

Do primary schools have to teach a foreign language?

At the moment, foreign languages are not statutory at primary school. However, Michael Gove, the Secretary of State, recently confirmed that foreign languages will be compulsory for Year 3–6 when the new National Curriculum comes into force in September 2014.

The new foreign languages Programme of Study will require pupils to:

- ❖ Speak in sentences with appropriate pronunciation
- ❖ Express simple ideas with clarity
- ❖ Write phrases and short sentences from memory
- ❖ Develop an understanding of basic grammar
- ❖ Learn songs and poems in the language studied.

Under the plans, schools will be able to decide which language (modern or ancient) their pupils should be taught. To ensure pupils build a good foundation, teaching should focus on just one language.

PE warm up in French

Teach a simple PE warm-up using basic French vocabulary:

<i>marchez</i>	<i>walk</i>
<i>sautez</i>	<i>jump</i>
<i>plus vite</i>	<i>faster</i>
<i>plus lent</i>	<i>slower</i>
<i>arrêtez</i>	<i>stop</i>
<i>frappez</i>	<i>clap</i>
<i>touchez</i>	<i>touch</i>
<i>la tête</i>	<i>the head</i>
<i>les pieds</i>	<i>the feet</i>
<i>le nez</i>	<i>the nose</i>
<i>les genoux</i>	<i>the knees</i>

TRY THIS!

10 Reasons for Teaching Foreign Languages in Primary Schools

1. Learning a new language is fun!

Games and activities lend themselves naturally to language learning. Repetition and practice are essential in language learning, so games requiring lots of repetition, such as Lotto, Simon Says and Chinese Whispers are all ideal. We've included a few of our favourite ideas on this pamphlet.

2. It's best to start early

Primary pupils are very receptive to learning a new language. They are willing and able to mimic pronunciation without the inhibitions and self-consciousness of older students. They enjoy playing with the language and pick it up very quickly. Their sensitive ears help them pick up on and duplicate tricky sounds that adults, and even adolescents, often stumble over.

3. Develops self-confidence

Children gain a great sense of accomplishment from learning to say something in a foreign language – it's like learning to crack a code! Language learning also provides frequent opportunities to perform before an audience. This nurtures pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence and develops strong interpersonal skills.

What's in the bag?

Secretly place an object in a bag. Allow the children a certain number of questions to guess what it is. You can only answer 'yes' or 'no'. Questions can vary depending on the ability of the children. Simple questions could be 'Is it big?' or 'Is it brown?' More complex ones could be 'Does it swim in the sea?' or 'Does it have long ears?'

TRY THIS!

Point to a card

Position flashcards for the vocabulary you want to practise around the room. Say a word then ask the children to point to the correct word. Children love it when you speed up this activity and keep repeating the same word in succession.

TRY THIS!

4. Enriches and enhances children's mental development

International studies have shown repeatedly that foreign language learning increases critical thinking skills, creativity, and flexibility of mind in young children. Pupils who learn a foreign language do better on both verbal and maths tests than those that don't. Learning a foreign language actually increases the density of 'grey matter' in the brain and the number of synapses, that interconnect parts of the brain.

5. Improves children's understanding of English

Through studying a foreign language, grammatical concepts and rules in English become clearer. Children use what they learn in one language to reinforce what they've learned in another.

6. Encourages positive attitudes to foreign languages

Having a positive attitude has been shown to be a crucial factor in determining children's success in foreign language learning. By showing children that language learning can be fun, pupils will approach secondary school language lessons with greater enthusiasm and anticipation.

Pause and say

Children play in pairs. One says a sentence or phrase in the target language, then presses a pretend pause button. The other child has to repeat the sentence or phrase, but only when his/her partner releases the 'button'. Challenge pairs to extend the length of the pause. Start with 5 seconds and build up. This is a surprisingly challenging activity.

TRY THIS!

7. Broadens children's horizons

Language learning is more than just learning to speak and write in a different language. Learning about festivals and traditions from countries where the language is spoken helps children appreciate other cultures so that they can take a place in our global society.

Longest sentence

Challenge children to write the longest sentence they can and then read it aloud. Tell them it must be grammatically correct, including the punctuation.

TRY THIS!

8. The ideal place to start

In primary schools, children typically spend the whole day with one class teacher who covers the whole curriculum. This is ideal for foreign language learning as teachers can exploit many opportunities to integrate foreign language into everyday classroom routines (such as calling the register), and into other lessons (such as counting in the foreign language during PE lessons or designing a replacement for the Eiffel Tower in Design & Technology). A class teacher who teaches everything, including the foreign language, helps reinforce the hidden message that 'everyone can do it.'

9. Helps children in later careers

Primary school might seem a bit early to start thinking about what career a child might have as an adult. However, as the world becomes more global, businesses and public organizations will need more people who can communicate in other languages, and are aware of different cultures.

10. It's great when you go on holiday!

The whole purpose of learning a foreign language becomes obvious when you have a chance to use it. It is so satisfying to be able to go into a baker's shop in France, ask for a croissant, and actually be understood. But, it's not always necessary to go abroad to have real experiences of communicating in a foreign language. Schools can invite native speakers into the classroom or establish pen pal links with schools abroad.