

## Languages and language learning at Key Stage 2 – a longitudinal study

### What this research was about and why it is important

This three-year study (2007-10) was commissioned by the government to provide an in-depth overview of language provision and teaching at Key Stage 2 (ages 7 to 11) in primary schools. Prior to this study, there was little research into these areas, and little research looking at key issues such as pupil attainment, the development of intercultural understanding, the promotion of knowledge about language, and the transfer of knowledge and skills. The KS2 Framework for Languages at the time outlined three core strands in language learning: oracy (speaking and listening), literacy, and intercultural understanding. The researchers visited a sample of 40 diverse and representative schools in the UK over three years. They also worked with a smaller number of eight case-study schools to assess the impact of provision on children's learning in languages, and across the curriculum. The researchers noted four main approaches to language teaching: lessons teaching the language, sensitization to language (tasters), language awareness, and language teaching through another subject (CLIL).

### What the researchers did

- The researchers observed lessons, interviewed staff and children, arranged small group discussions, distributed questionnaires, and collected documentary evidence.
- Children in the eight case-study schools completed language tasks in all four skills to evaluate their learning and language outcomes; some classes also took Asset Language Tests.

### What the researchers found

*The report listed several key findings:*

- Schools were enthusiastic and committed, and staff were of the opinion that languages contributed to children's personal and social development, and had benefits for children's English literacy development, and citizenship.
- Children were enthusiastic. They liked fun, interactive lessons, and were motivated by the learning process and their perceptions of the wider value of language learning.
- French was the most commonly taught language (for historical reasons), followed by Spanish and German; weekly teaching was between 30 and 60 minutes.
- Staff mobility and knowledge were influential in determining the delivery model. Teachers were mostly either generalist class teachers or specialist language teachers.
- Training was having a positive impact on provision.
- Schools were drawing increasingly on the KS2 Framework for Languages. Teachers were incorporating the objectives for oracy (to a lesser extent for literacy) into their schemes of work; there was little evidence of reference to the framework for intercultural understanding. Teachers relied heavily on commercial resources, reflecting their confidence and ability.
- Children taught throughout KS2 showed progression in their learning, but assessment of that learning required further development. Fun and enjoyment were key motivational factors. There was emphasis on vocabulary learned through topics (e.g. family, pets).
- There was evidence to suggest that children could achieve Framework targets in listening, speaking, and reading. Children were good on topic vocabulary, nouns, and formulas, but knew few verbs. Writing remained a challenge.
- A school-wide vision was important for successful provision, and this originated with strong leadership and the approval and support of the head teacher.
- Funding was regarded as a very important factor in good provision.
- Transition and transfer to secondary school were ongoing concerns.

### Things to consider

- The review was done before the introduction of statutory language teaching (September 2014).