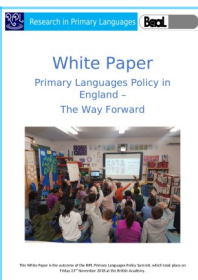




BREAKING NEWS

White Paper Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward

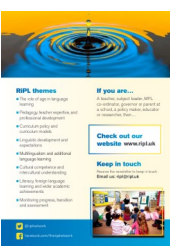
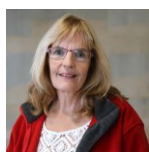


The [RiPL network](#) has today published a [White Paper](#) with recommendations towards an implementation strategy for primary languages in England. This follows the RiPL Primary Languages Policy Summit held at the British Academy on Friday 23rd November 2018. The various contributions, comments and discussions from the major national stakeholders who attended the Summit have helped to inform and shape the White Paper. We believe the publication of the White Paper is very timely within the context of recent developments relating to languages and the imminent crisis we face.

Language learning in primary schools – policy has clear potential but could do better: this is the conclusion reached by researchers assessing the success of the policy requirement for children to learn a foreign language at primary school four years after its introduction in 2014. In short: **it needs more support to be a success.** The [RiPL network](#), comprising university researchers, teachers, and policy makers, has focussed on language learning and teaching in primary schools and across transition and analysed where the challenges are. Language provision across the country is patchy and Britain lags behind other European countries when it comes to language learning and teaching.



As [Professor Florence Myles](#), Chair of our [RiPL network](#) explained: *“It’s clear from our research that simply requiring all primary schools to teach a foreign language is not enough. There are schools which illustrate exemplary practice, but a high-quality curriculum is not consistently provided in all schools, and children do not receive equal opportunities to learn a new language. To raise standards in language proficiency, in line with other European countries, schools need central guidance and support in a number of key areas.”* She continued: *“At this critical moment in the country’s history, it is particularly important for young people to develop a global outlook and the confidence and motivation to connect with others around the world. Getting the right skills in languages from an early age assumes an even greater importance. This is crucial if we are to reverse the falling number of pupils studying languages at GCSE and A-Level.”*



[Bernardette Holmes MBE](#), co-Chair of RiPL further comments: *“We must be realistic: we recognize that there are competing pressures for time in the primary curriculum and that reaching expected standards in reading, writing and maths takes priority, but developing a strong foundation in language learning is a crucial investment for the future, not just for the benefit of individual children but for the health of civil society as a whole. High quality language learning helps children to understand how language works, enabling them to make connections between their own first language and other languages they are learning. Through language learning, children begin to think flexibly, creatively and critically, developing the cultural agility they will need to face the challenges of a diverse and rapidly changing world.”*



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

Below: selected extracts from the White Paper — [pdf download](#)

Current challenges – defining the problems

“[... S]chools are facing a number of challenges in implementing a primary languages policy, leading to inequity of opportunity for primary pupils across the country. The principal problems in schools relate to time allocation, teacher subject knowledge and language proficiency, limited access to professional development and a lack of a 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.” *White Paper p. 9*

Lessons from research into primary language learning – implications for practice

- i. **During much of middle childhood children learn implicitly and need rich and plentiful input for learning to take place:** *sufficient 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 during the course of middle childhood.*
- 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:** *ensure clearly planned progression to boost motivation and increase uptake of languages in later years.*
- v. **Teaching time, teacher language proficiency, and teaching approach play a very important role:** *crucial role of teacher language proficiency and training; appropriate pedagogy; progression.*
- vi. **The number of pupils with English as an additional language has increased steadily in schools:** *recognise and draw upon the multilingualism of EAL children in the language classroom.* *White Paper pp. 9-11*

The RiPL White Paper makes ten recommendations

- 1. Time allocation** one hour per week, a non-statutory minimum of 140 hours over KS2;
- 2. Primary Languages Pedagogy:** the DfE should invest in professional development for primary teachers by providing funded opportunities to strengthen primary language subject knowledge, pedagogical understanding and language proficiency;
- 3. Curriculum planning:** commission non-statutory minimum core content defining what children should know and be able to do; strengthen links with literacy;
- 4. Transition:** clear primary-secondary collaboration about transition from Year 6 to Year 7;
- 5. Assessment and reporting:** agree and approve a nationally recognised benchmark by the age of transfer from KS2 to KS3, including the development and piloting of an e-portfolio;
- 6. Digital technology:** develop more frequent and effective use of technology;
- 7. School accountability:** Ofsted should include a focus on primary languages, in particular with regard to gathering evidence of intent, implementation and impact related to curriculum planning.
- 8. School leadership:** develop effective partnerships between senior leadership and governors to strengthen school accountability;
- 9. Strategic role of research:** The DfE should include a focus on the implementation of primary languages policy in the next round of social research aims, in order to garner high quality evidence to inform policy development and delivery of primary languages at key stage 2.
- 10. Create a National Task-Force for Primary Languages (NTPL):** set up a National Task-Force for Primary Languages, to address the challenges inherent in fully implementing the statutory order to introduce the learning of modern or ancient language from the age of seven. Primary schools face particular challenges which are distinct from those facing secondary schools and which must be addressed head on.

For full details of all the recommendations, see pp. 15-17 in the [White Paper](#)



New RiPL Blog — Let us know what you think of our RiPL pages. Which ones do you find most useful? Is there something else you’d like to see featured on our site? Has RiPL given you new ideas, changed your thinking, or changed your practice? We’d love to hear how we’re doing, and how you find us relevant.

RiPL gratefully acknowledges the contributions of delegates from the following organisations who attended the Primary Languages Policy Summit: *All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages; Association for Language Learning; Association of School and College Leaders; British Academy; British Association for Applied Linguistics; British Council; Business in the Community; Confucius Institute; Department for Education; Education Endowment Fund; Education Policy Institute; Goethe Institut; Hackney Learning Trust and the Primary Schools Network; Independent Schools’ Modern Languages Association; Harris Federation (ITE); Institut Français; King’s College, London; Manchester Metropolitan University; National Resource Centre for Supporting Foreign Languages in Schools; Ofsted; Ofqual; Our Lady of Mount Carmel R C Primary School, Tameside; Rushey Mead Educational Trust; Spanish Embassy Education Office; Speak to the Future; Springfield Primary School, Sale, Trafford; St Paul’s C of E Nursery & Primary, Brighton; The Primary Schools Network; The TENAX Schools Trust; University of Cambridge; University of Essex; University of Oxford; University of Reading; University of Southampton.*

A vibrant network of researchers and teacher practitioners engaging through RiPL