



BRITISH
COUNCIL

Language Trends 2022

Language teaching in
primary and secondary
schools in England

Survey report by Ian Collen

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The British Council builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the United Kingdom (UK) and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.

Introduction

The year 2022 has seen the biggest ever response rate to Language Trends. It is a pivotal time for language learning in England's schools; Head teachers in primary and Heads of Modern Foreign Languages in secondary clearly want their voices to be heard.

Now celebrating its twentieth birthday, Language Trends is an annual survey of primary and secondary schools in England, designed to gather information about the situation for language teaching and learning. Its aims are: (i) to assess the impact of policy measures in relation to languages; and, (ii) to analyse strengths and weaknesses based both on quantitative evidence and on views expressed by teachers. Since 2015 there has also been an annual survey in Wales, and since 2019 a biennial survey in Northern Ireland; reports can be found on the corresponding country's British Council website. The Language Trends series shows general shifts in data and seeks to provide a springboard for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policy makers, school pupils and the general public to consider particular aspects of language learning more deeply.

On behalf of the British Council and Queen's University Belfast, we would like to put on record our sincere thanks to teachers for participating in our research, especially during such a busy and unpredictable school year as the country begins to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. Without teachers' participation, our research would not be possible.

Headline findings

The headline findings for 2022 include:

- Four out of five responding primary schools have been teaching languages for more than five years.
- There is a great deal of variation in the amount of time devoted to languages in different primary schools across the country. Some pupils receive less than 30 minutes per week.
- The trend in all school types is that an increasing number of schools are reporting no international engagement.
- Our data show that the government is not on target to meet its EBacc targets for numbers of pupils taking a GCSE in a language.
- Spanish is now firmly established as the most popular A level language in England.

Policy context and background

The National Curriculum must be taught in all local authority maintained schools in England and the National Curriculum Framework stipulates that languages are compulsory from ages 7 – 14:

Table 1: National Curriculum Requirements to Study a Language

Key Stage	Year Groups	Age of pupils	National Curriculum Requirement to Study a Language
1	1 – 2	5 – 7	None
2	3 – 6	7 – 11	Study an ancient language or a modern foreign language
3	7 – 9	11 – 14	Study a modern foreign language
4	10 – 11	14 – 16	None (but encouraged as part of EBacc, see below)

The majority of state secondary schools in England are academies, which are exempt from following the National Curriculum, although in practice many do.

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc), a performance measure for schools rather than a qualification in itself, was introduced in 2010 and encourages all pupils to study a GCSE¹ in English language, English literature, mathematics, the sciences, a language (ancient or modern) and geography or history. The aim behind the EBacc is to keep young people's options open for further study and their future careers. The government's ambition is to see 75% of pupils studying the EBacc subject combination at GCSE by 2022, for award of qualifications in 2024; and 90% by 2025, for award of qualifications in 2027. The government is currently on track to meet all of its EBacc targets, with the exception of languages.

The Teaching Schools Council (2016) commissioned a review of current teaching and effective pedagogy of foreign languages at secondary school level in Key Stages 3 and 4. The results and a set of recommendations were published in the 'Modern Foreign Languages Pedagogy Review', noting that fewer than half of pupils at the time sat a GCSE in a language.

As an outworking of this review, the £4.8 million National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP)² was set up in December 2018 with a mission to improve language curriculum design and pedagogy, leading to a higher take up and greater success at GCSE. NCELP is funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and co-directed by The University of York and The Cam Academy Trust. It supports 45 schools, training and providing French, German and Spanish teaching resources to teachers for free. It currently covers Key Stage 3 and will expand to Key Stage 4 for over 1,350 teachers nationally.

In November 2019, the DfE announced that it would be convening an independent expert panel to test and develop potential changes to the subject content for French, German and Spanish GCSEs. The panel's subsequent recommendations were subject to a 10-week public consultation between March 2021 and May 2021 and the government has now published its response to the consultation. At the same time, Ofsted³ (2021) published its Curriculum Research Review (OCRR) for Languages with a focus on the three 'pillars' of phonics, vocabulary and grammar.

For first teaching from September 2024, with first award in Summer 2026, linguistic content for GCSEs in French, German and Spanish will focus on the most commonly occurring vocabulary of each language, with 1,700 words at Higher Tier and 1,200 words at Foundation Tier. Vocabulary and grammatical requirements for each tier will be clearly defined in the specification, set by awarding bodies. Pupils will be expected to know and use the specified linguistic content receptively and productively in the oral and written modalities, with an approximately equal emphasis on each. Any words outside of the prescribed list on examination papers will be glossed.

There is continued investment in the £16.4 million Mandarin Excellence Programme, a unique yet intensive language programme, which now has over 6,500 pupils from 75 schools in England. It is funded by the Department for Education and delivered by the UCL Institute of Education in partnership with the British Council. From September 2022, a similar £4 million programme will run for Latin, delivered by Future Academies, with an aim of 'levelling-up' and allowing more state school pupils to learn the ancient language.

¹ GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education; the main qualification taken at age 16 in England.

² See: <https://ncelp.org/>

³ Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.

Languages remain strategically important for the future of England. A recent study (Ayres-Bennett et al., 2022) found that languages play a significant role in international trade and that not sharing a common language acts as a non-tariff trade barrier. A key finding of the study is that investing in languages education in the UK will most likely return more than the investment cost, even under conservative assumptions. The benefit-to-cost ratios are estimated to be at least 2:1 for promoting Arabic, French, Mandarin or Spanish education, meaning that spending £1 could return approximately £2.

This year's Language Trends England therefore comes at an important time as the country starts to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and we strengthen our position on the world stage.

Research outline

The British Council contracted NICILT⁴ at Queen's University Belfast to conduct the Language Trends England 2022 research. Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. All participants gave their voluntary and informed consent to take part and the project was conducted to the highest ethical standards.

As in previous years, the research question guiding the study was 'what is the current situation for language teaching and learning in state primary, state secondary and independent schools in England?' The methodology was in keeping with previous series of Language Trends, using questionnaires to survey schools. The questionnaires were developed in autumn 2021 in consultation with an Advisory Panel who represented, among others, practising school teachers, subject associations, school leadership associations, Ofsted, the Department for Education and representatives of higher education.

The survey (using questionnaires) was carried out from mid-January to mid-February 2022. Schools were invited by email to participate, using the Department for Education's (DfE) official Register of Educational Establishments in England. We are delighted that 2022 saw the biggest ever response rate to Language Trends. After data sets had been cleaned, a total of 1,693 schools took part (compared to 1,511 schools in 2021), of which 735 were state primary schools, 769 state secondary schools and 189 independent schools.

Table 2: Overall response rates by sector

Response rates	Primary	State Secondary	Independent
	12%	27%	33%

Univariate and some multivariate analysis was performed on the quantitative data to identify overall trends; qualitative comments were analysed by means of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using deductive coding.

⁴ Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research. See: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/nicilt/>

Findings from the primary school survey

Profile of responding schools

The survey was sent to 6,000 state primary schools in England. The main selection criterion was ‘schools with pupils from five to eleven years of age’. It is acknowledged that this meant middle schools and those primary schools which do not cover the full age range were not included: a particular issue in the North of England, where there are a number of middle and junior high schools. In future years of Language Trends, we hope to be able to include such schools, as we are keen to hear from all sectors. It is pleasing that responding schools represented all areas of the country and there is no single area which is overly underrepresented when compared to the sample.

Table 3: Regional locations of participating primary schools

Region	Number of participating primary schools	As a percentage of survey respondents
East Midlands and the Humber	68	9%
East of England and North-East London	71	10%
Lancashire and West Yorkshire	130	18%
North of England	68	9%
North-West London and South-Central England	109	15%
South-East England and South London	112	15%
South-West England	108	15%
West Midlands	69	9%
TOTAL	735	

In terms of socio-economic profile, the main indicator comes from each school’s Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME) statistic. The current FSME average for primary schools in England is 21.6% (up from 17.7% in 2020 and 15.9% in 2019). This increase can be attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as wider geo-political issues. Using raw data from the Department for Education’s 2021 school census the research team calculated the FSME quintiles for state primary schools in England:

Table 4: Free school meal quintiles for state primary schools in England

	Free School Meals Entitlement
1 – least deprived	0 – 8.4
2	8.5 – 14.0
3	14.1 – 21.7
4	21.8 – 33.4
5 – most deprived	33.5 – 100.00

To give us a truly representative sample of primary schools in England, 20% of responding schools ought to be in each quintile. Table 5 shows that over half of schools responding to Language Trends England were in Quintiles 1 and 2, i.e. more favourable than England’s FSME average and in lesser deprived areas of the country. Whilst the profile of responding schools is slightly more balanced than in 2021, we are conscious that work remains to be done to encourage participation from primary schools with a high number of pupils entitled to free school meals. As in every year of Language Trends to date, the profile of responding schools could mean that data presented in this report may paint a picture which is slightly more favourable than the reality:

Table 5: Participation in our survey by quintile

	Percentage participation in our survey
Quintile 1 – least deprived	31%
Quintile 2	24%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	20%
Quintile 4	15%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	10%

Ofsted Rating

There are four possible Ofsted ratings that a school can receive; outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate. These Ofsted grades are based on inspectors' judgements across four Ofsted categories as set out in their Education Inspection Framework last updated in 2019: quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development of pupils, leadership and management. The majority of participating schools in our survey received a grade of good or outstanding in their last inspection.

Table 6: Ofsted rating of participating primary schools (* denotes fewer than five percent of schools. Hidden to protect schools' identity)

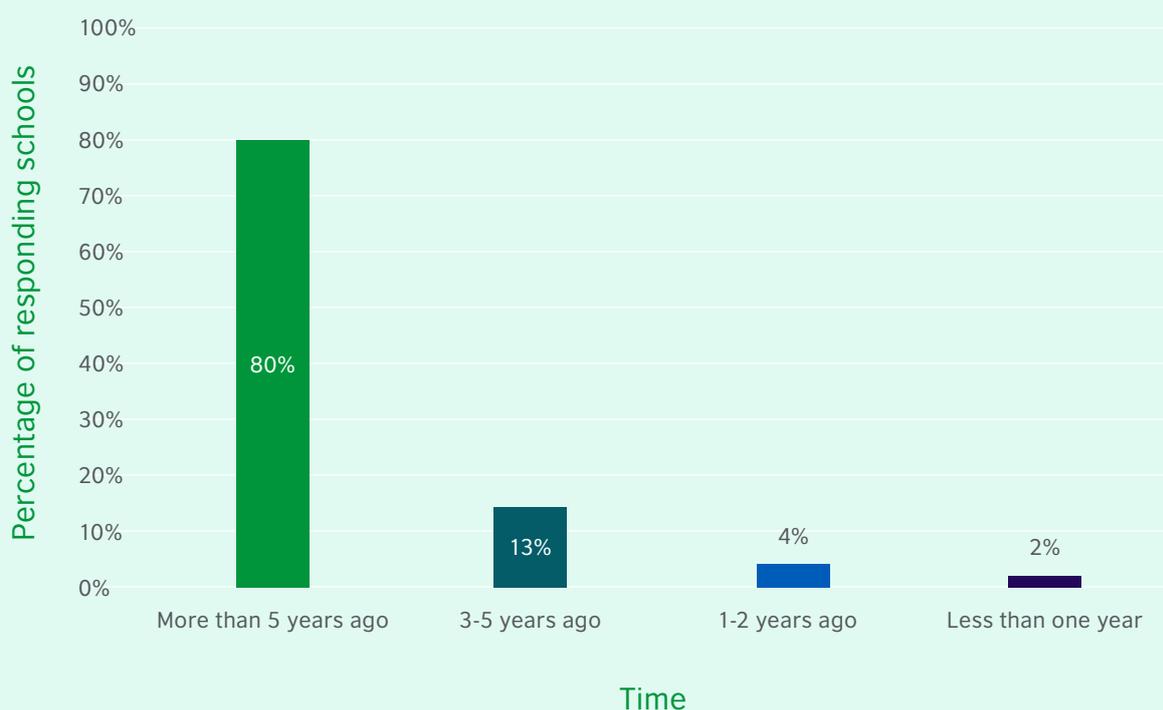
Rating	Percentage of schools in our survey with this rating
Outstanding	17%
Good	68%
Requires Improvement	7%
Serious Weakness / Inadequate	*
Special Measures	*
Unknown	6%

Forty-two percent of responding primary schools are community schools, 26% are voluntary-aided and 15% are voluntary-controlled. The remainder includes academies (convertors and sponsor-led), foundation schools and free schools.

Languages on the primary curriculum and assessment

It is pleasing to see that four out of five primary schools have been teaching languages as part of the normal school day for more than five years (see Figure 1); this represents a two percent increase on 2021 and a five percent increase on 2019. Ninety-three percent of responding schools allocate a set time each week for language learning; the remainder teach through collapsible timetable days or on a more ad hoc basis.

Figure 1: The time since responding primary schools started to teach languages

Figure 1

Ninety-three percent of primary schools plan for progress in one language across KS2. This is a growing trend from 91% in 2021, 88% in 2020, 78% in 2019, and is in line with the government’s ambition that pupils make progress in an ancient or modern language throughout Key Stage 2.

In terms of assessing pupils, the most frequent form of assessment remains informal assessment of each pupil, but this has decreased from 61% in 2021 to 57% this year. Formal assessment of each pupil has increased from 13% in 2021 to 18% in 2022. Whilst these are teachers’ perceptions and own interpretation of the question, our data do suggest that the assessment of pupils in primary languages is showing a slight trend of becoming more formalised than in previous years.

“In previous years, assessment has been very broad and informal. We are slowly introducing more formal and targeted assessments”

(Quintile 1 school, South-East England & South London).

“We are just starting to assess throughout the years. The focus is mainly on phonics teaching at the moment”

(Quintile 3 school, South-West England).

“We are just starting to bring in more formal termly assessments but still use informal and day to day assessments to assess progress e.g. the speaking and long writing is often done as a lesson. Also, some mini listening songs throughout the unit if work will all go towards an end of unit judgement

(Quintile 4 school, East Midlands and the Humber).

Figure 2: Assessment of pupils in primary languages.

In the ‘other’ category, teachers reported using the Language Magician assessment tool,⁵ assessment from Language Angels, use of assessment materials provided by the Primary Languages Network, as well as use of pupil self-assessment.

Languages taught at Key Stage 2

Figure 3: Most frequently taught languages in primary schools

French continues to be the most taught language at primary level, enjoying slight growth on our 2021 figure, and is significantly ahead of Spanish. Later in the report, it can be seen that this trend is not replicated at A level. The popularity of French at primary may be due to teachers offering the language which they themselves learned at school, in the hey-day when French almost had the status of a universal subject for all.

Less than three percent of responding primary schools offer one of Ancient Greek, Arabic, British Sign Language, Danish, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, or Latin. Although we can see some signs of diversification in languages, these are not statistically significant, i.e. the changes noted between 2021 and 2022 are most likely down to our achieved sample size. It will be of interest to keep an eye on languages, ancient and modern, taught in primary schools over the next decade.

Time for Languages

When languages are taught at Key Stage 1 (Years 1 – 2, ages 5 – 7), it tends to be for less than 30 minutes in 76% of schools. By the time compulsory language learning starts in Key Stage 2, time does increase to an average of 45 minutes per week in the majority of schools. These findings are broadly in line with previous years, with the exception that there is now a very small minority of schools which are willing to report ‘no language teaching’ in some Key Stage 2 year groups.

In Years 3 and 6, teachers reported the following time for languages:

Table 7: Time for languages in Years 3 and 6

	Less than 30 minutes	30 – 45 minutes	More than 45 minutes but less than 1 hour	Between 1 and 2 hours	No language teaching
Year 3	6%	53%	30%	10%	1%
Year 6	5%	48%	33%	14%	0.5%

⁵ The Language Magician: see <https://www.thelanguagemagician.net/>

Figure 2

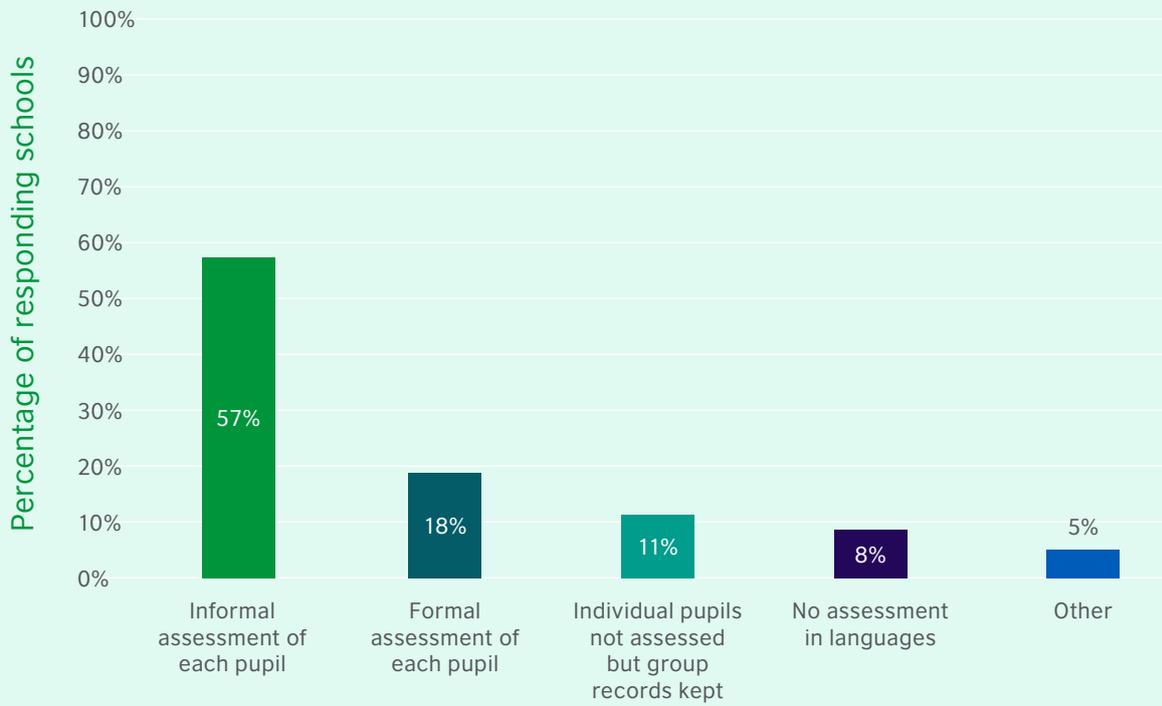
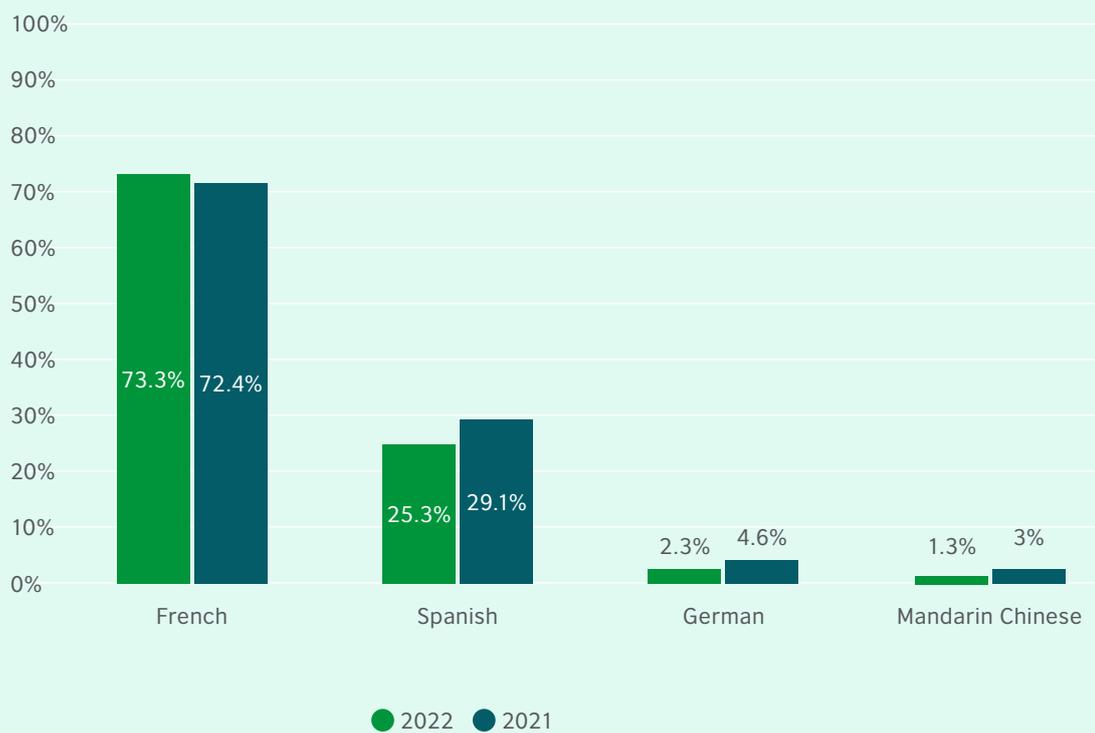


Figure 3



In three out of four schools, teachers report that pupils receive their allocated time for languages each week. However, in the remaining one in four schools, weekly language teaching is often disrupted for the following reasons:

- Language teacher time is divided between two year groups e.g. Year 6 have languages for half of the year and Year 5 have languages for the other half of the year;
- Staffing issues;
- Extra-curricular activities mean that languages are the first subject to be jettisoned.

“MFL is usually the subject that ‘slips’ and is missed off the timetable if there is something else on - a trip or special event to take time away from the rest of the timetable. Realistically most classes miss several lessons a term”

(Quintile 5 school, Lancashire and West Yorkshire).

Over half of primary schools which teach languages for between one and two hours per week are in Quintiles 1 and 2, in more affluent areas. Just one in ten schools are in Quintile 5.

The provision of language teaching in primary schools is encouraging, but pupils mainly learn implicitly, particularly younger learners. It is acknowledged that this is a slow process requiring plentiful and high-quality language input. We know from recent research (Graham et al., 2017) that the ideal conditions for teaching languages in primary schools are a minimum of one hour of contact time per week, delivered by a teacher with degree-level proficiency in the language.

Our data suggest there are socio-economic differences in the time devoted to language learning from school to school. A quarter of schools do not ensure that pupils get their weekly time for languages. There is too much variation in the statutory curriculum as received by pupils and it may be timely for government to consider better guidance as to the time (including incidental time) allocated to language learning.

International engagement

We have been keeping a close eye on international engagement over the past few years. Pre-pandemic and before the UK’s decision to leave the European Union, international engagement at primary level was reasonably healthy. The current situation leaves a lot of room for building back better.

Table 8: Longitudinal data relating to international activities in primary schools

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	35%	27%	19%	18%	19%
Involvement in international projects	22%	16%	10%	8%	10%
Host a language assistant	5%	5%	3%	2%	2%
None	46%	51%	61%	64%	67%

Of most concern is the number of primary schools who report no international engagement. Socio-economic factors do not seem to play a significant role here, with Quintile 1 schools just as likely as Quintile 5 schools to have no international engagement at 64% and 69% respectively.

In qualitative comments, teachers stated that they would be open to connecting with local university students, making or reigniting links with schools abroad, or using the British Council’s International School Award as a framework through which to quality assure the international dimension:

“We usually have access to student teachers from France via [the local university]. This has not happened during COVID years”

(Quintile 1 school, South-East England and South London).

“We take the pupils to the Spanish restaurant to order some food in Spanish and we do a Spanish day”

(Quintile 5 school, West Midlands).

“None currently - previously we have had contacts with schools in France, Rwanda & also Australia. We previously held the International School Award”

(Quintile 3 school, Lancashire and West Yorkshire).

“Benefiting from Turing funding and are taking 3 members of staff and 19 Y5 and Y6 pupils to France to visit our partner school in June”

(Quintile 4 school, North of England).

It is uplifting to see schools starting to tap into Turing funding and to make connections with schools in Europe, though there remains much room for expansion and development of the same.

Challenges to meeting the National Curriculum requirements

From a list of ten, primary teachers were asked to select which, if any, were challenges to meeting the National Curriculum requirements for modern or ancient languages at Key Stage 2. We asked the same question in 2021. Our data show that the impact of wider restrictions in relation to Covid-19 is starting to be less of a challenge, now in third place. The biggest issue for teachers is 'insufficient curriculum time in general'; the primary curriculum is busy and teachers are finding it difficult to fit everything in.

Table 9: The challenges to meeting the National Curriculum requirements

	2021	2021 Rank	2022	2022 Rank
Impact of wider restrictions in relation to Covid-19	66%	1	41%	3
Insufficient curriculum time in general	51%	2	61%	1
Need to use curriculum time to 'catch-up' in other subjects due to Covid-19	49%	3	40%	4
Staff language proficiency	47%	4	52%	2
Accessing language-specific CPD	19%	5	20%	6
Funding and resources	16%	6	23%	5
Finding suitably qualified teachers	10%	7	13%	7
Other reasons	7%	8=	6%	9
School does not experience any challenges	7%	8=	10%	8
Achieving support from parents/carers	5%	10	5%	10

Almost half of schools report that class teachers are responsible for teaching languages to their own classes; 23% of all responding schools rely on a specialist teacher of languages, who is also a member of the school's teaching staff; one in ten schools rely on an external specialist. Thirty-five percent of teachers teaching languages in primary schools have availed of subject-specific Continuing Professional Development (including online) in the current school year. This is an improvement on the 2021 and 2020 figures, which were 32% and 28% respectively. One school commented that the teacher of languages is key to meeting the national curriculum requirements:

"It has worked well to have a consistent specialist teacher but this depends on an agency to supply us with this person - as a small school we only need a person for half a day per week which is not easy to source" (Quintile 1 school, North-West London and South-Central England).

What is working well

Teachers of primary languages work hard to generate enthusiasm for language learning, and primary pupils are naturally inquisitive about other cultures and languages. Teachers were asked about what they perceive to be working well in primary languages in general. Eighty-four percent of teachers provided qualitative comments, all very positive, amounting to 12,000 words of qualitative data. This large data set was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The three main themes generated from the data set are congruent with those identified in 2021:

1. The teacher's competence;
2. The pupils' motivation;
3. Resources.

Quotes from the following teachers resonate with the overall findings from our data set:

“Having a specialist teacher means the children have high quality language lessons that are engaging and motivating, and the children progress well in their language acquisition”

(Quintile 2 school, North-West London and South-Central England).

“Children are genuinely interested in learning another language and knowing about other cultures - there is a general positive attitude towards language learning among children”

(Quintile 4 school, South-East England and South London).

“We have a scheme of work which is comprehensive and plans for progression. This has enabled teachers to more confidently deliver language lessons and we have seen a big increase in the teaching of the subject. Children are therefore getting a more consistent experience throughout KS2”

(Quintile 2 school, South-East England and South London).

Even better if...

It is clear that many aspects of primary languages are going in the right direction. Teachers were asked how language teaching could be made better: there were no pre-determined answers; teachers were free to write what they thought. Seventy-six percent of teachers responded, giving us a data set of 10,700 words. This data set was analysed in the same way as other qualitative data. The three main themes were requests for more:

1. Continuing Professional Development for teachers;
2. Funding, including for resources;
3. Time for languages on a crowded primary curriculum.

The following comments are reflective of many in the data set:

“There needs to be a significant reduction in primary curriculum demand if schools are to have the time to effectively teach languages - there also needs to be CPD support that is KS2 appropriate for non-language speakers. This would need to be free or subsidised as much of the schools CPD budgets continue to focus on English and maths as these continue to need development for maximum progress”

(Quintile 3 school, West Midlands).

“Ofsted have said that they have very specific ideas of what good progression looks like but we can't find a scheme of work that matches it. That would be VERY useful!”

(Quintile 3 school, South West England).

“Time! We need more time, and several lessons a week. Once a week is not good enough as the children forget most of what they have learnt from one week to the next. This means too that they often say they are ‘no good at Spanish’ as they want to make faster progress than is physically possible in the time allocated. There needs to be more money, both for CPD and resources. I end up spending a fortune of my own money on resources, and online subscriptions, as school doesn't have the budget”

(Quintile 1 school, West Midlands).

“More joined up thinking between primary and secondary - our secondaries teach a variety of languages so some children continue with French and some don't”

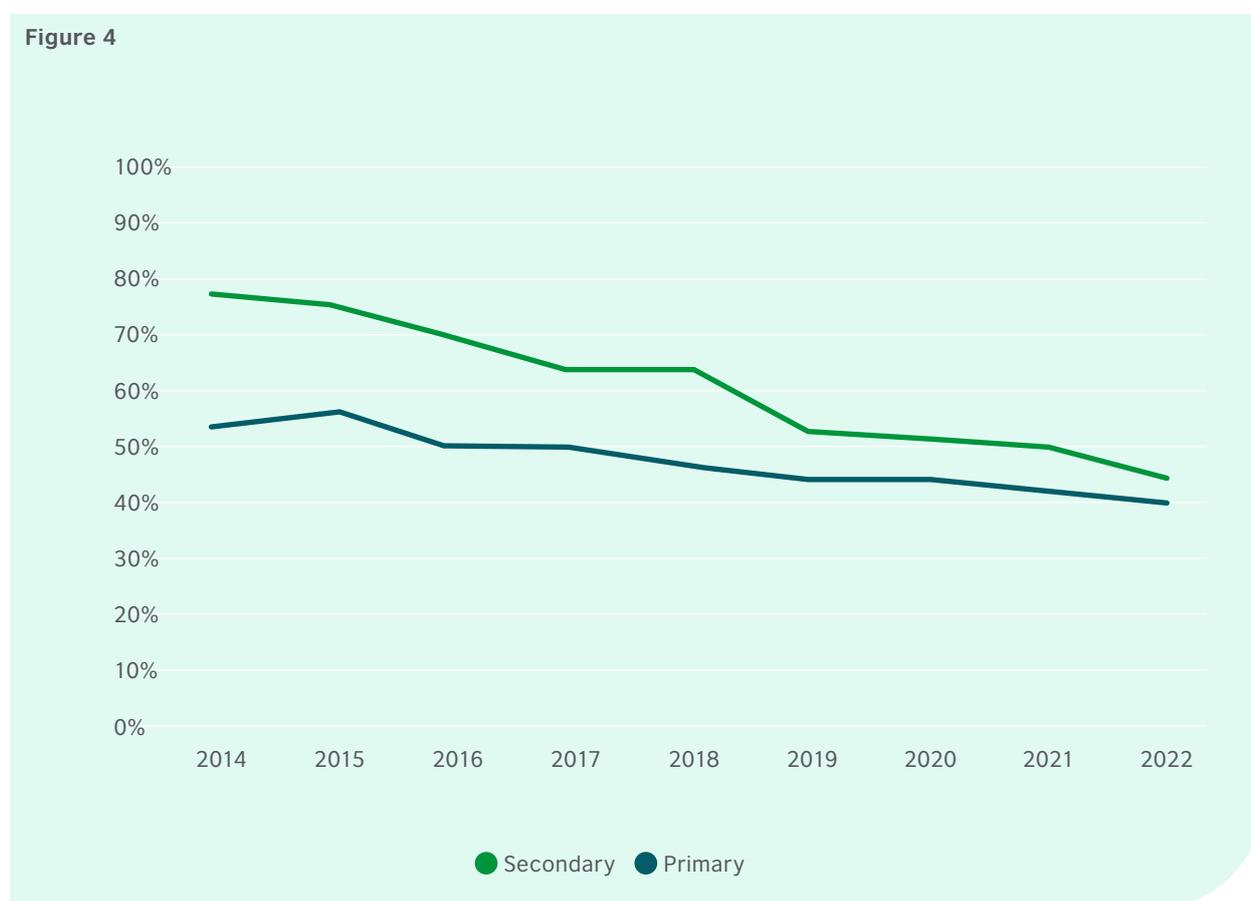
(Quintile 2 school, South West England).

Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3⁶

There has been a sustained decline in contact between primary and secondary schools in relation to languages. Although a greater proportion of primary schools provide information on pupil progress at the point of transfer, the proportion of secondary schools with access to this information has declined. In qualitative comments, primary teachers express a desire to benefit from the subject specialism of secondary colleagues and to forge stronger links with local secondaries.

Contact between primary and secondary schools

Figure 4: Contact between state primary and secondary schools in relation to languages⁷



⁶ The section on transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 was prepared and written by Sarah O'Neill, PhD student in Modern Language Education Policy at Queen's University Belfast.

⁷ In Figure 4, 'secondary' refers to the percentage of state secondary schools that do have contact with primaries; 'primary' refers to the percentage of state primaries that do have contact with secondary schools. Secondary data for 2018 include both state and independent schools.

Language Trends data evinces a sustained decline in contact between primary and secondary schools in relation to languages. This year, just over half of state secondary schools (55%) reported no contact with primary schools in relation to languages, whilst 60% of primaries reported the same regarding secondary schools.

Of the 40% of primaries that did have contact (Figure 4), more than two thirds (n= 205) only had contact with one secondary school. It would appear, however, that those primary schools which do have contact are increasing and diversifying the type of contacts they have. There has been an increase in the different forms of contact now being reported by ten per cent or more of schools as compared to five years ago (Figure 5). As in previous years, informal information exchanges (53%) represent the most frequent form of contact.

Sharing pupil progress data

Transition arrangements are a key recommendation of The White Paper on Primary Languages Policy in England, which states that “[...] at the very least, primary schools should provide receiving secondary schools with a clear statement of what pupils in the class have been taught and what pupils should know and be able to do at the point of transfer from KS2 to KS3” (Holmes and Myles, 2019:16).

Pleasingly, there has been an increase over the last five years in the proportion of primary schools reporting that they provide information on pupil progress in language learning at the point of transfer. This has risen to 28%, compared to only nine per cent when the question was first asked in 2017 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Types of contact that 10% or more of responding primary schools in 2022 have with secondary schools

Despite this positive trend, the proportion of state secondary schools reporting that they have **no** access to information about pupil prior attainment has also risen. Three quarters (75%) of responding state secondary schools have **no** information about prior attainment in language learning when Year 7 pupils arrive, whilst schools which *do* have some access to this information tend to lack it for a majority of their pupils (Figure 6).

Figure 6: State secondary school access to information about pupil prior attainment in language learning at KS2

Our data reveal further differences of experience between primary and secondary colleagues concerning pupil progress: since 2019, Language Trends has asked primary schools how outcomes at the end of Year 6, and secondary schools how the preparedness of current Year 7s, compare to previous cohorts. The expectation in Language

Trends 2019 was to report on “year-on-year improvements in language learning outcomes for successive cohorts of pupils” (Tinsley, 2019:10).

However, since the pandemic reporting years of 2021/2022⁸ there has been a deterioration in both outcomes and preparedness. Secondary schools have consistently returned a markedly less positive picture of pupil progress than primary schools over successive cohorts (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Changes to outcomes at the end of Year 6 (primary) and preparedness for language learning in Year 7 (secondary) over successive cohorts

Transition Issues

Teachers’ qualitative comments highlight some of the issues they face regarding the transition from KS2 to KS3. Secondary schools often focus on the range of languages taught in different feeder primary schools, making it difficult to pick up where learners have left off:

“Regardless of KS2 provision, we seem to have to start from the very basics each year. We do differentiate in class for those students who have a bit of knowledge of the language from primary school. This is further complicated by primary schools offering a range of languages, and students might join us having some experience of a different language to the one they are studying in Year 7”
(Quintile 1 school, South-East England and South London).

Commenting on transition from KS2, eight respondents reported that using NCELP resources enabled them to start from scratch in Year 7, regardless of language learning experiences at primary:

“Year 7 SoW follows the NCELP pedagogy which fully embrace new learning from Day 1 and building from KS2 grammar and language for learning knowledge (for eg. grammar terms, phonics,...)”
(Quintile 1 school, South-East England and South London).

“Our Year 7 SOW does not require any prior KS2 knowledge. Nor does it repeat anything they may have learnt in primary – we follow NCELP”
(Quintile 3 school, North of England).

The data confirm that only three per cent of state secondary schools are enabling all pupils to continue with the language they learned in KS2. Consistent with last year’s report, two thirds can facilitate this for some pupils and 22% for the majority, whilst eight per cent report starting a new language with all Year 7 pupils from scratch (Figure 8).

Figure 8: State Secondary - Do pupils in your school continue with the same language they learned at Key Stage 2?

⁸ Language Trends 2020 survey was conducted March-April 2020, just as the first school closures were announced (20th March 2020).

Figure 5

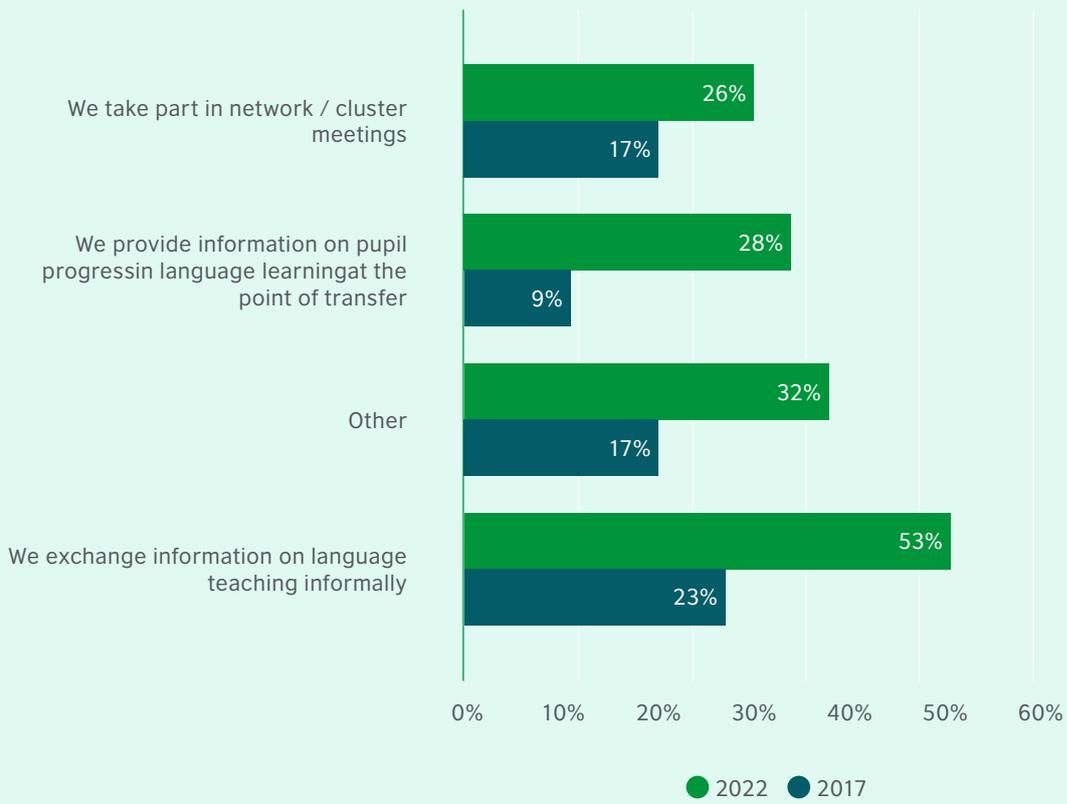


Figure 6

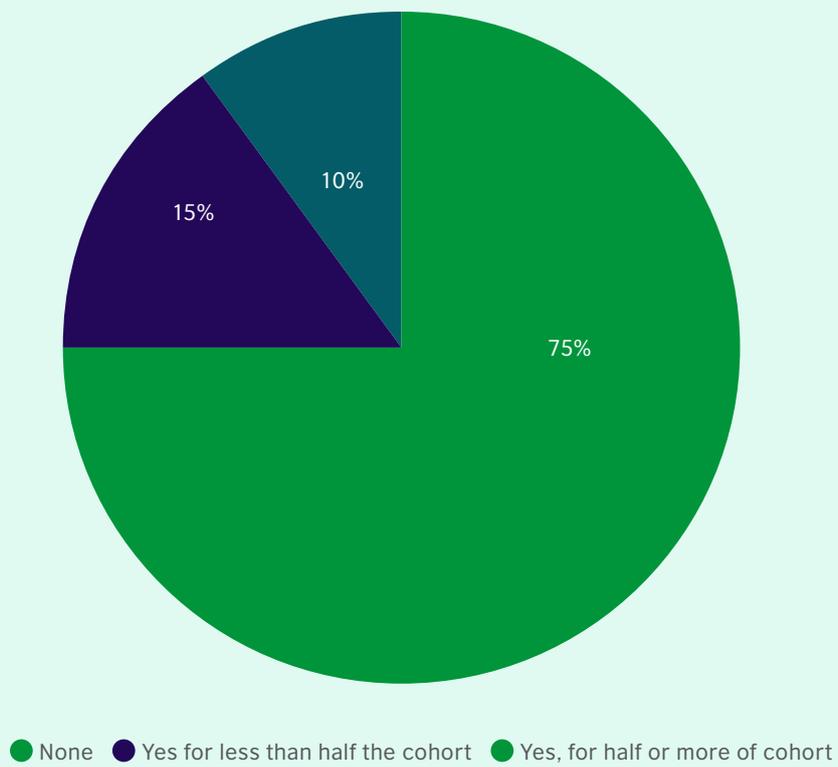


Figure 7

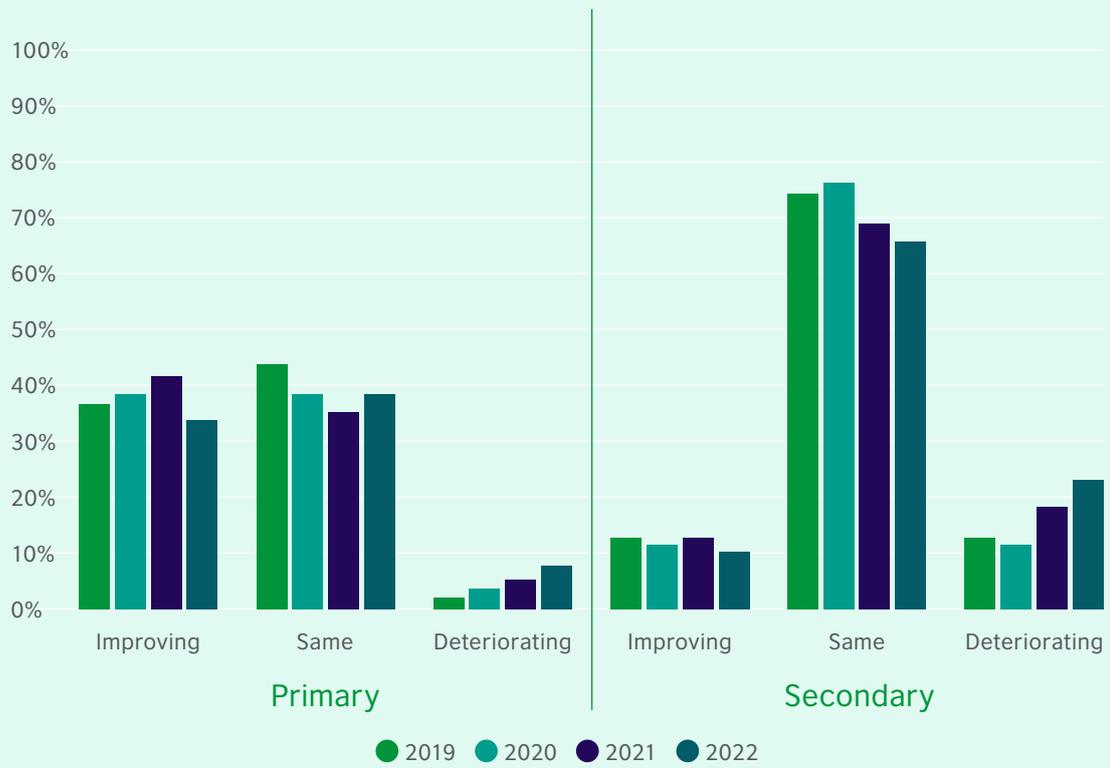
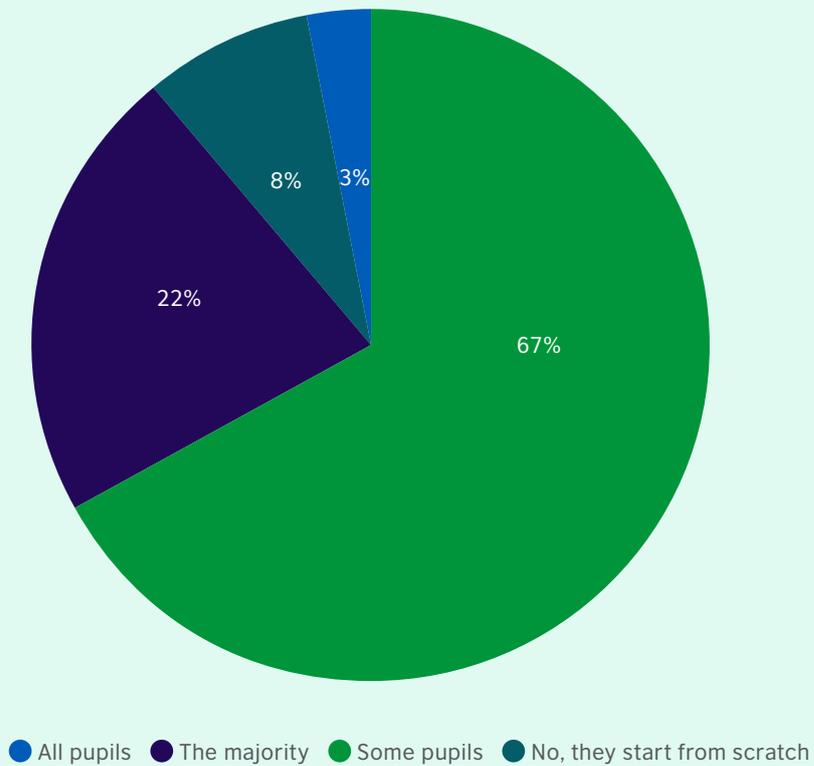


Figure 8



In their comments, some primary teachers express the frustration felt by teachers, parents and the children when faced with a start-from-scratch approach:

“An encouragement for secondary schools to engage with their feeder primaries so the children don’t have to start with a clean slate every September. There would be an outcry if this were to happen in Maths or English”

(Quintile 1 school, South-East England and South London).

“The contact is one way. I send information about what the children have covered in French. They start again from the very beginning at secondary. This is disappointing for the children. They often tell me about it when I meet them on their visits back to our school. Parents also comment on how frustrating it is”

(Quintile 1 school, South-West England).

Impact of the pandemic on transition

Some secondary school teachers chose to comment on the impact of the pandemic and repeated lockdowns on pupil confidence and learning:

“Covid has impacted their confidence, lower reading ages has resulted in generally weaker students which means a weaker transition from KS2 to KS3”
(Quintile 2 school, Lancashire and West Yorkshire).

“The pandemic has meant students come to secondary school with less linguistic knowledge than in previous years”

(Quintile 3 school, South-West England).

Even Better If...

Primary teachers in particular are acutely aware of the need to improve and build on existing transition arrangements. When asked what needed to be done to make language education even better, transition from primary and KS2 received 30 mentions in the qualitative comments from state secondaries. By contrast, transition and links to secondaries were mentioned 150 times by primary schools.

Many primary teachers expressed the desire to avail of CPD/training (146 mentions) and wished to benefit from the subject specialism of secondary language teachers (129 mentions).⁹ Despite this, only eight per cent of primaries report that a local secondary school provides language teaching in their school and only four per cent receive training from their local secondary. This represents a slight increase on lower figures reported in 2021 during lockdown, but continues a pre-pandemic drop first noted in Language Trends 2017 (Table 10), which reported “a notable change in the propensity of secondary schools to provide training or language teaching in primary schools” (Tinsley and Board, 2017:48).

Table 10: Data on % of primary schools receiving training and language teaching support from secondary schools

	4-year Trend			
	2013	2017	2021	2022
% of primary schools provided with language teaching by local secondary schools	19%	8%	5%	8%
% of primary schools reporting their local secondary school provided training for their languages teachers	7%	2.5%	1%	4%

⁹ These counts are based on a word frequency analysis.

The following comments illustrate this desire for collaboration:

“[Even better if...] Funded support to enable secondary specialist teachers to come in and work with in local primary schools”

(Quintile 2 primary school, East of England and North-East London).

“[Even better if...] An established network of secondary and primary schools sharing practice and support, and more CPD opportunities for language teachers”

(Quintile 2 primary school, South-East England and South London).

“In order to make language education in our school even better we need to have better transition from our feeder primary schools to ensure that we are aware of their prior knowledge and so we can hit the ground running in year 7 instead of starting from the very beginning. In order to do this we would need to employ another member of staff who could develop the SOWs and regularly visit and teach in our feeder primary schools”

(Quintile 5 state secondary school, West Midlands).

It is clear that both primary and secondary colleagues desire stronger links and greater collaboration with each other, but both face the fundamental challenge of insufficient time and funding, not only in relation to curriculum time, but also time and funding allocated to cross-sectional collaboration and resources, as in the words of one primary school leader:

“Even better if the learning of languages were a requirement from EYFS, and given a place in the curriculum from thereon up, when the children are at their most receptive. Even better if the importance and profile of languages could be raised and respected by government and the DfE. Even better if there was ringfenced funding for staff CPD and resources to teach languages so we would not always have to compete for time and money with subjects given higher priority”

(Quintile 4 school, South-East England and South London).

Findings from secondary and independent school surveys

A total of 769 state secondary schools and 189 independent schools responded, giving healthy response rates of 27% and 33% respectively. The state secondary participation rate is up five percentage points on 2021. Combined with primary, this gives Language Trends England 2022 the best ever response rate to our survey in our twenty-year history.

Profile of responding schools

An inclusion criterion for the sample was schools with pupils in the 11 – 16 or 11 – 18 age ranges. This means that there are two significant gaps in the following data: (i) middle schools and 13 – 18 schools are not included (a particular issue in the state sector in the North of England); and, (ii) state sixth form colleges were unable to participate. Sixth form colleges have been included in a bespoke survey of Language Provision in Further Education by the British Academy; this work is expected to be published in autumn 2022.

Table 11: Regional locations of participating state secondary schools

Region	Number of participating state secondary schools	As a percentage of survey respondents
East Midlands and the Humber	83	11%
East of England and North-East London	86	11%
Lancashire and West Yorkshire	123	16%
North of England	62	8%
North-West London and South-Central England	115	15%
South-East England and South London	138	18%
South-West England	81	10.5%
West Midlands	81	10.5%
TOTAL	769	

State secondary free school meal quintiles

The average percentage of children entitled to Free School Meals (FSME) in secondary education in England is 18.2% (up from 15.9% in 2020 and 14.1% in 2019). This average has most likely increased as the ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic have taken hold. Throughout children's language learning journey, there is strong evidence of a link between levels of FSME and uptake at key transition points (Henderson and Carruthers, 2021).

The research team arranged schools in our sample into five quintiles based on publicly available FSME statistics:

Table 12: State secondary, Free School Meals Entitlement quintiles

	Free School Meals Entitlement
Quintile 1 – least deprived	0 – 10.1%
Quintile 2	10.2% - 14.9%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	15% - 20.5%
Quintile 4	20.6% - 28%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	28.1% and above

Table 13: Percentage of schools in each quintile responding to our survey

	Percentage participation in Language Trends
Quintile 1 – least deprived	27%
Quintile 2	21%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	17%
Quintile 4	17%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	18%

In an ideal world, each quintile would attract 20% participation. There is statistically significant overrepresentation of schools in Quintile 1 (least deprived). However, the profile of responding schools is more balanced than in previous years of Language Trends; for example, Quintile 5 was 16% in 2021. Nonetheless, as at primary level, the data which follow may present the situation for language learning in more favourable light than the reality in many state secondary schools.

Ofsted Rating

Table 14: Ofsted rating of participating state secondary schools (* denotes fewer than five percent of schools. Hidden to protect schools' identity)

Rating	Percentage of schools in our survey with this rating
Outstanding	18%
Good	56%
Requires Improvement	10%
Serious Weakness / Inadequate	*
Special Measures	*
Unknown	14%

Of the 769 participating schools, 65 are all-girls' schools and 41 are all boys' schools. Fifty-five percent of schools are academy convertors, 14% are academy sponsor-led, 12% are community schools, eight per cent are voluntary aided schools, and the remainder is made up of other school types, including voluntary controlled schools and free schools.

Languages at Key Stage 3

French continues to be the most popular language at Key Stage 3 (ages 11 – 14), taught in 91% of responding state schools and 95% of responding independent schools, followed closely by Spanish in 73% and 94% of state and independent schools respectively. Our data show that Spanish is growing at Key Stage 3 in the independent sector, up from 89% in 2021. German is offered at Key Stage 3 in 36% of state schools and 77% of independent schools; the state figure evinces a noticeable decline on the figure from Language Trends 2018 when

44% offered German at Key Stage 3, but there is no change noted from our 2021 data, which is good news. In independent schools, it is pleasing to see a slight year on year increase in schools reporting that they teach German.

Independent schools told us that, on average, one in five pupils enters school based on the Common Entrance Assessment, whilst 65% of pupils enter via a school's own entrance test. Where schools use their own entrance tests, just one in five schools assess modern foreign language ability as part of the tests.

Seventeen percent of responding state schools are either NCELP hub schools or use NCELP resources in Years 7 and 8. These resources are focussed on a pedagogy which advocates for the three 'pillars' of phonics, vocabulary and grammar, an outworking of the 2016 MFL Pedagogy Review. A key aim for this pedagogy is to increase intrinsic motivation and ultimately uptake from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4. Progression is determined by the functions of grammar, and the frequency and usefulness of vocabulary and phonics, and avoids introducing too much language too fast.

By contrast, 73% of responding state schools in our survey report that they either regularly or occasionally use resources from a method called 'Extensive Processing Instruction' (EPI) with Year 7 and Year 8. EPI hinges on the notion that teaching language through chunks (e.g. polywords, collocation, sentence heads and frames) is much more effective than the teaching of single words, arguing this is more economical in terms of cognitive load, particularly for beginner to intermediate learners in instructed settings with limited contact time. It is based on the work of teacher and applied linguist Dr Gianfranco Conti and is sometimes called the 'Conti' method.

It is acknowledged that language teaching is now in an 'eclectic era' and teachers draw on the pedagogy of different thinkers. Some schools report using neither NCELP nor EPI resources. It is important to bear in mind that pedagogy – the art and method of teaching – cannot be properly ascertained in a large-scale survey such as Language Trends.

Thirty-five percent of state schools report that some pupils are disappplied from language learning at Key Stage 3, but Year 9 in particular, for a variety of reasons. In just over four out of five independent schools, pupils have a choice as to which language they learn at Key Stage 3; in state secondary schools, just one in three pupils are afforded this choice.

Languages other than the ‘big 3’

The scale of Language Trends England means that our survey results are dominated by the ‘big 3’ of French, German and Spanish. The work of NCELP currently focuses solely on these three languages and government does not have plans to revise GCSE content in languages other than French, German and Spanish.

Table 15: Raw numbers for teaching of languages other than French, German and Spanish at Key Stage 3 (* = less than 5, number hidden to protect identity of responding schools)

	KS3 full curriculum subject Independent Schools	KS3 Extra-curricular activity Independent Schools (n=189)	KS3 full curriculum subject State Secondary Schools	KS3 Extra-curricular activity State Secondary Schools (n=769)
Arabic	*	6	5	19
Chinese (Mandarin)	41	21	54	45
Italian	6	13	12	36
Japanese	*	17	9	20
Polish	*	*	*	5
Russian	10	10	6	12
Urdu	*	*	8	5
Latin	81	8	42	41
Ancient Greek	21	12	*	8
Other	*	*	7	16

Mandarin Chinese is taught in 22% of responding independent schools and 7% of responding state schools as a full curriculum subject at Key Stage 3. The Classics are alive and well in the independent sector: 43% of independent schools offer Latin and more than one in ten offer Ancient Greek. By contrast, in the state secondary sector, just six per cent of schools offer Latin as a full curriculum subject and Ancient Greek is all but non-existent.

Three out of four state schools which offer Latin are in Quintiles 1 and 2, i.e. with a FSME figure better than the national average. A clear north/south divide can also be evinced in our data: only one of the responding schools teaching Classics is located in the North of England. This would suggest that the North of England is a particular cold spot for the Classics.

Our data reveal that some schools successfully blend the ‘big 3’ with other languages. One teacher commented:

“All our students study French in Year 7. In Year 8 they continue with this, but also pick up a second language, either Spanish, Urdu or Arabic. At the end of Year 8 they choose their language option, with the GCSE starting in Year 9 in their chosen language. We find that Spanish is becoming increasingly popular as a second language, and Arabic also seems to be maintaining fairly high numbers. Urdu, however, is seeing decreasing class sizes as fewer and fewer pupils speak it at home. This is also the case at A-level, where we currently have no students for Arabic, nor French, and just one student in Urdu. Traditionally, the class sizes for Community Languages at GCSE have been small (5-7) students. Before Spanish, we taught Bengali, which usually had between 3 and 5 students in a GCSE class. Like Urdu, this has really dipped in popularity over a number of years and we no longer offer it.”

Another teacher commented:

“Pupils can take Polish if they study it at home/ Polish school; we facilitate the exams in school. This is also the case now with Chinese and Arabic, where we have native speakers.”

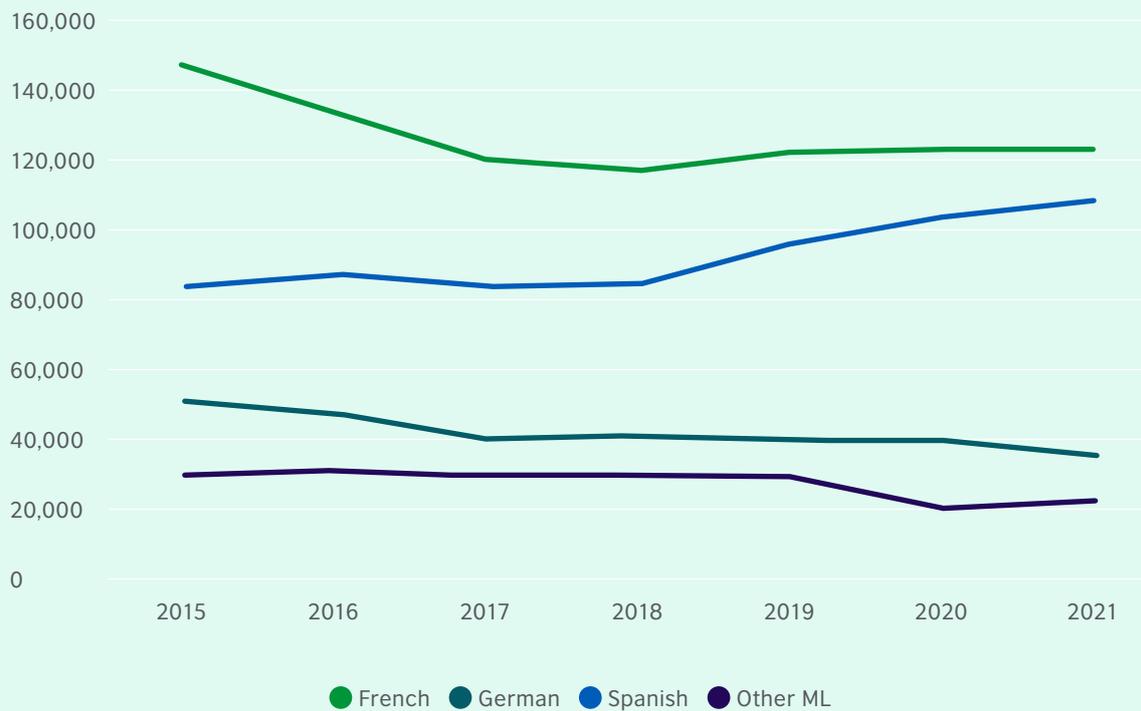
Whilst we often hear about the crisis in language learning, it is apparent that England has the potential to become a linguistic powerhouse (British Academy, 2019) with a rich tapestry of languages spoken and taught in our schools. Work remains to be done to capitalise on the range of languages spoken.

Languages at Key Stage 4

GCSE entries in French have remained fairly stable from 2021 data, but they are less than half the number of entries made in 2005. German has suffered yet another decline, but Spanish has grown to narrow the gap with French. If current trends continue, Spanish will be the most popular GCSE language in 2026. Spanish has already overtaken French as the most popular GCSE language in Northern Ireland, but French retains the top spot in Wales.

Figure 9:

GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015 - 2021



There has been a slight recovery in entries for other modern languages (i.e. languages other than French, German, Irish, Spanish and Welsh), but still nowhere near the level of entries prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Figure 9: GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2021

Table 16: GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015 – 2021 (Source JCO)

	2005 baseline	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
French	251,706	147,356	135,401	121,095	117,925	122,803	124,404	124,739
German	101,466	51,986	47,913	41,762	42,509	41,222	40,748	36,933
Spanish	57,731	85,217	87,581	85,184	89,577	96,811	104,280	108,982
Other Modern Languages	28,182	32,090	32,704	31,668	31,437	30,997	22,344	24,103

Our data show that, on average, 52% of pupils in Year 10 and 51% of pupils in Year 11 are doing a language for GCSE. This is a drop of one percentage point for each year group from 2021.

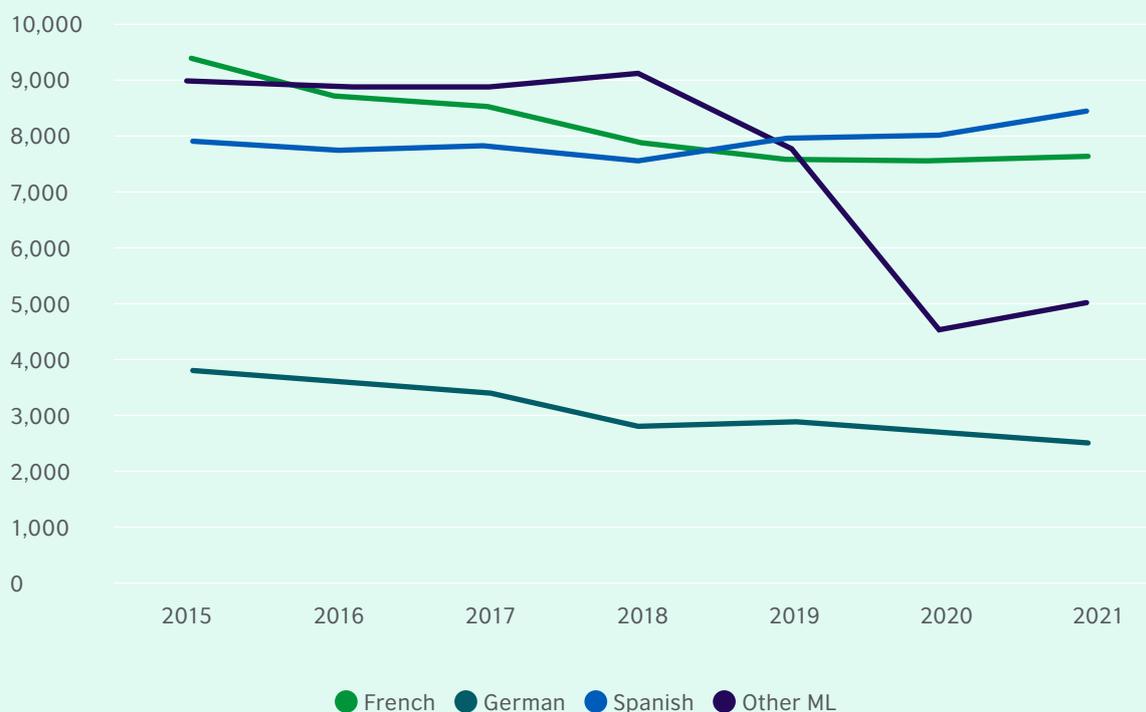
Data from this year's independent sector show that 77% of pupils in Year 10 and 76% in Year 11 are studying a language. Interestingly, this represents a drop of seven percentage points for each year group from 2021. Twenty percent of responding independent schools state that their Year 10 has fewer pupils choosing languages than in previous years, and 15% told us they have fewer pupils in Year 11. This may be an outworking of effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on language learning.

Seventy-eight percent of independent schools offer IGCSE qualifications and 38% offer GCSE qualifications; it is acknowledged that some schools offer both as well as the International Baccalaureate. Half of independent schools report that fewer pupils now study two languages for IGCSE/GCSE compared to five years ago. Forty-five percent report no change whilst a small minority report an increase.

Similar to our findings at Key Stage 3, the Classics are in a precarious situation in state secondary schools, with less than six per cent of responding schools offering Latin at Key Stage 4. However, Classics remain secure in independent schools, 65% of which offer a GCSE in Latin. It will be interesting to note the impact of the Latin Excellence Programme in state schools in the years to come.

Figure 10:

A level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015 - 2021



Languages Post-16

Official exam data show that, for the third year running, Spanish is the most popular language at A level, replacing the long-standing tradition of French being in the top spot. The diverging trends noted in the graph above would suggest that Spanish is now firmly in the top spot and will continue to be. It is interesting to recall that French remains the most taught language in primary schools.

German has once again declined slightly and it would be timely to consider how best this can be reversed; Germany was the UK's second largest trading partner in the four quarters to the end of Q4 2021, accounting for 8.5% of total UK trade (UK Government, 2022). Entries for other modern languages plummeted in 2020, most likely due to students at Saturday schools and in community learning settings not being awarded a grade for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic. These entries are showing signs of recovery but remain far below pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 10: A level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2021

Table 17: A level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England (Source JCQ)

	2005 baseline	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
French	12,716	9,332	8,753	8,539	7,874	7,607	7,557	7,671
German	5,481	3,791	3,617	3,422	2,859	2,864	2,666	2,507
Spanish	5,601	7,941	7,774	7,813	7,591	7,932	8,033	8,433
Other Modern Languages	6,249	9,039	8,884	8,862	9,091	7,762	4,606	4,985

International Engagement

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on international activities in schools. As in previous years, opportunities for engagement in the international dimension of school life are more widespread in the independent sector. Table 18 compares the findings from 2022 and 2021 with those from 2018, when the sample size was similar to both years:

Table 18: International engagement in state and independent schools

	State Schools			Independent Schools		
	2018	2021	2022	2018	2021	2022
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	31%	31%	30%	41%	42%	48%
We host language assistants	23%	21%	21%	50%	69%	61%
Joint Curriculum Projects	10%	8%	6%	17%	11%	13%
None	11%	38%	45%	3%	11%	18%

The most alarming statistic is the number of schools reporting they have no international activities in their school. We also asked state secondary schools if they had been awarded funding through the Turing scheme, the UK government's programme to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world. Just 16 out of 769 state schools responded in the affirmative; it is clear there is a lot of work to be done to help all schools develop their international dimension.

Modern Language Assistants

Modern Language Assistants (MLAs) are speakers of French, German, Irish, Italian, Mandarin Chinese and Spanish who can help students in the UK build their cultural capital by developing their linguistic and cross-cultural skills. Typically, MLAs are undergraduates or recent graduates. When in the UK, they often work in up to three schools.

One in four state secondary schools and one in three independent schools report that they have an MLA. Almost half (46%) of state secondary schools with an MLA are in Quintile 1. By contrast, just eight per cent are in Quintile 5. Just eight out of 62 state secondary schools in the North of England report having an MLA, whereas one in three state secondary schools in South-West England have an MLA.

What is working well

Teachers are working hard in challenging circumstances. Six hundred and ninety-three state secondary schools chose to respond to our open ended question on what is working well, giving us a data set of 15054 words. Having conducted a thematic analysis on the data, the three most frequent suggestions are:

1. High quality teaching and learning, particularly at Key Stage 3;
2. Having a department with established teachers who have harmonious relationships with their pupils;
3. Commitment to languages from Senior Management.

In terms of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3, our data set shows that teachers are looking to evidence and research to improve their classroom practice. This is to be commended. 'EPI' is mentioned 85 times in the data set and 'Conti' is mentioned 68 times; a significant majority of those comments are positive. 'NCELP' appears on 35 occasions in the data set.

Comments from teachers included:

“We have a very strong curriculum, languages becoming a more popular GCSE option, excellent support from trust leaders”

(Quintile 5 school, Lancashire and West Yorkshire).

“Support from Senior Leadership in school allowing changes to the curriculum (e.g. introduction at A level)”

(Quintile 5 school, North-West London and South-Central England).

“The boys are very motivated and enjoy their learning- many see an international and work opportunity through languages”

(Quintile 5 all boys’ school, location undisclosed to protect school’s identity).

Even better if....

Almost all (n=685) told us how languages could be improved. This resulted in a large qualitative data set of 15,359 words. The three main themes emerging were:

1. Time for languages;
2. The new GCSE in French, German and Spanish;
3. Resources.

In terms of time, teachers want more time at Key Stage 3 in particular and they want senior leadership to craft school timetables to be conducive to language learning. ‘Little but often’ at Key Stage 3 features heavily across the data set and in practice is usually more favourable than long periods.

The current and new GCSEs in French, German and Spanish combined featured 156 times across the data set. The current GCSE was generally seen as being ‘difficult’ and better suited to higher prior attaining pupils. Where the new GCSE was discussed it was somewhat with apprehension; there is a sense of collective disappointment that concerns have not been listened to and that teachers would like more information about the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish.

Resourcing, both human and physical, is something which teachers often cite as being an area for improvement. Teachers commented that they would like more money to secure an MLA, but at a more basic level there were numerous comments that teachers would like time for action research and development of their own resources to meet the needs of their pupils.

The following comments are reflective of the many comments from teachers:

“Make languages a priority and not an option. All pupils should be doing a language but maybe not all for GCSE. Bring back the more vocational language qualifications, example business Spanish/French”
(Quintile 5 school, West Midlands).

“The new GCSE in MFL (i.e. French, German and Spanish) is something that needs to be looked at. It is disappointing that the government didn’t listen to the concerns raised by teachers, headteachers, exam boards and the whole of the languages community about the new exam. Wouldn’t have been better to tweak and adapt what we currently have rather than create a whole new GCSE which is not going to give students the best experience of learning languages?”

(Quintile 2 school, Lancashire and West Yorkshire).

“Changes to GCSE are soul destroying. We have worked so hard to produce resources to support students both in and out of the classroom. Changes seem to lack context. Harsh grading and the setting of questions in the TL in the writing papers were the issues which needed to be addressed. Baby out with bathwater will deepen MFL crisis in my opinion”
(Quintile 1 school, South East England and South London).

Conclusion

Our extensive underpinning data sets show that a lot is going right for language learning in the UK. Responding teachers are passionate about the transformative impact they are having on children and young people in their classrooms. As author, I see that any criticism of policy is borne out of a love for both languages and teaching.

At primary level the socio-economic differences in the time devoted to language learning from school to school and the fact that a quarter of schools do not ensure that pupils get their weekly time for languages need to be addressed. There is too much variation in the statutory curriculum as received by pupils in the classroom.

Progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 remains the nut to be cracked. Whilst there are some pockets of good practice, our data show that too many teachers are frustrated by a lack of joined-up thinking.

Issues at the next transition point, from Key Stage 3 to GCSE, also remain. Teachers in general do not appear convinced that the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish in England is going to lead to increased pupil motivation, sense of progress and thus uptake. The outworking of the new GCSE will not be seen until first results are awarded in summer 2026, but it is hoped that the impact will be a positive one for all concerned.

The independent sector is not immune to the problems faced by the state secondary sector, particularly at A level where declining pupil numbers in languages are reported. Concrete solutions such as a premium at A level, as suggested by British Academy et al. (2020), could establish a solid pipeline of linguists to Further and Higher Education and beyond.

By working together, government, policy makers, subject associations, school leaders and teachers can improve language learning for all young people in the near future. On y va! Auf geht's! ¡Vamos!

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