THE PROVISION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR PUPILS AT KEY STAGE 2

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Introduction

Following the publication of the National Languages Strategy 'Languages for All: Languages for Life' (2002), the DfES commissioned research in the 2002-03 academic year to investigate the extent and nature of the teaching of Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 2 (KS2) in England. Three further research aims related to the effectiveness of different types of delivery with examples of good practice, the variability of procedures for transition from KS2 to KS3 and the qualifications, experience, and training needs of teachers.

Key findings

- The survey established that 44% of schools teaching KS2 pupils in England offered some form of primary modern foreign languages (PMFL). Curriculum time was used for this in 35% of all schools. However, PMFL provision was not as extensive as this might suggest: only 3% of schools gave all pupils in all years of KS2 a PMFL session of at least 20 minutes at least once a week. The PMFL entitlement is therefore starting from a low baseline.
- The most commonly reported lesson length was 20-30 minutes and the most commonly reported frequency was weekly. The nature and amount of provision varied across different KS2 year groups. Older pupils generally had more time allocated and had more dedicated language lessons. These lessons were more frequent than those for younger pupils. Pressures on curriculum time were a major factor in deciding whether to offer PMFL: 27% of schools that had withdrawn PMFL gave lack of time as one of their reasons for doing so.
- French was the language most commonly taught. Of all schools teaching KS2 pupils 40% offered French, 32% offered only French and 8% offered more than one language.
- Where it was offered, PMFL was taught by class teachers in 41% of schools; by peripatetic teachers in 16%; by volunteers or parents in 15%; by secondary teachers in 13%; by a language teacher on the staff in 12%; by Foreign Language Assistants in 5% and by Teaching Assistants in 4% of schools. In contrast, 45% of schools favoured a language teacher on the school staff (who is also likely to be a class teacher) as the ideal PMFL teacher and 39% favoured class teachers.
- Among teachers not currently teaching PMFL, 82% said they would require teaching materials before they were prepared to teach PMFL. There was a significant lack of awareness amongst teachers about the types of resources available and the ways in which they can be used.
- Primary teachers rated pupils’ attitude to learning a language as more important than any other potential benefit of PMFL.
- Specialist Language Colleges (SLCs) reported considerably more links with partner primary schools than did other secondary schools: 69% of SLCs reported visiting primary schools to model teaching strategies whereas 16% of other secondary schools did so.
- Approximately 25% of all primary teachers reported having a GCSE or equivalent in French. This was more than all other MFL qualifications combined.
- Approximately 50% of all responding teachers thought that PMFL should be a statutory requirement.
- Before the PMFL entitlement can be realised, the amount of work to be done varies greatly from one LEA to another. Only 2 LEAs estimated that more than 80% of their schools currently offer PMFL: 19 LEAs estimated that over 40% of their schools offered PMFL in some form whereas nearly 40 LEAs reported that fewer than 20% of schools offered PMFL.
Background

PMFL provision has often been of an ad hoc nature, dependent in many cases of the availability of appropriate staff. The National Languages Strategy, published in December 2002, sets out a common entitlement for every child in KS2 to have modern foreign language provision in curriculum time by the end of the decade. While this stops short of making foreign language learning a compulsory part of the curriculum, it represents a significant step forward for PMFL. It also raises the issue of exactly what kind of detailed policies should underpin this intention, and by implication, the nature and extent of resources that will be required. While the current situation is one where provision is expanding rather than contracting, much remains to be established about the nature and extent of provision. The main aim of this research report was to assess the extent and nature of primary foreign language learning. Three further sub aims concerned the effectiveness of different types of delivery, the variability of procedures for transition from KS2 to KS3 and evidence of teachers’ qualifications and experience and their training needs.

Methodology

The research project made use of a multi-method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data from questionnaires that were administered at four levels: primary and middle schools; primary teachers; secondary schools and LEAs. The resulting analysis was based on responses from: 2966 primary and middle schools (for the school questionnaire); 2825 teachers (for the primary teacher questionnaire); 64 SLCs and 118 other secondary schools, and 113 English LEAs.

Discussion forums were held in the North and South of England. Both groups included a range of stakeholders: KS2 and KS3 pupils; primary headteachers; primary MFL teachers; secondary MFL teachers; parents; governors and members of the local business community with an interest in supporting and promoting foreign language learning.

In addition, 15 individual schools were selected (“spotlighted”) to give regional and geographical representation and to exemplify aspects of good practice. Fieldwork included interviews with headteachers, class teachers, pupils, and relevant outside parties, as well as observation of lessons and inspection of documentation and pupils’ work where possible.

Main findings

- Baseline
  The results showed that 44% of maintained primary schools teaching KS2 pupils in England were offering some form of MFL provision, with 35% of this taking place in curriculum time. French was the most widely taught language. In general, the older the age group, the more likely they were to be taught PMFL in curriculum time. The amount of curriculum time devoted to PMFL varied enormously, with only a very modest amount in some schools, although most commonly schools provided 20-30 minute lessons weekly. Taken together, the figures relating to curriculum time and the figures relating to the teaching of different year groups suggest that in fact only 3% of schools were offering all pupils in KS2 20 minutes a week.

- Aims of teaching PMFL
  PMFL was widely regarded as valuable, with the overarching message from the data being one of support and enthusiasm from primary headteachers and teachers. Pupil enjoyment, the enhancement of the whole curriculum and the role of PMFL in developing positive attitudes was particularly highlighted. Parents, governors and pupils conveyed the same positive message. Few of the responding schools delivering PMFL had defined teaching aims or a PMFL learning policy; in contrast, all of the spotlighted schools had policy statements and schemes of work which clarified aims. Those aims usually included: achieving a basic level of competence in a foreign language; developing cultural awareness and promoting positive attitudes to learning a foreign language. In some spotlighted schools cross curricular links, for example with literacy, were a core part of their programme. Secondary schools in general welcomed PMFL, however, almost all secondary teachers interviewed were keen to have a clearer idea of what they could expect from PMFL in terms of pupils’ knowledge and skills. The implication of this is that secondary schools would prefer a commonality of provision amongst their partner primary schools. It is difficult to see how this could be achieved without extending a common approach across the whole country.

- Time
  Concerns about meeting the PMFL entitlement centre largely on curriculum time and staff expertise. Pressures on curriculum time were a major factor in deciding whether to offer PMFL.
• Transition from KS2 to KS3
Approximately half of all responding primary schools reported having no transition arrangements with SLCs or with other secondary schools. At secondary school level, there was considerable goodwill from secondary MFL teachers towards the PMFL entitlement although there were concerns about its impact on MFL learning in KS3. Secondary teachers also reported that there was inadequate time and funding for liaising with primary colleagues and for transition activities. SLCs had significantly more links with primary schools than other secondary schools, and they were more likely to differentiate MFL teaching and learning for pupils on entry at year 7. Only 49% of SLCs and 29% of other secondary schools were satisfied or very satisfied with their own transition arrangements. The majority of secondary MFL teachers would be willing to undertake training to support PMFL if funding were provided.

• Staffing
The response from primary school teachers showed a preference for having a languages teacher on the primary school staff. Schools using language teachers on the school staff were the most likely to think their current arrangements were ideal, with 85% describing themselves as satisfied. Primary teachers’ foreign language proficiency was relatively limited. They were more likely to be able to speak French than any other language although only 8.5% described themselves as fluent or fairly fluent, and the majority who reported any qualification did so for French, with GCSE or equivalent being the most common qualification. While the majority of those currently teaching PMFL described themselves as confident to do so, for those not currently teaching PMFL the opposite was the case and they cited this and their lack of knowledge and skills in the language and pedagogy as the main reasons for not teaching. An encouraging finding, however, was that of those not currently teaching PMFL, 36% would like to do so. This represented a sizeable potential pool of PMFL teachers.

• Training
There was a very high level of demand for training and resources. In particular, primary teachers wanted materials, documentation, personal language training, and training in methodology in order to be able to teach PMFL. Those already teaching PMFL also expressed a need for further language development and methodology training. Links with other primary schools and with secondary schools were seen as welcome. The most popular source of support was the LEA adviser. A third of LEAs reported having given some PMFL training to primary teachers since 2002, and the majority were keen to provide support in the future, if they had the funding to do so. The majority of responding secondary MFL teachers also stated that they would be willing to undertake training to support PMFL if funding were provided.

• Funding
Two fifths of schools with PMFL thought that their provision was vulnerable to changes in circumstances, such as the PMFL teacher leaving the school. To address the conditions mentioned above and to move towards the PMFL entitlement will have considerable cost implications. 91% of LEAs and 72% of schools not offering PMFL saw increased funding as important for developing provision. Approximately half of all responding teachers stated that PMFL should be a statutory requirement, including 70% of those currently teaching PMFL.

• Inclusion
In general, schools that offered PMFL to KS2 pupils tended to be more favoured socio-economically according to a number of measures. Provision at national level was therefore far from inclusive. Notwithstanding the clear acknowledgement of the benefits of PMFL for all children, some schools raised concerns in particular about PMFL provision and the needs of children with English as an additional language (EAL) or children with additional educational needs.

Recommendations

• Summary
To develop PMFL from its relatively low baseline, there needs to be:
  o Leadership, in terms of key personnel available locally and detailed guidance for LEAs on how to meet the Entitlement;
  o Training and support to increase numbers of PMFL teachers and promote a diversity in languages offered; Higher Education Institutions should develop ITE programmes to include PMFL; networks need to be established;
  o Resource provision for children of different ages and stages and in different languages and this need to be subsidised;
  o Transition arrangements so that information is shared between primary and secondary schools to aid continuity in learning;
  o Further research to examine quality teaching, pupil outcome and transition.
The PMFL entitlement is starting from a low baseline: substantial funding is needed to extend the scale and quality of current provision. There is need for an increase in policy directed and practical initiatives to support primary and secondary schools, LEAs, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) so that they can meet the challenge.

Leadership

- Key personnel are needed in each LEA to promote PMFL in schools, and also to develop networks both between primary and secondary schools, and between schools and appropriate central agencies.
- Detailed guidance is needed for LEAs and schools on how they can meet the PMFL entitlement within the timescale.
- Schools should plan for a minimum of 30 minutes protected time a week with additional time (30 minutes equivalent) for cross-curricular activities and the incidental use of foreign languages during the day.

Training and support

- Primary schools should plan to train or appoint at least one teacher on the staff who is confident and able to teach PMFL.
- An increase in the levels and diversity of training is needed for teachers and other classroom support personnel to extend the pool of competent and confident teachers. Training for beginner PMFL teachers, subject co-ordinators, FLAs, TAs, HLTAs and secondary teachers (primary methodology) needs to be provided.

Transition arrangements

- HEIs should plan to modify their primary Initial Teacher Education programmes to include PMFL as a subject alongside the Foundation Subjects.
- Targeted funding for schools in disadvantaged or EAL areas to support them in meeting the PMFL Entitlement.
- Learning clusters, consortia and support networks of primary and secondary schools and the community need to be supported in order to develop practice and share resources including trained staff.

Resources

- A range of subsidised materials and resources need to be made available to schools for teaching children of different ages and stages of development, including ICT and e-learning, visual, audio and quality texts (fiction and non-fiction).
- A diversification of languages needs to be promoted and supported by quality resources and training in a range of languages.
- Effective, funded transition arrangements, including the transfer of information, need to be developed to ensure that secondary schools take account of pupils' prior learning.

Further Research

- Further research is needed to examine quality teaching, pupil outcome and effective transition.

Additional Information

Copies of the full report (RR572) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.

Cheques should be made payable to "DfES Priced Publications".

Copies of this Research Brief (RR572) are available free of charge from the above address (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at www.dfes.gov.uk/research/

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