



# Why primaries and secondaries must link for a languages strategy

Dawn Francis-Pester investigates why greater joined-up thinking between primary and secondary schools is needed to ensure foreign language acquisition is a success.

**P**rimaries have risen to the challenge of languages on the curriculum. But how could clearer guidance and more linking with secondaries improve things further?

Primary schools are now approaching the end of their second term of compulsory language teaching. While it is too soon to see the full impact of early language teaching, including language choices and results at key stage 4 and further on, enough feedback and opinions have been given for teachers and other professionals to have a general idea of what is working, some of the main challenges, and how things could be improved.

This time last year, not long before primary languages became compulsory, the CfBT Education Trust and The British Council published a survey,

designed to chart 'the health of language learning in schools in England'. The research describes language trends in both primary and secondary schools, including the views and experiences of teachers at 3,000 state primary schools.

The survey found that 95 per cent of primary schools were already teaching a language and 42 per cent said they already met the curriculum requirements. Three quarters of primaries offered French and 'most of the others' offered Spanish, with both of these representing the main languages offered at secondary level.

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organisations with online materials. For example The Association for Language Learning provides free training resources at [www.allconnectblog.wordpress.com/](http://www.allconnectblog.wordpress.com/) and [www.ukgermanconnection.org](http://www.ukgermanconnection.org) has resources as well as host teachers and student ambassadors who can support primaries. Another source of information is [www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk](http://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk).

Liz also believes many secondary schools are doing everything they can to provide support and resources for primaries, including sharing language assistants and sometimes sending sixth form language students to help out. In her area of north Yorkshire, schools began to liaise eight or nine years ago when they believed languages would become statutory at primary level. For Liz the downside is lack of funding and she feels extra money for supply staff to enable secondary teachers to go in to observe and support primary teachers, would be very well spent. In some areas schools are situated a good distance away from each other too, so extra funding would help with travel and other issues connected with time and workload.

## Rising to the challenge

Despite varying levels of teacher expertise, complete freedom of language choice and a non-uniform approach to training and resources, it is obviously vital for secondary schools to recognise and draw on language skills obtained at primary level. *The Language Trends* report described many primary and secondary schools struggling to establish 'sustainable collaboration' for transition from key stages 2 and 3. It also predicted that schools that were already teaching languages, before they became compulsory, would have more language experts available, be more likely to monitor and assess pupils and would have better links with secondaries. While transition and coordination still seem less than uniform across the UK, more plans are gradually being worked on, and secondaries and primaries are beginning to see the benefits of dialogue and coordination.

One primary school says: 'It is essential to ensure progression rather than repetition', so in-depth planning to avoid overlap is needed, but making room for revisiting topics in different ways is to be encouraged. Clearly too much repetition could potentially wipe out any enthusiasm for language learning early in key stage 3 and undo any benefits of early language learning.'

However, Liz Black stresses that it's not as simple as checking which vocabulary or role play areas have been covered, before pupils reach year 7. She describes the aims of transition from key stage 2 to key stage 3 as 'a real merging of pedagogy', going on to explain that teachers need to be clear about which specific skills have been covered too. For instance can pupils do group work? Are they used



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