is recommended only for strong, confident linguists. Russian is a member of the Slavonic group of languages and, once its alphabet has been mastered, basic expression is not excessively complex. Its grammatical structure is not dissimilar to German and it is also completely phonetic. Talented British Russian speakers are few and far between, making this an attractive option if you are looking for something different.

The most important thing you will gain from whichever language you choose is the confidence to communicate. Grammar has its part to play in all modern languages, but at best you will learn about the country, the people who live there and how their daily lives compare to our own. You will spend a brief amount of time abroad and acquire the beginnings of a wanderlust that will hopefully stay with you in later life.

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