
LANGUAGE LEARNING PROVISION AT KEY STAGE 2: FINDINGS FROM THE 2006 SURVEY

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Introduction

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) is conducting research on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills to assess:

- the nature and extent of language learning provision at Key Stage 2 in schools in England, and
- progress towards the national target of entitlement to language learning in class time for all pupils in Key Stage 2 by 2010.

The research consists of an annual survey of a nationally representative sample of primary schools in England to be conducted in the autumn term of 2006, 2007 and 2008.

This research brief reports on findings from the 2006 survey. A full report on findings from all three years will be published in spring 2009.

Key findings

The 2006 survey indicated that:

- 70 per cent of schools were providing primary languages within class time, and 36 per cent as extra-curricular activities.
- For each year group, just under half of schools were providing the national entitlement; 34 per cent of schools were providing it for all year groups.

Methodology

The 2006 survey was conducted by a questionnaire which was sent to a representative sample of 8,000 schools in England in autumn 2006, and the response rate was 48 per cent. At the same time, a questionnaire was sent to all local authorities (LAs) in England, and 70 per cent responded.

It was recognised that schools already delivering primary languages might be more likely to complete the questionnaire. To address the possible resulting bias, a representative subsample of 500 schools was selected, and data was collected from all of the schools in this 'target' group, by means of telephone enquiries where necessary. Relevant findings from the full survey have been weighted according to the results from the target group.

All schools which responded to this year's survey, as well as all schools in the target group, will be invited to take part in follow-up surveys in 2007 and 2008 in order to track progress over time.

Findings from this research will be compared to findings from a baseline study conducted in 2002/03 by Driscoll et al. (2004).

Main Findings

Progress in provision of primary languages

Of the main sample, 81 per cent of schools were providing primary languages within class time, and 38 per cent as extra-curricular activities. Within the target group, the figures were 70 per cent and 36 per cent respectively, which is probably a more accurate reflection of the national picture. Even so, it represents a dramatic increase since 2002/03, when a baseline study reported that 44 per cent of KS2 pupils in England were receiving some primary language provision.

French was by far the most popular language, offered by 91 per cent of schools providing primary languages. Spanish (25 per cent) was second, and German (12 per cent) third. Choice of language was determined by the availability of teachers and resources, and the languages taught in local secondary schools.

Schools believed that the main aims of primary language teaching and learning are to develop enthusiasm for language learning, to develop speaking and listening skills, and to learn about/understand other cultures. The main reasons given by schools for **not** offering primary languages were 'other curriculum priorities' and 'no teachers available'.

Primary language teaching in class time was strongest in the north (offered by more than 75 per cent of schools in the north-east and north-west) and weakest in the east of England and the West Midlands (60 per cent or less).

Delivery of primary languages

Language teaching was most commonly carried out by class teachers with appropriate background and/or training. The majority of schools reported providing 30-60 minutes of language teaching per week.

For each year group, about two-thirds of the schools provided discrete language lessons, and almost half of the schools provided discrete language lessons for **all** year groups. In nearly all cases, the whole year group was involved. The most common pattern was one lesson per week. About a quarter of schools were offering language-based extra-curricular activities, but the participation rate was typically low.

Schools reported challenges related to staffing, curriculum time and finance, but on the whole more than three-quarters were at least 'quite confident' about the sustainability of their current arrangements for language provision.

More than half of the schools received external support from their LA, and a third from local secondary schools. The most common forms of support were LA advisers and links with secondary teachers. Only 20 per cent of schools were receiving specific funding, but almost half said they would like to receive funding.

The Key Stage 2 Framework for Languages was used by two-thirds of the schools. Half referred to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) schemes of work, and nearly as many mentioned commercially available or locally produced schemes of work. Electronic resources were popular.

Only about 20 per cent of schools offering language provision responded to a question about monitoring and assessment; half of these were using their own materials to measure progress. It appears from this that relatively few schools were monitoring pupils' progress in language learning, which may impact on pupils' opportunities to achieve a recognised level of competence in a language.

Transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 was supported by pupil visits to secondary schools, or secondary teacher visits to primary schools (over a third of schools in each case), but relatively few respondents mentioned specifically language-based transfer activities.

Progress towards primary languages entitlement

The national entitlement is a commitment that all Key Stage 2 pupils will have the opportunity to learn a language, at least in part in class time, by 2010. For each year group, just under half of the schools surveyed were providing the national entitlement. One third (34 per cent) were providing it for all year groups.

It appeared that schools making greatest progress towards the national entitlement were those which had written policies on language teaching, received external support from the LA and/or linked secondary schools, and had languages delivered by class teachers with appropriate background and/or training. Those making least progress were those

with the lowest achievement levels and the highest proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals.

Of those not yet providing the national entitlement, two-thirds had plans to do so, and most were confident of reaching it by 2010. They reported that increased funding, qualified adults to teach languages and external support would most help them to progress towards the national entitlement.

The local authority survey

Of the 105 responding LAs, just over a third had a primary language policy or curriculum guidance document. More than half said that languages were being taught in class time in more than 60 per cent of their schools. Overall, responses from LAs give a lower estimate of the proportion of schools that were teaching primary languages in class time than the responses from schools, which suggests either that LAs were unaware of what was happening in some schools, or that they were operating with a stricter understanding of providing foreign language teaching within class time.

Almost all of the LAs said that they funded meetings for teachers, and a large majority (over 80 per cent in each case) said that they funded pedagogical training, teaching demonstrations, one-to-one support, networks and primary-secondary links. Three-quarters of the LAs said that they had their own bank or library of resources available to support primary teachers with language teaching.

Almost all of the LAs had provided training since September 2002 for those involved in teaching primary languages. The proportion of schools involved varied, but half of the LAs said that over 60 per cent of schools had taken part. Almost three-quarters of LAs said that they actively supported teachers in using e-learning in teaching primary languages.

Only three LAs felt that the national entitlement had been reached in their authorities, but over 90 per cent reported specific plans to extend primary language provision. In the view of LA respondents, the factors which would lead to an increase in primary language teaching at Key Stage 2 related to staffing, training and funding.

Fifteen of the responding LAs were KS2 Language Learning Pathfinder authorities. They believed that the pathfinder programme had kickstarted

provision, enabled networking, and raised the profile of primary languages. It had contributed to the sustainability of primary language teaching by supporting the training/professional development of teachers and networking with other interested schools. The perceived main inhibitors to sustainability related to staffing or funding.

Recommendations

Schools should be encouraged and supported to monitor pupils' progress in language learning, and give them opportunities to achieve a recognised level of competence.

Support from LAs needs to be targeted at schools likely to be most in need of help. In particular, there are opportunities for LAs to provide more support in the crucial area of teacher training for primary languages.

There is also scope for interchange of information between primary and secondary schools. Schools may need additional support to ensure that language teaching can be rolled out to all year groups in Key Stage 2, and particularly in Year 6, in preparation for transfer to secondary school.

References

Driscoll, P., Jones, J. and Macrory, G. (2004). *The Provision of Foreign Language Learning for Pupils at Key Stage 2* (DfES Research Report 572). London: DfES.

Additional Information

Copies of this Research Brief (RBX02-07) 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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