



Twelve questions you may want to ask



piecebypiece

languages in primary schools

Throughout the country there has been great interest in the idea of primary languages. Many schools already have a great deal of experience, while others have been taking their first steps towards this broadening and deepening of the curriculum.

For those of you at an early stage in your thinking and planning, we have gathered together some of the most frequently asked questions and given some composite answers based on the collective wisdom of your colleagues!

1 What is languages entitlement?

There is a working definition of 'entitlement' in the National Languages Strategy document:

'Every child should have the opportunity throughout Key Stage 2 to study a foreign language and develop their interest in the culture of other nations. They should have access to high quality teaching and learning opportunities, making use of native speakers and elearning. By age 11 they should have the opportunity to reach a recognised level of competence on the Common European Framework and for that achievement to be recognised through a national scheme. The Key Stage 2 language learning programme must be delivered at least in part in class time.'

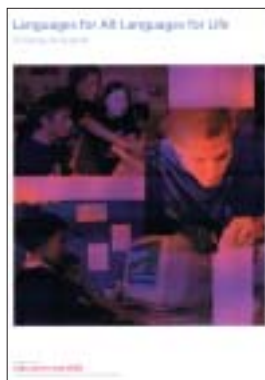
This suggests that by 2010 all primary children should have the opportunity of serious foreign language study over the four years of Key Stage 2. This will involve learning to communicate in a foreign language (with an early emphasis on listening and speaking) as well as learning about language and comparison of different cultures.

Of course, we have time to build up to that objective gradually and for some schools the first steps may involve an emphasis on one element of entitlement, for example intercultural understanding and contacts. To help in this process, the DfES and a range of partners are developing a 'Framework' for Key Stage 2 languages, which will support the introduction of a flexible programme over time.

This should be ready for piloting in September 2004 and will be published nationally in 2005 (see www.nacell.org.uk/profdev/KS2_framework_summary.htm#info for further details).

2 Will it be compulsory?

At present languages are non-statutory in primary schools. However, there is a national and, in most cases, local expectation that all Key Stage 2 pupils will be offered a language within six years. LEAs, for example, have been asked to plan for primary language entitlement in their Education Development Plans. The experience of the many primary schools that have already introduced a language suggests some very good reasons for this, not least the excitement and enthusiasm with which young children take to a foreign language experience. There is therefore every likelihood that increasing numbers of schools will want to introduce some kind of language provision.





3 Will all children have to learn a language?

All children in Key Stage 2 will be entitled to learn a language. There might be particular educational reasons for restricting this entitlement, but the evidence suggests that the majority of pupils will benefit from this experience. Handled in a sensitive and creative way, language learning has been shown to increase the self-esteem and performance of pupils whose first language is not English, perhaps bringing their home languages into the classroom as something to be valued and studied. We also have considerable evidence that a foreign language can help the development of children with learning difficulties of various kinds – recycling knowledge in new contexts and stimulating both linguistic and cognitive development. Indeed, in 2003 three of the winners of ‘European Awards for Languages’ were special schools, in Birmingham, Dover and Sunderland.

There is, in general, an important issue of equal opportunities and inclusion here. Once the tradition in our country was that foreign languages were the preserve of the grammar schools and the private sector. It seems to many people that it would be regrettable if we were to re-introduce such a separation in the primary school.

Fortunately, the first signs are very encouraging. Many schools and LEAs, including those in predominantly working-class or rural areas, are introducing primary languages for all and with great success – extending horizons and opportunities and developing the innate abilities of all children to communicate. You will see some examples of this work on the enclosed CD-ROM, *Primary languages in action* which may inspire and challenge you.



4 How will languages fit into the curriculum?

We think that it is important that languages should be integrated into the curriculum rather than being seen as a bolt-on extra.

That is one reason why we are working very closely with Primary Strategy colleagues. In fact, the experience of those who are already teaching primary languages suggests that time may not be as difficult an issue as it first appears.

Primary teachers are in many ways uniquely placed to integrate a

foreign language into their general

teaching. There are obvious and fruitful links between foreign languages and literacy and, indeed, other parts of the existing curriculum – the development of listening and speaking, mathematics, geography, citizenship.

We do think that children need some opportunity for intensive exposure to the foreign language, but this can be in relatively short bursts, reinforced by work in other parts of the curriculum. You can see more about how this could be done (from very modest beginnings) in a free publication entitled *Curricular models*, downloadable from www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/models.htm. QCA has produced general guidance on designing and timetabling the primary curriculum (see www.qca.org.uk/ages3-14/5-14/2799.html).





5 Won't the introduction of languages distract us from our main objectives and targets?

This is one of the most important questions about languages in the primary curriculum and is at the heart of the agenda set out in *Excellence and enjoyment: A strategy for primary schools* in 2003. Languages can be seen as an important way of putting more 'fun' into primary learning and of broadening our children's experience. Anyone who has seen children singing songs or playing games in a foreign language (or even watched a video recording of language lessons, as in the enclosed CD-ROM, *Primary languages in action*, probably needs little convincing of the value of such language learning for young children. One answer could therefore be to visit a classroom where languages are being introduced, or indeed to look at the available videos and CD-ROMs.

Very often, you will see that teachers in all kinds of schools are finding opportunities to enhance learning through languages – reinforcing learning, developing cross-curricular links, improving listening skills and cultural knowledge. We also believe that far from interfering with these core objectives and targets, languages can actually support and improve them. There is research evidence to suggest that language learning supports a child's general understanding and language development. We are already seeing many indications of improvements in both literacy and mathematics in areas where foreign languages have been introduced. As our experience of primary language learning expands, we will be monitoring this more closely, but the early signs are really encouraging.

6 Where will I find the staff?

One of the reasons for the relatively relaxed timescale is to allow time to develop a workforce capable of teaching languages. Even so, we have actually been surprised at how much expertise and willingness to 'have a go' there is among existing primary teachers. There are a number of ways in which these teachers can be supported to make the most of their language skills – through CPD, courses at home and abroad, and networking opportunities (see Question 9). Many teachers have also found it useful to observe other teachers and have been supported by ASTs or advisory staff.

We have also been developing ways in which language teachers from the secondary sector – in particular from Specialist Language Colleges – can support primary developments. There are already 189 Specialist Language Colleges working in this way with groups of primary schools and from September 2004 there will be 195. Over the next year we expect that this kind of programme will develop further, with support and co-ordination from regional centres, universities and LEAs.

CILT has been actively supporting early language learning at a local level through the Early Language Learning (ELL) Regional Support Groups, the majority of which are based at CILT Comenius Centres (see www.cilt.org.uk/primary/rsg.htm for further details).



In addition, new teachers with foreign language competence are coming into the profession. This year, over 500 PGCE, B Ed and GTP students are being trained to teach in Key Stage 2 with a language specialism (either French, German or Spanish). The numbers are set to increase in future years. This is a new programme which has been developed in collaboration with institutions in France, Germany and Spain (and from next year Italy and Portugal) and it includes a teaching placement in a school abroad. It would certainly be worth finding out if one of the 27 providers running these courses is in your region, since they are always looking for placement schools for trainees (see www.nacell.org.uk/profdev/itt.htm for further details).

Finally, there is a great deal that can be done by non-teachers with language expertise. The British Council organises a programme of Foreign Language Assistants, including an expansion this year into primary schools (see www.languageassistant.co.uk – 'UK schools and authorities' for further details). We are also looking at how best to develop the role of Teaching Assistants in schools which will enable them to support language-learning programmes and later this year we are planning to pilot some language-specific training for the new 'Higher Level Teaching Assistants'.



7 Which language should we teach?

8 Where will I find the resources?

There will not be a prescribed language, so this can be a matter of choice by individual schools. As might be expected, many schools are introducing French, but there are also many examples of Spanish, as well as German and other languages, including community languages. Most schools are basing their choice mainly on the resources available to them – in particular the language skills of their teaching and support staff. In many cases, LEAs are able to support a rather more co-ordinated approach, through the promotion of primary–secondary partnerships. Obviously, it makes sense to think about continuity with the secondary school – that is why it can be so helpful early on to appoint a Languages Co-ordinator in the school and to make contact with local networks. However, it is unlikely that we will be able to guarantee continuity on a national basis. The proposed KS2 Framework will also take account of this by ensuring that, over time, there is a clear expectation of learning objectives, not only relating to competence in a specific language but also in terms of language-learning skills.

When the DfES began to support languages in primary schools in 1999 this was thought to be one of the burning issues. In fact, it has not turned out to be such a difficult problem. Primary teachers have been very inventive in re-using what they know – a great deal can be done with puppets, card and colours, small whiteboards and children’s toys, and with resources already used in classrooms, for example in numeracy, science and geography. There has also been much use of Big Books and of simple videos and websites. Some of this can be seen on the introductory CD-ROM, *Primary languages in action*.



Rather more dedicated resources can be found from a range of providers and information about many of these can be accessed through the NACELL website (www.nacell.org.uk/resources/resources.htm); there are also on-line resources such as the BBC site.

As far as the teaching programme is concerned, the KS2 Framework due to be published in 2005 will be a major resource. In the meantime, QCA has already produced some model schemes of work for those teaching French, German and Spanish. Many LEAs also have schemes of work.

You can find more details about available resources on the poster accompanying this information pack.



10

What about assessment?

Will we have to do languages SATs?

There are absolutely no plans to increase burdens on primary schools. One of the undoubted attractions of primary languages at present is that they give full reign to the enthusiasm and inventiveness of teachers. It makes sense, therefore, to build on this enthusiasm and the autonomy which this gives to teachers (and, indeed, pupils).

Having said this, we will also need to know how our children are doing if this entitlement is to be real and if it is to meet the quite ambitious aims which the Government has set. There are a number of tools being developed to help in this (in addition to the KS2 Framework).

First, we are creating a 'Languages Ladder' – a voluntary recognition scheme which will be linked to a European languages framework (the Common European Framework) and to the existing national qualifications system. This will enable learners to assess their own language competence, eventually in a wide range of languages, and in different language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing). It will be appropriate for the youngest learners and could also be used for teacher or external assessment. This will be trialled during 2004 and will be ready nationally in September 2005 (see www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/DSP_languagesladder.cfm for further details).

We have also supported the development of a 'European Language Portfolio', again based on the Common European Framework, which allows pupils to record their progress in languages (as well as their knowledge of other languages and cultures). The Portfolio is already being used successfully in a number of primary schools. See the enclosed leaflet for further details.



9

What about more general support?

There is already a great deal of support for primary languages. Over the next year or so we hope to increase and localise that support.

If you are relatively new to the idea, then your starting point should probably be NACELL – the National Advisory Centre on Early Language Learning run by CILT, the National Centre for Languages. NACELL has a website (www.nacell.org.uk) which can probably direct you to an answer for most of your questions. In addition, there is a NACELL information point which can deal with individual enquiries (nacell@cilt.org.uk).

NACELL lists resources, national and international training courses and CPD. It will also be able to tell you if there is a regional or local support group for primary languages near you and give you the contact details.

Increasingly, LEAs are able to help and in many cases they have appointed someone to have responsibility for primary entitlement – sometimes an adviser, or an advisory teacher or AST.

Your local Specialist Language College may also be able to help (see www.cilt.org.uk/languagecolleges/collcontact.htm to find out your nearest Specialist Language College).



11

How will I persuade the parents?

The good news is that most parents are actually in favour of their children learning languages. This is reported in a number of recent opinion polls (showing that between 75–80% of the population agree with the statement that in today's world English is not enough). More importantly, it is confirmed by the experience of those schools which have already begun on the road to language entitlement. In general, parents are very supportive. Where they are not, it may be because they are worried about overall attainment ('Why should my child learn Spanish when he/she can't write proper English?'). In this case, the answer lies in convincing parents about the broader educational and social value of languages – perhaps a letter to parents recasting some of the points discussed above?

More often, parents seem to worry because they themselves think that they have little or no language competence. This – it seems to us – provides a great opportunity for schools, both to make use of those language skills (perhaps not in French or German) which parents do have and to explain to them what is happening in the classroom. An example of this from one school is an information sheet for parents to enable them to help with a learning homework. Even more ambitious has been the development of family learning circles with parents learning alongside their children after school (see www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets/Familylearningjan99.html). One thing is certain: the parents of this new generation are important partners in this ambitious venture. We need to use their talents and take them with us.

12

So when should we get started?

The plan is for a gradual introduction of primary languages. This should give schools time to prepare and enable national and local Government to develop support, advice and resources. Thinking about it, however, if you are to introduce full four-year entitlement by 2010, you will almost certainly need to have made a start by 2006. It therefore seems to make sense to begin earlier rather than later – for example by including languages in the school's planning processes and introducing some elements of MFL in other parts of the curriculum (see the **NACELL best practice guide, 'Cross-curricular links': www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/index.htm**). Many schools have found it helpful quite early in the process to appoint someone as the MFL Co-ordinator in order to take forward the planning and start making links. Nationally, we are seeing a picture of growing enthusiasm and confidence. As many of those now teaching primary languages have discovered, the first steps can be quite modest, but they soon begin to have a real effect on pupils' learning. Over the next year, we hope that many more of you will be encouraged to make that start.

These answers can only be very general. To follow up any of these points – or indeed other questions about primary languages – please contact NACELL (tel: 020 7379 5101; e-mail: nacell@cilt.org.uk).

The helpdesk may also be able to put you in touch with regional or LEA support.

‘Delivering an entitlement to language learning so that every pupil at Key Stage 2 is offered the opportunity to study at least one foreign language by the end of the decade is the centrepiece of our strategy’

National Languages Strategy

This brochure provides the answers to twelve questions, to help headteachers get started.



www.cilt.org.uk