

10 Reasons for Teaching Foreign Languages in Primary Schools

Foreign Languages are in the National Curriculum from September 2014

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.

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.

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.

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.

8. The ideal place to start

In primary schools, children typically spend most of the 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.

We have been championing the importance of primary MFL since 2001, so we are absolutely delighted that foreign languages will now be part of the KS2 curriculum. Schools may teach any modern or ancient language, and should focus on enabling pupils to make substantial progress in one language. The focus of study should be on practical communication, both spoken and written.

In particular, pupils should be taught to:

- ❖ Listen attentively to spoken language
- ❖ Explore the patterns and sounds of language
- ❖ Engage in conversations; ask and answer questions
- ❖ Speak in sentences, using familiar vocabulary, phrases and basic language
- ❖ Develop accurate pronunciation and intonation
- ❖ Present ideas and information orally to a range of audiences
- ❖ Read carefully and show understanding of words, phrases and simple writing
- ❖ Appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes
- ❖ Broaden their vocabulary
- ❖ Write phrases from memory, and adapt these to create new sentences, to express ideas clearly
- ❖ Describe people, places, things and actions orally and in writing
- ❖ Understand basic grammar

Join up the words

Make a set of cards with a word on each, then cut each card in two. Ask children to reconstruct the words by putting the two halves together correctly. For less able children, put images on the cards as well.

TRY THIS!

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!

But how do you find the right resources to help you develop your pupils' confidence in writing and speaking a foreign language?

Well, first of all, we'd recommend that you take an audit of the language skills of your staff. This might determine what language is best for you to focus on.

If you have a skills shortage, are there training courses your staff could go on? If none of your staff know how to speak a foreign language, perhaps you could look at bringing in a language specialist. Have you considered approaching your local secondary school? They might be able to help.

Secondly, you will need to take an audit of the foreign language resources you already have in the school.

The handy reference chart inside this leaflet shows you how our key books link to the KS2 Programmes of Study in the new National Curriculum. Altogether we have over 70 titles for teaching French, Spanish, German and Italian.

If your staff are not confident about teaching a foreign language, the quality of the resources you choose becomes even more important. Brilliant Publications' foreign language resources are designed to support non-specialist teachers. You will find details of all our books on our website and in our catalogue.

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!

How our books link to the KS2 Programmes of Study in the new National Curriculum

French 														
Spanish 														
German 														
Italian 														

Pupils should be taught to:														
Listen attentively to spoken language	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓	✓	
Explore the patterns and sounds of languages	✓		✓		✓		✓							
Engage in conversations; ask and answer questions	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓					✓	
Speak in sentences, using familiar vocabulary	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓				✓		
Develop accurate pronunciation and intonation	✓	✓				✓								
Present ideas and information orally	✓			✓						✓	✓			
Read carefully and show understanding	✓							✓				✓	✓	
Appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes	✓		✓											
Broaden their vocabulary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Write phrases from memory	✓							✓			✓			
Describe people, places, things and actions	✓	✓												✓
Understand basic grammar	✓										✓			✓