

Supporting Foreign Languages in your School: a guide for governors in primary schools

This paper has been produced in association with the British Council and the National Governance Association (NGA) and is designed to assist governing boards and trustees support language learning in their schools.

Why is language learning so important for primary children?

- 1 Young children are very enthusiastic and love learning foreign languages. They find it fun and they enjoy discovering new worlds and new ways of saying things
- 2 **Learning a foreign language in primary schools** enables pupils to see the central role languages play in a school curriculum offering the potential to awaken a lifelong interest in foreign languages
- 3 A positive experience in primary will establish a motivation to learn more at **secondary**.
- 4 Learning a new language and culture helps stimulate a child's curiosity and makes them open-minded and tolerant of diversity.
- 5 Learning a second language helps boost children's cognitive development which helps their overall **academic progress**.
- 6 Children who learn a second language **display more empathy** towards others and are more receptive to other cultures and experiences.
- 7 Research shows that language learning at school boosts overall literacy, a major predictor of children's attainment in science and maths. We know too that the ability to switch between languages develops cognitive flexibility and improves **multitasking and creativity**.
- 8 Through learning about different languages and cultures, children are encouraged to celebrate the cultural and linguistic diversity of a school's community and be open and interested in new languages and cultures later on.

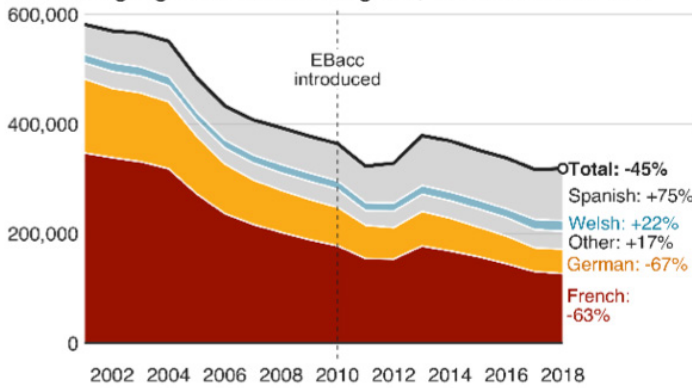
Why we need to build keen, fearless and curious language learners in primary schools ready to embrace languages in secondary schools

- 1 Children learning and enjoying languages in primary schools will be the linguists of the future. We need to create world citizens who have the confidence to 'have a go' at communicating in whatever language future encounters require.
- 2 The British Academy has **set out evidence** showing how the UK's lack of language skills has resulted in the loss of economic, social, cultural and research opportunities. For example, the economic cost in terms of lost trade and investment has been estimated at 3.5% of GDP (around £48 billion a year).
- 3 The All Parliamentary Group for Languages, in recognising the need for linguists of the future, has set out a vision "to meet the UK's goals in government, business and civil society by building a country where language skills are valued; where speaking more than one language is the norm; and where languages education and training are world class, equipping the current and next generations with the right language skills for the future." <https://nationalrecoverylanguages.weebly.com/>

- 4 Over the last 18 years, languages at both GCSE and A level have been declining rapidly. In February 2019, the **BBC published findings** which showed the decline in learning foreign languages at school over this period in the UK.

GCSE languages dropping

GCSE language exams sat in England, Wales and N Ireland



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications

BBC

The number of students studying modern languages at undergraduate level has fallen by 54% since 2007–08 and many MFL university departments are closing.

Revised Ofsted Education Inspection Framework 2019

Ofsted's **new framework** focuses far more on the wider primary curriculum. Inspectors will want to see how the school's curriculum can impact positively on pupils, communities, and the needs of its pupils. In terms of languages, inspectors will be asking what is driving the curriculum plan for languages and what is its ambition? Why are teachers teaching that, why then and what is the result? Is there a coherent, well-structured model which offers a progressive language learning experience for all pupils?

Challenges for primary language teachers and teams

Staffing: there are currently fewer specialist foreign language teachers in primary schools (**Language Trends 2019**) and many teachers completed their GCSEs at a time when modern foreign languages were not compulsory.

Funding issues: foreign language budgets in schools are likely to be limited and do not stretch to expensive resources, with teachers often expected to fund free resources. For example, children should be hearing examples of children's voices in a new language so quality sound-based resources are essential (see ASCL's **Discovering Language** resources).

Transition: the varied approach offering different languages at primaries means it is difficult to build effectively on prior learning in Year 7.

Recruitment: the combination of fewer language graduates along with the government's successive missed targets for foreign language teacher recruitment means it is difficult to recruit specialist teachers for secondary. This has a knock-on effect on providing specialist support for primaries.

Time allocation: allocated time for languages is often taken for other school priorities (**Language Trends 2019**).

Preparation time: this is sometimes difficult to allocate in primaries due to other pressures.

Support your primary foreign language teachers

Language teaching is demanding and challenging in both presentation and preparation time.

Key questions to consider

- 1 Is there a primary languages policy or scheme of work?
- 2 What informs the curriculum planning for languages?
- 3 Is there a set time allocated for languages each week in Key Stage 2? Do the children always receive it?
- 4 What does the school do to boost staff expertise and confidence?
- 5 Are there any cross-curricular links with languages?
- 6 Do teachers have any access to language specific professional development?
- 7 Are the 'community', 'home', or 'heritage' languages being celebrated in school? In what way is the school celebrating the linguistic footprint of the school community?
- 8 Is there parental support from parents and governing boards and trustees for languages?
- 9 Are there any Language 'Celebration Days' (eg the European Day of Languages in September each year)?
- 10 Are there any international projects happening in the school?
- 11 What is the transition like between secondary and primary? Is there the opportunity for colleagues to co-create the Year 6/7 curriculum plan together to ensure a seamless transition?
- 12 Does the school have mixed-age issues as these need careful consideration in regards to languages?
- 13 Is primary languages referenced on the school's website?

Possible ways of helping your language teachers and teams

- Support continuous professional development for foreign language teachers through subject communities and primary foreign language networks, eg the Association of Language Learning.
- Develop promotional information about foreign languages for parents at Intake evenings/presentations.
- Encourage governing boards and trustees and parents with language skills to act as role models for language learning.
- Nominate an interested governor for support with primary languages.
- Encourage celebration of the school's languages at assemblies and parental gatherings to enlist parental support for languages from the outset.
- Develop relationships and encourage collaboration with secondary schools to support effective transition in languages.
- Promote the importance of foreign languages, for example, support for international experience, visits and trips.

Further Information

ASCL's Key Stage 2 Discovery Language resources offer an adaptable, well-sequenced model which can be delivered by non-specialists

<https://www.ascl.org.uk/Help-and-Advice/Primary-education/Discovering-Language>

Revised Ofsted framework

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/education-inspection-framework-2019-inspecting-the-substance-of-education>

Association for Language Learning <https://www.all-languages.org.uk/>

British Council <https://www.britishcouncil.org/>

French Institute <https://www.institut-francais.org.uk/french-courses/>

Goethe Institute <https://www.goethe.de/en/index.html>

Primary MFL Facebook Page

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