

Languages

A conversation with Kate Percival

Kate Percival teaches a Year 6 class at Broomfields Junior School in Warrington. She also teaches in another school that's part of the Primary Languages Network, teaching French in Year 5. She is the primary languages consultant for the Primary Languages Network. She trains teachers and goes into schools working with languages co-ordinators to support the development of languages teaching.

If you've taught a rich, challenging, ambitious languages curriculum, and you get to the end of Year 6 and you're just about to pass these children on to secondary, what does success look like? What should your children know, understand, and be able to do in languages?

The children should have a passion for languages. Our main aim is to instil in them a curiosity about languages, for them to want to continue learning languages. We want to hook them into the joy of learning languages, and how so many different links can be made with their own language. They might speak a different language at home than the English they speak at school and the language we're learning all together, but they are able to make those links across the full range of languages. We want them to feel like they can say, 'I can speak French, I can speak Spanish,' and, while the content, the amount of words and

phrases that they can say might not be huge, they've got that attitude already that they can do it, they can speak the language. They have got that growth mindset, so that when they move to KS3, there is no limit to what they can achieve in language learning. It's really important that it is primary languages. We always try to make sure that it's not a secondary curriculum watered down for the age that you're working with; it's very much taught creatively, and there's lots of active learning. It's very much based on songs, games, activities, role plays, using realia – props, real-life things, puppets, cuddly toys.

In terms of the formal language that they have, their understanding of it at the end of Year 6, what would you expect them to know about grammar and other aspects of formal language content?

We would want them to be able to engage in some sort of transactional language – language that elicits a response – which could be as simple as asking and answering what their name is, where they live, when their birthday is, what their favourite animal is. Some sustained conversation is what you want them to be able to engage in; that said, you also want them to understand a little bit of how language works and how it's made up. We don't specifically teach full grammar lessons, but if they've done four full years of learning a language, you would want them to understand, for example in French, that the adjective usually comes after the noun when describing something. Or you'd want them to be able to say the first, second, and third person of a couple of verbs. It's not huge paradigms but you want them to have an awareness of how language works. They might be at the stage where they're ready to extend their sentences by using a conjunction in the middle of two ideas. It's that level of awareness of how language works, being able to manipulate it to an extent, and having a bank of language at their disposal so that they then can express their opinion, write short paragraphs, extend sentences with conjunctions – that level of language before they move on to Year 7.

The national curriculum is focused on speaking the language, and interaction with people. Essentially, listening, speaking, reading and writing are the key four skill areas that we want the children to be developing – a balance of those four. There's one attainment target right at the end, about having an understanding of basic grammar. A lot of

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language teaching at primary is active learning and speaking, but you want them to be listening to you as well and being able to decode words and read sentences with perhaps the odd word that they've learned and then trying to work out what the rest of the words are. Writing usually begins from Year 3, or earlier, depending upon when the school decides to begin language teaching.

Phonics is useful in languages teaching; it's not something that's explicitly taught, but there is real value in the children knowing different phonemes and different graphemes, because it really helps them to decode and encode. To be honest, that's how they learned to read in their first language, English, and a lot of primary-aged children are now used to that way of being taught to read. I've spent the last couple of years employing a strategy where we collect phonemes. We'll teach the lesson about, perhaps, 10 different colours, and in those colours we will see, for example, the 'eu' sound, e and u together in the word 'bleu', and we'll take that e and u sound and build upon it – it could be a working wall or a table in the children's books that we add to every time we find another grapheme that makes a certain sound. This idea was taken from Early Years teaching and we applied it to a foreign language. It enables me to say, 'Here's a new word or a new phrase, and we'll have a look at it, and we'll have a go at saying it, and there's an o and i sound in there, now what does o and i say in French? Let's look on our table, let's look on the working wall. It says "wah", so we need to make sure we've got the "wah" sound in there, not the "oi" sound, which you would say if it was an English phoneme.' As the teacher it gives you the power to say, 'Come on, we know this, let's have a look back and use what we know,' and it gives the children that self-efficacy so that they can say, 'Hold on, I recognise that sound, I've seen that grapheme before, quick check back to see how I say it, and now let's employ that sound in that new word and see if I get it right, and let's not worry if it's not.'

So, our perfect languages pupil in Year 6 is keen to have a go at speaking, they're not intimidated in any way by that. They've got pretty decent vocabulary. They don't always get the grammar completely right, but they've got a good sense of some of the basics. They are able to decode words, encode words, and have a go at unfamiliar stuff, and maybe even a bit of etymology and a bit of roots of words, and can unpick words, and they are ready and confident to crack on at secondary.

When and how do you start your languages curriculum and how do you build it up to create those Year 6 linguists?

You can start from EYFS because the children's ears are really open to new sounds, and we know the younger the children are, the more receptive they are to language and the easier they can pick it up, and the less inhibited they feel. They're happy to stand up, dance around, sing songs in a new language. They'll go home singing it, so they're self-practising beyond school. They're singing it in the playground, they're teaching a friend, a sibling, a parent, and that is them reinforcing that language all the time, so the younger the better, for sure. It's not compulsory in KS1; it's compulsory only from KS2. What we tend to call KS1 languages is 'education of the ear'. They're very short bursts of provision, so it might just be one song or one game or one short activity with a very small speaking output, possibly no writing at that stage, or if there is it's very low threat, so it might be writing with an invisible pen in the air, or tracing the shape of a word on your partner's back with your finger, or having a go at one word on the whiteboard. It's very Early Years. Education of the ear: we say, 'Put your best French listening ears on, your best Spanish listening ears on, and be ready to listen to those different sounds that are different to the sounds you would normally hear day to day.' It's about tuning in at that stage and enjoying themselves. Our culture is so self-conscious when it comes to speaking languages. To get the children talking when they're uninhibited in Early Years is really key, because if you leave it until Year 3, you're already going to have young people who will feel a bit embarrassed speaking in a foreign language.

What happens then when they get to Year 3 in KS2?

We call that the first stage of language learning, so 'stage 1'. It might be that in some schools and for some children stage 1 doesn't come until much later, Year 5 or Year 6 even. Whatever their first year of language learning might be, it's important that the schemes of work are pitched at that level of understanding. Primary Languages Network has a couple of schemes of work. One is purely video lessons, and this came about since the pandemic, because so many of us were recording content and putting it out on to different portals. The network decided it was going to record a series of lessons to see teachers through the pandemic,

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and they were hugely popular. Not just because it was a lot easier for teachers who possibly would class themselves as non-specialist, but they were high quality, and they demonstrated what a primary languages lesson should look like, and the children were really engaged with them. They're not perfect. We're still tweaking them. I think that always comes with curriculum design – you're never quite satisfied, are you? You're always thinking of new ways of doing things, and better ways to engage children and to get more out of them. We've got the premium plus video lessons, and then we've also got what we call 'Click2Teach', and it's as it says, it's PowerPoint based. You literally can bring up your lesson, it's on a PowerPoint, all the slides are there ready with the content that you need, the resources, the games, the activities, the things you need to print out, and they've got the embedded sound files as well. Again, lots of teachers, myself included, will just feel comforted by the fact that if they're not 100% sure, they can just click on that little button and be reminded of what to teach and how to teach it. There's nothing wrong with that; we want teachers to feel empowered, that they can teach foreign language lessons, whether they class themselves as a specialist or not. We've seen it done very effectively by teachers who would say they have no language skills themselves; they just have an interest and a desire to get better. It's so encouraging for the children when the teacher's saying, 'I'm not the expert today, but how exciting that we can learn Spanish together. Who can remember that word from last week? Because I've forgotten it. Oh, you can remember it? Wow, aren't you great!' It's a silver lining from the COVID cloud which we're very happy about.

Let's say they begin in Year 3. How do you construct the curriculum from that point?

This is what we call Languages Core Skill progress document. In terms of the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, this breaks it down so you can see what you're expecting the children to be able to do at the different stages.

Progress over 4 stages in the core skills

(listening, speaking, reading and writing in a primary foreign language)

Core skills of learning			
	Listening	Speaking	Reading
Stage 1	Can understand a few familiar spoken words and phrases.	Can say/ repeat a few words and short simple phrases and would be understood by a sympathetic native speaker.	Can recognise and read out a few familiar words and phrases.
Stage 2	Can understand a range of familiar spoken phrases and is able to listen for specific words and phrases.	Can ask and answer simple questions and give basic information. Can pronounce familiar words and some new words accurately.	Can understand simple written phrases. Can match sounds to familiar written words.
Stage 3	Can understand the main points from a series of spoken sentences (including questions.) May require some repetition.	Can ask and answer simple questions on several topics and can express opinions. Can take part in brief pre-prepared tasks such as short presentations and role plays.	Can understand the main points from a short-written passage in clear printed script. Can use bilingual dictionaries independently. Can apply phonic knowledge to find, understand and/or produce spoken and written words.
Stage 4	Can understand the main points and some detail from a short spoken passage with comprising of familiar language.	Can take part in a simple conversation and can express simple opinions. Generally accurate pronunciation (to a sympathetic native speaker).	Can write two or three short sentences as a personal response, using reference materials / with support. Attempts to use accurately nouns and adjectives and shows awareness of the use of and conjugation of some commonly used and regular verbs in the present tense. Can write a short text attempting to use accurately nouns, adjectives and some commonly used and regular verbs in the present tense on a familiar topic using reference materials, support if necessary.



Primary Languages Network

Source: Primary Languages Network.

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Just to be clear, when we talk about stages, we're talking about the year of language learning. Stage 1 is usually Year 3, but it's not always the case. You could have a Year 6 cohort who are just starting languages – perhaps the school hasn't offered it before. Maybe for whatever reason they've switched from French to German; there's no point starting the children at stage 4 German. That's why we call it 'stage' not 'age', just because it doesn't correlate with Years 3, 4, 5 and 6.

If you look at stage 1, all you're asking the children to do is to listen out for a few familiar words, single words, single set phrases, like, 'My name is ... I live in ...' That might extend to, 'My favourite animal is ...' There are set phrases; we're not expecting them to be listening to great volumes of words, just set phrases, single words, and you can see how that develops. Stage 2 – the second year of compulsory language learning – we're actively listening to a range of spoken phrases now, and picking out specific words and phrases. There is a bit of a gear change between stages 2 and 3... It builds up. If you look at the speaking, it begins with 'say or repeat', so at the starting point we're just mimicking single words or set phrases to begin with, which could be understood by a sympathetic native speaker who can understand what they're trying to say, they get the gist of the idea. You know what it's like when you travel abroad and you make an effort, you try to speak a different language, and you get the right outcome or the right response – you've cracked it. It doesn't have to be absolutely 100% perfect, it doesn't have to be perfectly pronounced; it's about being understood, it's about communication. Asking and answering simple questions and giving basic information, that basic transactional language.

We then cover several topics and broaden the content; we might be able to express our opinion on foods, on hobbies, on sports, on colours. It might be that the children work together in pairs or groups on a very short spoken piece, and then they use a green screen app, or a ChatterPix app, which ours love because they can animate little puppets, or toys, or their water bottles, and record themselves, and play it back. It can be a brief, pre-prepared task, such as a short presentation.

As it moves to stage 4, we're looking at improving that pronunciation; that's really where the phonics is helpful. So, they can express ideas, maybe adding those conjunctions in the middle to lengthen what they say. The same applies to reading, so it starts at word level, and goes all

the way through to understanding longer passages of text. When we talk about reading at an extended level, so maybe by stages 3 and 4, we're really using what we call 'language detective skills' or 'reading detective skills'. It's very much how we teach guided reading in English. We would be asking the children firstly to skim and scan for what they already learned. This is a skill I believe that secondary will also endorse, so it's great practice for them to be learning how to do it at such a young age. Then we ask them to find cognate words, so the words that are the same or similar in the target language and in English. We talk them through how to spot cognate words: 'Who can spot the cognate words? Is this a cognate? Is it a near cognate because it might be slightly different, have a different ending or a different pronunciation?' Then there's non-cognate, words that look nothing like the English version. We get them to find those first, then to use the context of the text to work out the rest of the words, so not thinking they've got to understand every word. I read a book as an adult and I don't understand every word; doesn't mean that I don't understand the story. It's all those skills which are then transferable to any language, any reading that they might be doing, and just good habits to get into.

It is about the language learning having a purpose, so it's not just learning for learning's sake, but it's what you can do with it. That is what motivates pupils. Michael Wardle, the lead for languages for Ofsted, coined the phrase, 'What's left in the sieve.' I suppose what he means by that is, 'We throw all this content at them, and we give all these lovely active learning experiences, but what can they still remember and still retain by the end of it? By the end of the week, by the end of the month, by the end of the year?' I suppose that is where language needs to have a purpose, and we need to keep revisiting language, and keep using it in different ways, and asking different questions. We need to get the children to really think back to what they can still do and still say; that's not to say that if they still can't remember something from last week, I can't move on and so we don't then give them any more content. Rather, it's about making that curriculum cyclical, if you like, so always having a chance to look back and re-encounter what you have already learned. Having purpose is important. If you're teaching a lot of vocabulary – for example, all the items you might find in a pencil case – it's less important to know all the names, but more important to do something with it, and

extend that into a sentence, so, 'In my pencil case, I have ...' or 'Please can I have ...' or 'I would like ...'

If you're not using the online lesson, and you're a Year 3 teacher, and you've got the children in front of you, and it's languages hour, how do you teach that? What's the pedagogy that goes with the content?

Well, it's probably about half an hour if you're lucky, and then it's about making every minute count. Those short bursts are probably worth more than a full hour. It'd be amazing to have a full hour, but I don't think many schools have that luxury. It would be thinking about what content you want to teach them; it could be animals, and you would share with them 10 new animal nouns. It's a lot of call and response, listen and repeat. You would make that learning active, so you might put an action to each of the animal nouns. You could ask the children to think of the actions, or just do them yourself and get them to copy. Then to see whether they've grasped some of those nouns early on, we'd do a little formative assessment. I would say to the children, 'When I say the noun, you do the action.' I don't do any physicality, just put my hands behind my back, so I'd say the word, for example, 'le lapin', and then they would have to do the bunny ears for the rabbit, and then we'd swap. I would then just do the action, and then they would say the word. This would be really pacy, so that we could get as much listening to those words and saying of those words done as possible. Then we'll play some games, so it might be a 'Simon Says' game. My favourite resources are some fly swats from the pound shop which are shaped like hands, and they absolutely love it. It's one versus another, they come up to the interactive whiteboard, I call a word, and it's the first one to splat the right picture.

Then we're thinking, right, we know these nouns, we're pretty confident with them, what can we next do with them? It might be that they put the vocabulary into context, through asking and answering the question, 'What's your favourite animal?' So, we'll repeat that question a lot. 'What's your favourite animal? My favourite animal is ...' We're just hearing that answer from everyone in the class. It might be that we work smartly and we use our register time, which is time that can be utilised for languages. Instead of just saying 'good morning' 30 times, can we ask that question in the target language, 'What's your favourite

animal, Chloe?’, and then Chloe replies, ‘My favourite animal is ...’ Someone could be tallying it as we’re going so that we build upon their mathematics skills. They’re hearing that question and answer 30 times, and it’s going in. There are lots of great songs out there, so we might be learning a song about a particular animal, and learn to perform that. We might hear that in assembly at the end of the week, or we might record it and that might go on our Twitter feed for the school. It’s about keeping the outward-facing promotion of languages in mind as well – how we can share and celebrate what we’ve learned in language lessons? Because that really flies the flag for the subjects, but it also really reinforces what the children are learning, because when they go home, they’ll be singing it, they might teach a friend, teach a sibling, exploiting what they know. I think that’s probably half an hour up, then. Then the next week they would come back, and you can’t rush on, you’ve got to make sure that they can still remember those nouns, they can still remember that question phrase, and that answer. But you wouldn’t spend the whole lesson on that again, that might just be your warm-up. It might be an interactive game, it might just be as simple as putting 30 seconds on the clock, and asking the pupils, ‘How many times can you ask and answer that question with a partner.’ The simplest is often the best for recall. The children quite like that pacy element, and that competitive element, and they can see their skills improving over time.

Once you’ve learned about the animals, you might then move on to do some listening. We have a story which is about different animals that someone might see on a journey. It’s all read aloud in the target language. They might be asked to touch their nose, or wiggle their ear, or put their hand in the air whenever they hear an animal, so it’s just something physical that we’re asking them to do. Again, you are assessing formatively; just them listening for those single words, those set phrases, and you detecting who’s able to identify them. Then we might take the structure of a story and come up with our own endings; we might then get the bilingual dictionaries out, which is a real skill and possibly, I would avoid at stage 1.

If you look at stage 4, you will be expecting them to be able to use and accurately find a word in the bilingual dictionary to maybe make up our own versions of this song or this story that we’ve just engaged with. Dictionary work is powerful. There’s an argument that says we don’t use

dictionaries anymore, we Google instead, and I understand that, but I think there's still a benefit to be had from using a dictionary. Knowing that it's two books in one, to start with, in a bilingual dictionary, and knowing what the little 'm' and the little 'f' means, a masculine or a feminine noun. If they're looking up, for example, the word 'bat', and they want to get the animal bat, we teach them how to avoid ending up with the cricket bat word, and I think that's definitely a skill worth learning. We want to be able to accurately use a dictionary by the end of stage 4. We drip-feed dictionary use throughout the four stages, but always emphasising that the first resort is your brain and then your buddy and then your book.

Some of the things you talk about are just the same when it comes to learning music, about embodying the language, the sounds. It's exactly the same as the techniques used in music. And you're applying so much of what you've done when you're teaching English, when you're teaching listening, speaking, reading, writing. English is all around you, yet this new language is something that's completely alien, so it's far more abstract for the children. On the one hand, you can apply things, but on another hand, you've got to consider the fact of how new this is. What are the cognitive barriers to teaching a language to children this young?

If it sounds different, they've got to put meaning to those sounds; they're hearing those words, but their noise rather than their meaning. We're teaching them right from the start that they're listening out for what they can understand, so just those single words, those single phrases, the bits they do understand, and not to worry about the rest that becomes white noise, if you like. So that's the first barrier. The second barrier is possible influence by adults who feel that they can't achieve in languages and who maybe project that attitude on to children, which is a real shame because they pick up such a lot, don't they, from grown-ups? If we say, 'I was rubbish at languages at school,' or 'I can't speak Spanish, so I can't help you with your homework,' or 'I can't help you with the home learning,' then often the children will feel there's no point. That becomes a barrier, so I think we've got to, as adults, put our anxieties to one side,

in a way, and see the value of learning a language ourselves to be able to pass that on to our children.

A teacher who's coming to languages for the first time – maybe they've had the responsibility dumped on them – how do you help them to fall in love with languages? What is the gift we're giving young people with these skills?

The Chinese proverb comes to mind, 'If you learn a second language, you're able to see the world through another set of eyes,' and what we've not mentioned so far is the cultural understanding that comes with teaching languages at primary. It comes hand in hand with language learning. We try to make sure that we are interlacing that intercultural understanding throughout the curriculum. We're comparing and contrasting what our life is like with life elsewhere in the world. For example, it might be Epiphany. We've just learned about Epiphany in January. It's not something that we tend to celebrate very much, well, certainly in my culture, but some other children may recognise it from their own cultures and be able to draw on that experience. The target-language country that we're looking at might have a rich, enjoyable celebration that you can just pick up and run with in the classroom. One lesson that really stands out for me is about the Epiphany tradition where there's a little toy baked in a cake and the head of the family cuts it into pieces. To prevent anyone from cheating and getting the piece with the toy in it – because they become the king or the queen for the day if they get it – the youngest member of the family hides under the table. They call out family members as the cake is cut and given out, and then they all eat at the same time, and whoever's found the toy is crowned king or queen for the day and treated like royalty. I do this with my class, and it's not the day, it's the 40 minutes, and it's not a real cake, we pretend, but we work out who the youngest is and they actually hide under the table. Then we're revisiting all those different family-member nouns and they're calling out, 'maman, papa, grand-mère, grand-père,' and we're pretending to hand out the cake, pretending to eat it, and pretending to find the little toy. That's something that really stays with the children. It's about having that awareness, that respect for other cultures, the way things are done elsewhere, and making those links with your own. Actually, becoming more proud of your own and saying,

‘Well, actually, we do pantomimes at Christmas.’ No other country really does pantomimes, and that’s a tradition and a cultural element that we need to be proud of. Crackers as well. I don’t think any other country actually pulls a cracker and tells a joke and wears a crown, so it makes you become aware of your own unique culture.

What do you do to create a safe culture in the classroom for speaking and listening in languages?

Not every child will naturally want to stand up and speak or to make these sounds. Not every child *will be able* to replicate these sounds. They’ve got to feel like they are comfortable enough to have a go and it doesn’t matter if they make a mistake or it’s not perfect, and I think that comes from you as the practitioner. I don’t have perfect pronunciation, and I will tell the children that. I often need a little bit of help from the sound buttons or to look up a word in the dictionary. Again, that’s helpful for the children to know that you don’t know it all and actually, you do make mistakes, and we learn from those mistakes and that’s okay. It’s important that children get the chance to practise. Lower down the school, it might be that a child doesn’t want to talk to you in a different language. Maybe they don’t want to talk to you in their home language. It might be that you use things like puppets or animations or partner work before you persuade them. You don’t really want to make them/force them to speak to you or to anybody else, so it’s about opportunities to practise first and, like you say, to feel that there is a safe culture to have a go and not to worry about it not being 100% perfect. We have something called ‘language detectives’. Each week we award a certificate; sometimes I get the children to pick who they feel deserves the certificate. We’re hoping to develop what we call ‘language ambassadors’ throughout the school, which are essentially like monitors’ roles. Maybe two or three children in each class who are looking out in their language lessons for children who they feel deserve the certificate each week. As part of the language-learning skills it could be that a child spotted some cognates or some near-cognates, or they’ve made a link with a word that’s very similar to a word in their home language, or they’ve used really good educational guesses to work out something, or they’ve had a go and they’ve been confident enough not to be shy, not to think, ‘Oh, I don’t want to try it in case I get it wrong.’ They’ve embraced that safe culture

and had a go and have maybe stepped out of that comfort zone. We try and recognise that as part of what we call 'language detective skills'. In grown-up speak, they are what we call transferable skills. Sometimes the children, or even teachers, were worried that the children are learning one language at primary and then they go on to secondary and it's a different language. What I would try to say to them is, 'Not to worry, not to have a hang-up about that because actually, the skills that you are developing, you can pick them up and you can move them to any other language. It's the knowledge of how language works and the knowledge of having a go, learning from your mistakes, enjoying it, which is going to work for you.'

How do you assess in primary languages?

Most of it is formative, during the lesson, during your game of 'Simon Says'. You say, 'Jacques a dit toucher la tête,' and everyone apart from a few people will be touching their head; then you know who hasn't quite got that. We try to do some self-assessment as well; we have a document which we call 'Tracking Clouds'. It's basically 'I can' child-friendly statements with maybe 10 different statements of what you hope they will achieve during the block or during the unit. Every so often, we'll go back to this document and see whether the children themselves feel that they can, for example, count to 30, or can say where they live, or can express their opinion. They traffic light that as to how confident they feel they are in that skill. It's not stipulated that we need to assess in languages, but as practitioners, you will want to know that your children are making progress.

We have an assessment in all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It could be at the end of every block or could just be once a term. I think three over the year would track the progress the children have made in all four skills. We call it 'Puzzle it Out', so the children don't even see them as assessments; they just see them as puzzles. It's all done in one session, and they're just like what they've done in every other session. The listening task might be, 'Listen to the audio and draw the monster that you can hear being described.' It might say that the monster has three eyes and two heads and four arms, and they've got to draw it, so that's fun, and that's very primary.

Then the speaking one, well, this is often the trickiest one because you've got a class full of 30. How do you assess 30 children speaking?

Again, we're making the children more independent and we say, 'You're going to assess your partner here, so give them some time, give them some preparation, tell them what you're looking for.' The task might be, 'Describe the monster and give four details,' to give them some practice and then have a go. Their partner will write down what their partner says and they will grade red, amber, or green, or it might be a smiley face or a straight-line face, or it'll be a mark out of 10 on how they feel they've done with that task. Obviously, you are going to want to maybe listen in to what we call 'borderlines'. At the end of the day, you want to come out with 'emerging', 'meeting' or 'exceeding'. Sometimes called 'working towards', 'age-related expectation' and 'greater depth'. It depends how you class it, but there are basically three attainment levels. If you feel like your teacher understanding of a particular child could just be on the cusp, then you might use a spotlight hand; I say, 'My spotlight hand might come round and want to listen in to some of these descriptions or some of these conversations.' If you know that you need to listen in to somebody, then you've got that opportunity to listen, to jot down, and to come up with your own judgement.

The reading task, again, might only be two or three sentences or a short paragraph and you might be asking them to pull out three details, three colour words, three numbers, three elements of a description. Then the writing task is usually on a similar topic, so you could say, 'Describe your monster,' or describe your character, your alien, whatever it is, 'and give three or four details.' They're all based on a theme. They're all very doable because they're the kind of things we've done before, and actually, what you can do then is, literally, on an A4 piece of paper, as a teacher, I will look through them, see how well they've done with each of the tasks, and I would give my outcome: 'emerging', 'meeting' or 'exceeding'.

Tell us, what do you think are the three most important reasons and most valuable reasons for learning a language at primary?

Number one has to be that communication element because during the pandemic, we missed so much social communication, that human contact. It's about being able to communicate, that transactional language, eliciting a response, finding out something for yourself.

Number two is those language-learning skills for life that you can then take away with you and use in so many different areas to help you learn a whole range of subjects. Number three is fostering that love of languages and that keen motivation to go on and find out more – to see beyond our own community and our own culture.

All pupils should learn a language. Languages are integral to the national curriculum and part of a broad and balanced curriculum, so we should be teaching languages to every single child. The scheme of work that I use, it has differentiation built-in, and often it's what we call a 'no-ceilings' approach. It might be a writing task where the children can achieve by following the pattern; we call it rainbow sentences. They can follow the pattern of the rainbow and select something from the red column, something from the orange, something from the yellow, and they will write grammatically accurate sentences in the target language. That's a huge sense of achievement then. Then, for your higher achievers and your rapid graspers, they can continue and go right to the end of the rainbow colours, and maybe with a conjunction, link two sentences together.

Enrichment is the icing on the cake of the languages curriculum. That can be different things to different people, but it might be as simple as singing the song that you've learned in your language lessons at the start of assembly. It could be making a link with a school, not necessarily in the target-language country, although that would be amazing if you could, but a school in a different area of the UK that's in a different context with a very different community, but they're also learning the same language as you. Being able to share and email across examples of work, some sound files of recordings. We have native-speaking parents who we invite into school to talk about their real-life experience of a different language, a different culture. The European Day of Languages helps spotlight the subject. It might be a half-a-day focus or a full-day focus where teachers come off timetable and deliver a series of activities. Say you have a colleague who's really mad keen on a Spanish football team and they want to do an activity that's penalty shoot-out orientated with a bit of language in there and some scoring. They could do that activity, talk about the team, the colours of the kit, and where they're based, and they could run that activity several times with different groups. Then another activity could be role play. It could be a French café. It could be learn a new language. It could be based on flags/geography. Links with

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artists from different countries. There's so much scope, and I think those are the things that the children remember when they go home because it's a bit different, it's very memorable, it's fun, and it'll stay with them.

Languages: background

From the 1830s, French and German began to be offered in the emerging major public schools. The second half of the 20th century shifted to become more inclusive and languages were offered in all comprehensive schools, to pupils across the full ability range.

For a while, as part of the national curriculum introduced in 1988, most pupils learned a foreign language. In 2004, however, a language ceased to be compulsory at GCSE, although a language should still be taken until age 14. A language is now included in the EBacc, which pupils in England will earn by studying English, mathematics, science, history or geography and a language until they are aged 16. To help us get our bearings, it is worth quoting the purpose of languages from the national curriculum programme of study:

'Learning a foreign language is a liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world. The teaching should enable pupils to express their ideas and thoughts in another language and to understand and respond to its speakers, both in speech and in writing. It should also provide opportunities for them to communicate for practical purposes, learn new ways of thinking and read great literature in the original language. Language teaching should provide the foundation for learning further languages, equipping pupils to study and work in other countries.'¹

Once the importance statements have been revisited, it is helpful for subject leaders and co-ordinators to discuss and agree with colleagues

¹ Department for Education. (2013) *Languages programmes of study: key stage 2*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239042/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_Languages.pdf (Accessed: 24 February 2022).

on the reason why their subject, in this case languages, is important for the pupils in their school. One way of doing this is to draw on a quote, in this case a Czech proverb: 'You live a new life for every language you speak. If you only know one language, you only live once.' This kind of prompt allows us to formulate our way of stating the importance of the subject. We might agree or disagree with such a statement and in doing so come to a form of words that expresses our view of the importance of this subject, in this school. This moves us away from the territory of 'we teach this subject because of the SATs or GCSEs'. While the external tests and exams are important, they are not the totality of the subject.

Professional communities

Subject associations are important because at the heart of their work is curriculum thinking, development and resources. The subject association for languages is the Association for Language Learning and it should be the case that any member of staff with responsibility for a subject should be a member of the relevant subject association, paid for by the school.

Twitter subject communities are important for the development of subject knowledge because it is here that there are lively debates about what to teach, how to teach and the kinds of resources that are helpful. For languages, it is worth following @All4Language and the hashtags #MFLchat, #MFLTwitterati and #Languages.

There is an excellent example of drawing in pupils, in *Telling Tales in Latin*, a clever book about Ovid who writes stories that introduce pupils to vocabulary and grammar in a structured, careful way. Right from the start, pupils are encouraged to see the links between the Latin vocabulary and words in English. What this means is that, very early on, pupils gain confidence because they realise that they can begin to make sense of it. And the great thing is that the teacher does not need to know Latin in order to work through the activities with pupils.

Interestingly, the programme of study at KS2 allows for the teaching of any modern or ancient language. There are excellent resources for teaching Latin to young children. Minimus is a Latin course based on a real family who lived at Vindolanda in 100 AD: Flavius, the fort commander, his wife Lepidina, their three children, assorted household slaves, their cat Vibrissa, and Minimus the mouse. It is a great way in,

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not just to the language but to the lives and preoccupations of Romans living in England 2000 years ago.

Links

BBC Primary Languages – <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/subjects/zq6pyrd>

Mama Lisa's World: International music and culture – www.bit.ly/3k10yVr

DuoLingo, a free language learning app – www.duolingo.com

Teaching Latin to Primary Children – www.bit.ly/3iWq7Yh

St Peter's Latin programme for KS2 – www.bit.ly/3mec3vd

Curriculum 2014 Best Practice – Foreign Languages – www.bit.ly/3srJvzv

Goethe Institut: German for children – www.bit.ly/2VXw7qN

Spanish resources – www.bit.ly/37TFCtS

Italian resources – www.bit.ly/3gc1khf

The Primary Languages Network – www.primarylanguages.network