

## White Paper: Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward

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

This research evaluates the implementation of the statutory requirement to teach a modern or ancient foreign language to all children in key stage 2, introduced from 2014. In September 2018, the first cohort made the transition to secondary school. It is now time critical to review the extent to which the statutory requirement has been met, and to what effect.

### What the researchers did

The researchers identified the current challenges facing schools in implementing the foreign language requirement, defined the problems, convened a Policy Summit in November 2018, and published a [White Paper](#), outlining recommendations.

### What the researchers found

**Current challenges:** “The principal problems in schools relate to time allocation, teacher subject knowledge and language proficiency, limited access to professional development and a lack of shared and agreed understanding of pupil progress at the point of transfer from primary to secondary schools. Given the central importance of subject knowledge to good teaching, the variability of initial teacher training in subject knowledge development is a cause of concern. The current infrequency of Ofsted inspection of primary languages is a further cause of concern.” (p. 9)

### Lessons from research into primary language learning — implications for practice (pp. 9-11)

- i. During much of middle childhood children learn mostly implicitly and need rich and plentiful input for learning to take place: enough time needs to be allocated to language learning.
- ii. Middle childhood is characterised by very active cognitive development: activities need to be enjoyable but should also capitalise on emergent learning strategies and cognitive changes.
- iii. Strong early L1 literacy skills are associated with higher FL attainment: links with L1 literacy and the languages children know and are learning need to be strengthened, for both monolingual and EAL children.
- iv. Progress motivates: clear planned progression is essential to boost motivation and increase uptake at KS4.
- v. Teaching time, teacher language proficiency, and teaching approach affect pupil progress: access to high quality initial teacher training and continuing professional development is crucial.
- vi. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is steadily increasing: teaching approaches should recognise and draw upon the multilingualism of EAL children in the language classroom.

### RiPL solutions and recommendations (See pp. 12-14 and 15-17)

1. **Time allocation** at least one hour per week, a non-statutory minimum of 140 hours over KS2;
2. **Government-funded professional development for primary teachers** to strengthen primary language subject knowledge, pedagogical understanding and language proficiency;
3. **Curriculum planning:** commission non-statutory guidance on minimum core content defining what children should know/be able to do in pronunciation, phonics, grammatical structures, vocabulary and knowledge about language;
4. **Transition:** strengthen primary-secondary collaboration; provide receiving schools with a clear statement of what pupils have been taught and what they should know and be able to do at the point of transfer;
5. **Assessment and reporting:** agree a **nationally recognized benchmark** by the age of transfer from KS2 to KS3;
6. **Develop effective use of digital technology** to support learning, training and reporting, including the development and piloting of an e-portfolio;
7. **School accountability:** Ofsted should include a focus on primary languages, gathering evidence of intent, implementation and impact related to curriculum planning;
8. **School leadership:** Develop effective partnerships between **senior leadership** and **governors** to strengthen accountability and improve coherent and structured progression in primary languages in the school development plan;
9. **Strategic role of research:** The DfE to include a focus on the implementation of primary languages policy in the next round of social research aims, to garner high quality evidence to inform policy development and KS2 delivery.
10. Create a **National Taskforce for Primary Languages (NTPL)** to support school-led improvement in the teaching of primary languages, to build the foundation of future language learning at KS3 and increase uptake at KS4 and beyond.

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