



From the Chalk Face! Tell us about your experiences teaching languages in your schools.

St. Paul's Church of England Primary School, Brighton

In September 2006 I joined St. Paul's Primary School Brighton, as their Headteacher. The previous Head, had introduced enrichment lessons in Spanish, as part of the PPA cover in our school. This was just with the eldest children in year 5 and 6.

When I arrived I could see I had a gifted teacher in Maggie Morgan and as I started to know my staff realised very quickly, we had some outstanding practice in language learning.

At the time we had a MFL adviser in the LEA and she came and observed our practice. She recommended that we became part of two longitudinal studies. One was with the London Metropolitan University and the other with Southampton University. We began in September 2008 on both these projects with Dr. Janet Enever, from the London Metropolitan University. This was following one class from year 3 to 6 over four years to look at their language acquisition. She came every half term to track progress for the four years. At the end of the four years our school had been very successful and when tested, the majority of children had achieved a C grade GCSE equivalent grade. This study was carried out across seven schools, in each of seven countries across Europe and paid for by the European Union. It was called the ELLIE project, Early Language Learning in Europe.

At the end of this study I was invited to the sharing of the results, at a conference in Warsaw, Poland, where all the other countries and participants in the study were represented. I started talking to MFL specialists from the Department of Education and they were very keen to learn more about our school.

In January 2011 three members of the D of E came to visit our school, to see Spanish taught, and we were just beginning a British Council Connecting Classrooms Project with Mexico, with 6 schools who also spoke Spanish, across Brighton and Hove LEA. I co-ordinated the group and went to visit Mexico with Spanish teachers, from across the schools. This involved visits to Veracruz, visiting six Mexican schools and a reciprocal visit to St. Pauls. From this work we were invited to the D of E in London, in May 2011 to discuss with Hugh Baldry, head of MFL development nationally and a Director from the Spanish Embassy, the opportunity to be part of a bilingual project to incorporate Spanish into other areas of the curriculum.

We began this project in September 2011, also agreeing to teach Spanish from reception and all classes in key stage one and two. This work has led to exceptional results, as every year it has grown. We have just one specialist teacher but needed more support to make this work well. So we have Spanish Erasmus+ students who can emphasise the vocabulary, particularly in art, PE and music. We made links with Spanish universities who automatically send us Erasmus+ students.

We advertised for Spanish volunteers in the local community too and parents who might speak Spanish. This helped and developed conversation across the school. We also arranged training, so all our teachers could use every day basic Spanish vocabulary, with the children in their class and new words, as they moved up to each class, it would be more complex. We were supported in this with the Spanish Embassy language department.

We continue to have termly upskilling ever since.

We wanted the children to use their Spanish in its natural environment and had always had a link school in Zaragoza, Spain since 2008, when Ms. Morgan went to visit on a British Council course. It took several years for both schools, especially the parents, to let it happen. In 2015 we took our year six children to the school for the first time and since, we have been every year and they bring their children to us. It is such a rich experience both times, to use language, explore our cultures and learn about each other's education systems, as well as making friends.

We have had so many visitors from the Department of Education, Spanish Embassy and other schools, wishing to learn from our practice. Ms. Morgan and I have been involved in many language meetings and groups to support this learning, both locally, nationally and internationally.

In February 2015, Ms. Morgan was awarded a MBE for her contribution to developing language skills so widely and I was asked to be part of the Steering Group to develop language teaching and the National Languages Reference group with experts in this field. I was chosen as a chair of these groups and advised them on the development of the new MFL curriculum. We were funded nationally until 2016, then we were asked by the Expert Advisory Group for MFL until last year and we were funded by BESA.

At St. Paul's our language learning continues to thrive and I feel strongly, as a headteacher that to learn another language, at such a young age develops so many skills to support general learning in all subjects. It also opens so many doors in the future, as our children travel more and will become ever wider global citizens. We constantly review our practice, so all our students can make the best progress and enjoy lifelong, language learning.

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Southampton University Primary Languages (SUPL). Foreign Language Literacy in Primary Practice. Friday 19th July 2019: 9.15 am to 4.30 pm. A FREE one-day event to find out more about FL literacy, creativity and challenge! Three inspirational guest speakers: [Bernadette Holmes](#) – Born Global, [Dawn Alexander Joseph – Hackney Learning Trust](#) – Primary Languages Coordinator and Clare Seccombe – [Lightbulb Languages](#) and FL practitioner. You can also join workshops led by SUPL teachers exploring FL literacy practice: phonics, graded readers, authentic texts and writing. All attendees are offered free access to an online French and Spanish resources bank. Lunch and afternoon tea are included. Numbers limited. More information or to book a place, email [Alison Porter](#). More about SUPL on our [Teaching](#) page.

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