



# Primary Languages Policy in England – Can we make it work?

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**Download the White Paper:** <http://www.ripl.uk/policy/>

# Context – Primary Languages Strategy

- ▶ National Curriculum Reform in 2013
- ▶ September 2014: statutory requirement for primary schools to teach a foreign language to all children at KS2
  - ▶ Focus on making **substantial progress in one language**, ancient or modern;
    - ▶ receive an appropriate balance of spoken and written language
    - ▶ develop an understanding of basic grammar
    - ▶ learn to write phrases and short sentences from memory
    - ▶ learn to speak in sentences, with appropriate pronunciation
    - ▶ express simple ideas with clarity
    - ▶ become acquainted with songs and poems in the language studied.



# Context – curriculum reform

- ▶ High expectations, strong school accountability;
- ▶ **KS3 to build on the foundations laid at KS2;**
- ▶ **System of levels and descriptors removed and not replaced;**
- ▶ **Schools given autonomy to interpret and implement requirement;**
- ▶ **Removal of support** given by LEAs; **no official guidance available** e.g. about:
  - ▶ Time requirements
  - ▶ Expected attainment levels
  - ▶ Level of teacher expertise required
  - ▶ Availability of CPD



**By implication, five years after the introduction of the statutory requirement, it could be expected that:**

- ▶ the majority of primary and secondary schools should already share, or be working towards, a clear and agreed understanding of what constitutes substantial progress in one language by the end of each key stage;

and

- ▶ where pupils continue with the same language from KS2 into KS3, there should be at least an outline agreement at local level of what pupils will be taught and should be able to do as a result of their language learning.



**Is this the case?**

# Where are we 5 years later?

- ▶ In Sept 2018, first cohort of KS2 language learners moved to secondary;
- ▶ Time to evaluate/take stock;
- ▶ Have expectations been met? What is the situation in schools?
  - ▶ Current inspection and research evidence finds great variation in primary language provision across the country
  - ▶ A number of factors continue to impede the development of coherent provision of language teaching from ages 7 to 14
  - ▶ Need to assess the situation



# RiPL - Research in Primary Languages network [www.ripl.uk](http://www.ripl.uk)

- ▶ A team of researchers, teachers, teacher trainers, language advocates set up RiPL to:
  - ▶ contribute to evidence-based policy making through engagement with major stakeholders
  - ▶ Provide jargon-free summaries of research findings to inform policy and practice
  - ▶ Engage with teachers to support pedagogic innovation and support
  - ▶ Website, blog, monthly newsletter



# RiPL Policy Summit, November 2018

## Aims:

- To bring together major stakeholders: researchers, teachers, school leadership, Ofsted, DfE, British Academy, Academy chains, cultural partners etc. in order to:
  - Discuss current provision, challenges and potential solutions;
  - Agree a confirmatory position;
  - Co-construct a White Paper to develop a strategy for the effective implementation of the primary languages strategy.
  - Funded by a BAAL (British Association for Applied Linguistics) '*Applying Linguistics*' grant
- Policy briefings circulated beforehand;
- Presentations from major stakeholders.



# RiPL White Paper: Purpose

- Develop an implementation strategy:
  - What needs to happen for the primary languages policy to become effective?
  - Based on sound analysis and evidence, what are possible solutions to the challenges faced by primary schools?



# Research evidence

# Current research understandings and their implications

## Policy decisions need to be based on:

- ▶ Research-informed understanding of how primary children learn a new language;
- ▶ The conditions which make it possible for pupils to make progress.
- ▶ **Key insights are provided by recent research, with clear implications for practice.**
  - ▶ During much of middle childhood children learn implicitly and need rich and plentiful input for learning to take place: enough time needs to be allocated to language learning → **rich and plentiful input**
  - ▶ 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 towards the end of middle childhood → **appropriate activities**



- ▶ Strong early L1 literacy skills 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 → **develop metalinguistic awareness and links to L1 Literacy**
- ▶ **Progress motivates:** ensure clearly planned progression to boost motivation and increase uptake of languages in later years → **clear progression**
- ▶ Central importance of **context in which children learn:** Teaching time, teacher language proficiency, and teaching approach play a very important role;
- ▶ Increased number of EAL pupils → **recognise and draw upon the multilingualism of EAL children in the language classroom**



Research evidence discussed at summit and fed into the White Paper (Holmes & Myles 2019)

# Current situation in England

# Provision

- ▶ Around 80% of schools allocate between 30 – 60 minutes per week. 71% find it a major challenge to find sufficient curriculum time to teach a language (Tinsley & Board, 2017);
- ▶ England (2%) is generally below the OECD average (4%) for FL curriculum time (10% in Spain) (OECD - Education at a glance 2014);
- ▶ A minimum of 1 hour per week of FL instruction (along with other factors) optimises FL outcomes (Graham et al., 2017);
- ▶ Children can, and do, make progress when FLs are consistently taught at KS2 (Cable et al., 2010)



# CPD and upskilling

- ▶ Subject knowledge, pedagogical understanding and teacher confidence all underpin outcomes (Graham et al., 2017);
  - ▶ Limited training in language pedagogy impacts negatively on learner attitudes and self-efficacy (Mihlajević Djigunović, 2009);
  - ▶ Language upskilling could contribute to easing primary languages teacher supply/confidence issues;
  - ▶ GCSE & below impacts negatively on learner progress (Graham et al., 2017);
- ▶ 42% of schools have class teachers providing FL, 46% use specialist teachers (often already members of staff) (Tinsley & Board, 2017);
- ▶ Subject knowledge and subject-specific pedagogy should be included in Initial Teacher Training and in CPD courses in order to reduce inconsistency of provision, and should be DfE funded (Carter, 2015).



# Curricular content and outcomes

- ▶ Mismatch between primary and secondary perceptions of competence (Board & Tinsley, 2017:13);
  - ▶ Development of guidance on minimum core content for languages at KS 2;
  - ▶ Minimum outcome CEFR A1;
- ▶ Strong L1 literacy skills associated with higher FL attainment;
- ▶ Working memory is developing throughout middle childhood and may be linked with FL proficiency (Myles & Mitchell, 2012; Courtney et al., 2017; Porter, 2017);
- ▶ The development of L1 literacy in any language supports the development of metalinguistic awareness and vice versa (Murphy, 2014).



# Transition

- ▶ Only 16% of primary schools take part in network or cluster meetings with secondary schools;
- ▶ Secondary schools take responsibility for teaching languages in 6% of primary schools and provide the scheme of work for a further 2%;
- ▶ A very small proportion of schools say that they collaborate with their secondary schools in developing units of work in languages (2%) or in planning lessons together (1%) (Board & Tinsley, 2017);
- ▶ Secondary teachers often take little or no account of prior learning; many pupils repeat what they have already learned;
- ▶ This leads to demotivation which can result in an early loss of interest and curiosity in language learning;
- ▶ This may be a contributory factor to low uptake of languages at KS4 (Courtney, 2014; Graham et al., 2016).



# School accountability and Leadership

- ▶ Ofsted should include a focus on primary languages under the new Framework, and gather evidence of intent, implementation and impact related to curriculum planning;
- ▶ Raise awareness of the wider benefits of language learning with Senior Leadership Teams;
- ▶ Develop understanding and recognition of good practice in Governor training programmes.



# Conclusions and recommendations

It is clear at the current time that:

- Children do not receive equal opportunities across schools to learn languages at KS2;
- Some schools illustrate exemplary practice, but a high quality curriculum is not consistently provided in all schools;
- Opportunities are limited by the teaching conditions; conditions vary between schools;
- There are differences in weekly time allocated to primary language teaching;
- There are differences in how the time is distributed across the year and the key stage;
- There is significant variation in teachers' subject knowledge and language proficiency;
- There is a lack of professional development opportunities;
- Curriculum planning rarely involves cross-phase collaboration, scant agreement at local level on what to teach and what pupils should be able to do at the end of KS2;
- As a result, secondary schools seldom build on the KS2 foundations;
- Lack of continuity leads to demotivation and can contribute to an early loss of interest.

**There is a clear need for an implementation strategy, informed by current research findings**



# RiPL recommendations

Informed by research evidence, RiPL makes the following ten recommendations for ensuring the success of the primary languages strategy. This involves the DfE working with professional bodies and lead researchers, where appropriate:

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 (both ITT and CPD);
3. **Curriculum planning:** commission non-statutory guidance on minimum core content defining what children should know and be able to do in relation to pronunciation, phonics, grammatical structures and vocabulary; strengthen links with literacy and other languages;
4. **Transition:** clear primary-secondary collaboration about transition from Year 6 to Year 7; sharing of expectations against agreed benchmarks; clear statement of learning outcomes for each child;
5. **Assessment and reporting:** agree and approve a nationally recognised benchmark by the age of transfer from KS2 to KS3 (e.g. A1 on CEFR), including the development and piloting of an e-folio;



# RiPL recommendations

6. **Digital technology:** develop more frequent and effective use of technology, for upskilling and to provide resources for lessons;
7. **School accountability:** Ofsted to include a focus on primary languages, in particular with regard to gathering evidence of intent, implementation and impact related to planning.
8. **School leadership:** develop effective partnerships between professional bodies, 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 KS2;
10. **Create a National Taskforce for Primary Languages (NTPL):** set up a National Taskforce 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 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**

# National Task-Force for Primary Languages

**The central purpose of the NTPL** would be to support school-led improvement in the teaching of languages:

- **Research-informed professional development programmes** (ITE and CPD);
- **Up-to-date online information on effective teaching methods;**
- **Accessible summaries of research** on primary language learning and teaching;
- **Support for the development of strategic learning networks** of primary and secondary language teachers;
- **Language up-skilling of primary practitioners;**
- **Opportunities to participate in classroom-based interventions** to improve the quality of teaching and learning and pupil outcomes;
- **Large scale research** (subject to funding) on key priorities in relation to language learning.





# White Paper

## Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward

With thanks to the **British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL)** for supporting the RiPL Summit and the White Paper.

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If you have any comments, please send a message to: [ripl@ripl.uk](mailto:ripl@ripl.uk)



<https://twitter.com/riplnetwork>



<https://www.facebook.com/theriplnetwork/>

# Call for action – 9<sup>th</sup> Nov, London – free event

- ▶ Question 1: WHAT? - CURRICULUM CONTENT: What should primary children know and be able to do in the language by the end of Key Stage 2?
- ▶ Question 2: WHO? - TEACHER SUPPLY AND TRAINING : How do we make sure that we have sufficient teachers with the subject and pedagogic knowledge required to teach primary languages effectively across the country?
- ▶ Question 3: WHEN? - TIME AND CURRICULUM PLANNING: How do we provide and safeguard sufficient time in the primary curriculum to teach the full requirements of the national curriculum and reach national expectations?
- ▶ Question 4: PROGRESS, ASSESSMENT AND TRANSITION: How can we assess and record progress across the key stage, maintain learners' motivation and support smooth transition from primary to secondary schools?
- ▶ Question 5: TECHNOLOGY: To what extent can technology provide solutions to some of the challenges facing schools in delivering primary languages? (Strengthening teachers' subject knowledge and language skills; connecting teacher networks; and enriching the learning experience of children in key stage 2)
- ▶ Question 6: QUALITY AND LEADERSHIP: How do we evaluate the quality of our own language teaching and how are our schools evaluating the quality of the languages curriculum across the key stage? How do we ensure equity of provision across the country?



Register:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/primary-languages-policy-in-england-tickets-74276604323>

# RiPL - Research in Primary Languages



The Research in Primary Languages (RiPL) network was born out of a series of workshops bringing together researchers and practitioners to address current issues in primary foreign language learning and teaching. A real need was felt for closer dialogue and collaboration, in order to inform policy.



[www.ripl.uk](http://www.ripl.uk)