

Language Trends England

2026



Language teaching in primary, secondary
and independent schools in England

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Introduction

The British Council is pleased to present the results of *Language Trends England 2026*. The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Its mission is to support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people across all four nations in the UK and countries worldwide.

These connections bring wide-ranging benefits. People and organisations from around the world are encouraged to visit, study in and partner with the UK, strengthening its global reputation and influence and driving economic growth. By connecting UK expertise in arts, culture and education with its global presence and networks, the British Council unlocks potential and transforms lives. It supports artists to share their distinctive voices and provides educators with the tools to shape generations. Among the areas of education supported by the British Council, language learning plays a vital role in helping young people in the UK to develop the confidence to shine, preparing them for life in a globally interconnected society.

Language Trends is an annual survey of primary and secondary schools in England. Since its first release in 2002, it has become a widely referenced overview of language learning at school level. Designed to gather information on the current situation for language teaching and learning, the report reflects on the impact of policy measures and highlights strengths and weaknesses based on quantitative data and qualitative comments from teachers.

There are now *Language Trends* reports for all four devolved nations of the UK as well as Ireland: Wales (since 2015), Northern Ireland (biennially since 2019), Scotland (since 2025) and Ireland¹ (since 2026). This series shows longitudinal trends and general shifts in data, providing a snapshot of the current language education landscape for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policymakers, school pupils and the public to consider aspects of language learning more deeply.²

The British Council commissioned Queen's University Belfast to conduct the survey for *Language Trends England 2026* and produce this report. We would like to thank teachers for taking part in the research. Without their participation, this work would not be possible.

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When we refer to Ireland, we are referring to the 26 counties that comprise the Republic of Ireland.
The research series can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/research-series/language-trends>.

Headline findings 2026

The headline findings for 2026 include:

- Primary schools show growing engagement with international activity, including partner school links, participation in global projects and work with cultural organisations. Many also foster multilingual awareness through whole-school approaches that celebrate Home, Heritage and Community Languages and integrate multilingualism across the curriculum;
- Curriculum time for languages is under pressure, with over a quarter of primary schools and around a fifth of state secondary schools reporting reductions at Key Stage 3;
- Despite increasing attention to transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, state primary and secondary schools continue to report challenges in ensuring continuity and progression; only 2 per cent of state secondary schools report that all pupils continue with the language studied at primary school;
- Spanish has overtaken French as the most widely entered GCSE language;
- Post-16 language provision in state secondary schools remains constrained by low cohort sizes and minimum viability thresholds, with 43 per cent reporting that courses do not run if thresholds are not met;
- Independent schools continue to report extensive provision and opportunities for international engagement, including a wide range of languages, a broader range of post-16 cohort sizes, greater capacity to sustain both small and large groups, cultural activities and overseas experiences;
- Teachers reported significant curriculum change in response to new GCSE specifications, including widespread redesign of schemes of work, assessments and materials, and increased emphasis on phonics, dictation and reading aloud from Key Stage 3 onwards;
- Teachers were broadly supportive of Curriculum and Assessment Review proposals on primary languages, curriculum coherence, cultural knowledge and vocabulary expectations, but raised concerns about implementation and uptake; views were predominantly positive in primary and more mixed in secondary schools;
- The proposed removal of the EBacc was one of the most frequently discussed aspects of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, with most respondents anticipating a negative effect on language uptake;
- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly embedded in language teaching practice in both primary and secondary schools, with some departments explicitly developing pupils' critical, ethical and effective use of AI.

Policy context and background

Language learning and teaching in England is informed by the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2013). This sets out attainment targets and programmes of study across Key Stages (see Table 1), and has been in place in its current form since 2013.

Key Stage	Year Groups	Age of pupils	Requirements
1	1–2	5–7	None
2	3–6	7–11	Study any ancient or modern foreign language
3	7–9	11–14	Study any modern foreign language
4	10–11	14–16	None

Table 1: National Curriculum requirements to study a language (2013–)

Language study is compulsory from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. While there is no requirement to continue to Key Stage 4 and sit a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)³ examination in a language, pupils have been encouraged to do so as part of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc is a school performance measure introduced in 2010 to encourage GCSE study across a defined combination of subjects. It comprises five components: English language and literature, mathematics, the sciences, geography or history, and modern or ancient languages. EBacc uptake has been indirectly incentivised by Progress 8, another accountability measure that assesses pupil progress from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4 across eight subjects: English and mathematics, three EBacc subjects, and three open subjects.

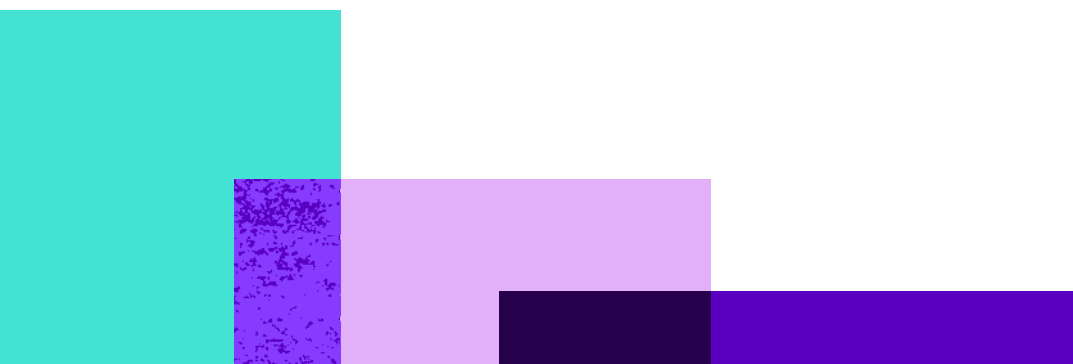
The EBacc was one of several key issues with implications for language education addressed in the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review (Department for Education, 2025a), which used public data and extensive stakeholder engagement to evaluate the curriculum, assessment and qualifications system in England. One major finding was that the government's target for 90 per cent of pupils to be entered for the EBacc by 2025 had not been met. In the 2024/25 school year, just 40.5 per cent of pupils – the highest ever proportion – were entered for the full EBacc. A further 45.1 per cent were entered for four of the five components, down from a peak of 49 per cent in 2020/21. Among pupils missing one component, nearly nine in ten were not entered for a language GCSE (Department for Education, 2026a).

Although there were initial increases in uptake of EBacc subjects at GCSE – including a moderate rise for languages in the early years – this did not translate into higher participation post-16 or meaningful impact on university access. EBacc entry was also lower among socio-economically disadvantaged pupils. The review concluded that the EBacc had not fully delivered its intended benefits and may constrain pupils' subject choice, affecting their engagement and achievement. It recommended removing the EBacc performance measure but retaining Progress 8, with the EBacc subject group renamed “Academic Breadth”.

The review made further recommendations for languages, focusing on curriculum content and transitions. Drawing on findings from *Language Trends England 2024*, it noted strong support for language-specific lists of core Key Stage 2 vocabulary and grammar. However, it also highlighted limited primary–secondary contact and that few Year 7 classes are organised by prior language study, meaning many pupils repeat content or must start a new language. In response, the review recommended updating the Key Stage 2 Languages Programme of Study with a defined minimum core content for French, German and Spanish to clarify expectations and support continuity and consistency across Key Stages 2–4. It also called for support from Oak National Academy and the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE), and for local authorities, trusts and schools to coordinate approaches to the main language taught in their area. It advised against immediate changes to the new GCSE, suggesting that the DfE review its impact after the first exams in 2026.

Teaching of the new GCSE subject content (Department for Education, 2025b) is underway, with the first cohort sitting the new exam in 2026. Several national language programmes have been established to support implementation and strengthen Modern Foreign Language (MFL) teaching practice. NCLE’s Language Hub programme provided CPD and brought together lead and partner schools with the aim of promoting language teaching excellence, creating local communities of practice, improving Key Stage 2–3 transitions, and supporting Home, Heritage and Community Languages. Early impact pointed to improvements in pedagogy, stronger professional networks, successful language promotion events, and positive effects on pupil enthusiasm and the status of languages in schools (Department for Education, 2025c). Following reductions in NCLE funding, the programme in its current form was discontinued for 2025/26. In response, the Department for Education is now funding NCLE to develop a free, modular online professional development platform for language teachers (Language Educators Online; LEO). Other initiatives continue to support language learning, including the British Council Language Assistants Programme and the UK-German Connection, alongside targeted projects aiming to increase uptake and strengthen provision in specific languages such as German.

Meanwhile, similar developments are taking place in other UK jurisdictions, where similar approaches to language qualification reform are being adopted. Core vocabulary and grammar lists for Key Stage 4 French, German and Spanish were introduced in Wales in 2025, with a Key Stage 3 core list for the same languages and Irish under development in Northern Ireland.



Beyond these policy and curriculum developments, several broader contextual developments are relevant for interpreting the findings presented in this report. A challenge is the sustained decline in MFL provision in higher education, reflected in reductions in student numbers and the closure or restructuring of language departments (University Council for Languages, 2024). Since 2014, 14 institutions have withdrawn modern languages degrees entirely, with several others reporting staff cuts and the loss of provision in certain languages, raising concerns about the sustainability of the subject pipeline and the long-term supply of language graduates and teachers.

A recent UK–EU agreement has confirmed the UK’s participation in the Erasmus+ programme from 2027, reopening opportunities for young people to study, train and undertake placements abroad (Department for Education, 2025d). The scheme is expected to support language learning and intercultural experience by broadening access to international mobility across backgrounds.

Free school meal eligibility (FSME), an indicator of the socio-economic profile of schools used for comparisons across levels of social deprivation in the *Language Trends England* series, is subject to ongoing policy change. FSME currently applies to children aged 4–16 in households receiving income-related benefits, subject to a net income threshold of £7,400 per year. In 2024/25, the national FSME rate rose to 25.7 per cent (up from 24.6 per cent in 2023/24), equivalent to around 2.2 million pupils (Department for Education, 2025e). It is expected to rise further from September 2026, when eligibility will be extended to all children in households receiving Universal Credit, regardless of income (Department for Education, 2026fb).

Research outline

Ethical approval for the *Language Trends England* series was secured from the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work Research Ethics Committee, Queen’s University Belfast. All participants gave voluntary and informed consent to take part, and the project was conducted in accordance with Queen’s University Belfast research ethics procedures.

The research aims to investigate the current situation for language teaching and learning in state primary, state secondary and independent secondary schools in England in the 2025/26 school year. As with previous iterations, a questionnaire-based methodology was used. Three surveys (one for each type of school) were developed in late 2025, in consultation with an Advisory Panel comprising in-service schoolteachers, the Association for Language Learning, the Independent Schools’ Modern Languages Association, the Department for Education, Oak National Academy, NCLE, school leadership associations and Higher Education representatives.

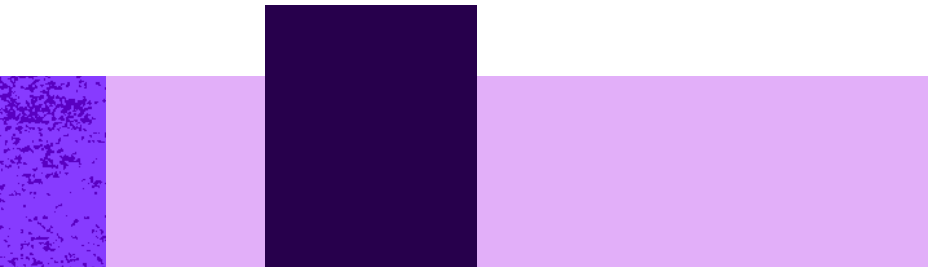
The surveys, administered via Questback, were conducted from late-January to mid-March 2026. Using a database of publicly available email addresses for Heads of Languages and headteachers, schools were invited to participate by email. Survey links were also shared through British Council social media channels and by the authors on LinkedIn.

Table 2 presents response rates by sector, following data cleaning and the removal of duplicate responses. Rates were estimated using the number of schools to which invitation emails were successfully delivered and are rounded to the nearest percentage point. As survey links were also disseminated through social media channels, exact response rates are difficult to calculate.

	Base (emails delivered)	LTE25 Responses	Response rate for LTE25	LTE26 Responses	Response rate for LTE26
State primary	6068	503	8%	368	6%
State secondary	2645	445	17%	539	20%
Independent secondary	532	63	12%	76	14%

Table 2: Survey response rates

The number of participating schools has remained broadly stable (983 compared with 1,011 last year). However, the sector profile of respondents has shifted, with 94 more responses from state secondary schools and 13 more responses from independent secondary schools, alongside 135 fewer responses from primary schools.



Univariate and some multivariate analyses were performed on the quantitative data to identify overall trends. For state primary and secondary schools, the data were examined comparatively across levels of socio-economic disadvantage, based on free school meals entitlement. Using data from the 2024/25 school census (Department for Education, 2025e), FSME quintiles were derived using percentile-based cut-points, with schools ranked by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and allocated to groups defined by the 20th, 40th, 60th and 80th percentiles. Quintile 1 represents schools with the lowest proportions of eligible pupils (i.e. most affluent), and quintile 5 those with the highest (i.e. least affluent). Qualitative comments were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and deductive coding.

To encourage participation from a wide range of schools, some questions in the Language Trends England 2026 survey were optional and therefore not answered by all respondents. For comparability with previous years, percentages for these questions have been calculated using only valid responses to each question, with the number of responding schools reported as *n*. Where *n* is not stated, percentages are based on all survey respondents.

Findings from primary schools

Profile of responding primary schools

Around half of primary schools in the sample were located in the south of England, including 22 per cent from the South-East and a further quarter from London and the South-West (see Figure 1).

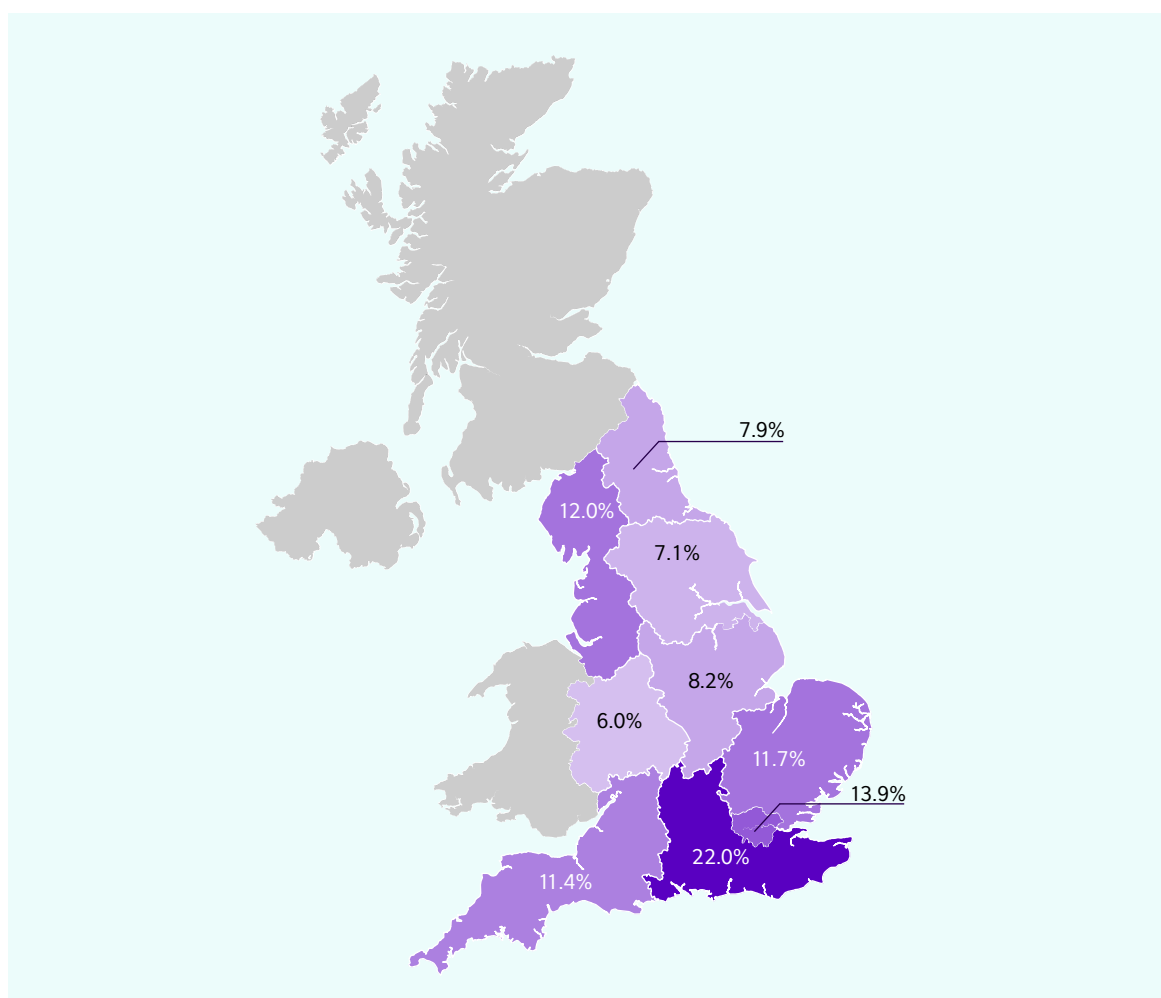


Figure 1: Location of responding primary schools

The national average FSME for state primary schools is 24.7 per cent, slightly below the national average for all school types (25.7 per cent) and broadly stable compared to 2024 (24.3 per cent; Department for Education, 2025e). Table 3 shows the percentage of schools in the sample within each FSME quintile. In a fully representative sample, 20 per cent of responses would be expected from schools in each quintile. Although the sample is not fully balanced across all quintiles, it includes relatively broad representation across different levels of disadvantage compared with 2025. Forty per cent of responses were received from schools in quintiles 4 and 5, compared to just 25 per cent last year. The mean FSME rate across the sample was 23.2 per cent, a little below the national average.

Quintile	Range (2025)	% respondents (2025)	Range (2026)	% respondents (2026)
1 – most affluent	0.0–10.2%	27%	0–10.34%	25%
2	10.3–16.5%	25%	10.35–16.8%	21%
3	16.6–24.9%	23%	16.9%–25.3%	14%
4	25.0–37.4%	14%	25.4%–38.20%	21%
5 – most deprived	37.5% and above	11%	38.3% and above	19%

Table 3: FSME quintiles for state primary schools in England and percentage of respondents within each quintile

The survey was completed by the languages co-ordinator (54.3 per cent), the headteacher (29.6 per cent), a senior leader (8.4 per cent), or another member of school staff (7.4 per cent). All but seven schools have taught languages in 2025/26 as part of the curriculum; among schools with no current language provision, two have taught primary languages over the past five years. Reasons for stopping language learning included the fact that languages are not compulsory in Key Stage 1 (4 responses), a lack of expertise in the school (2), other curriculum priorities (2), and a lack of funding (1).

Curricular languages taught in primary schools

Of the 361 schools that currently teach curricular primary languages, 82 per cent have taught languages for more than five years, and less than one per cent started teaching languages in the 2025/26 school year (consistent with the findings in both 2023/24 and 2024/25).

Classroom teachers are the main providers of language teaching in 61.6 per cent of schools, with specialist language teachers based in the school the main providers in 28.8 per cent of schools. Small numbers of schools have a peripatetic specialist teacher, a language assistant, or a language teacher from a local secondary school.

Respondents were asked what languages they teach as part of the school day (see Figure 2). As in previous years, very few schools reported language provision in early years and Key Stage 1. At Key Stage 2, French and Spanish continue to dominate: French remains the most widely taught primary language, offered in around 60 per cent of schools compared to 70 per cent in 2025. Spanish is taught in around 30 per cent of schools in Key Stage 2; this represents an increase on 2025, reflecting a wider trend towards the learning of Spanish (see later reporting on secondary schools). A small number of schools deliver curricular lessons in Arabic, German, Italian, Latin, Mandarin and Polish, as well as Cornish, British Sign Language and Russian. Of the twelve schools teaching Latin, seven reported that all children have access to the subject, with other schools focussing on targeted groups in Years 3, 4, 5 or 6.

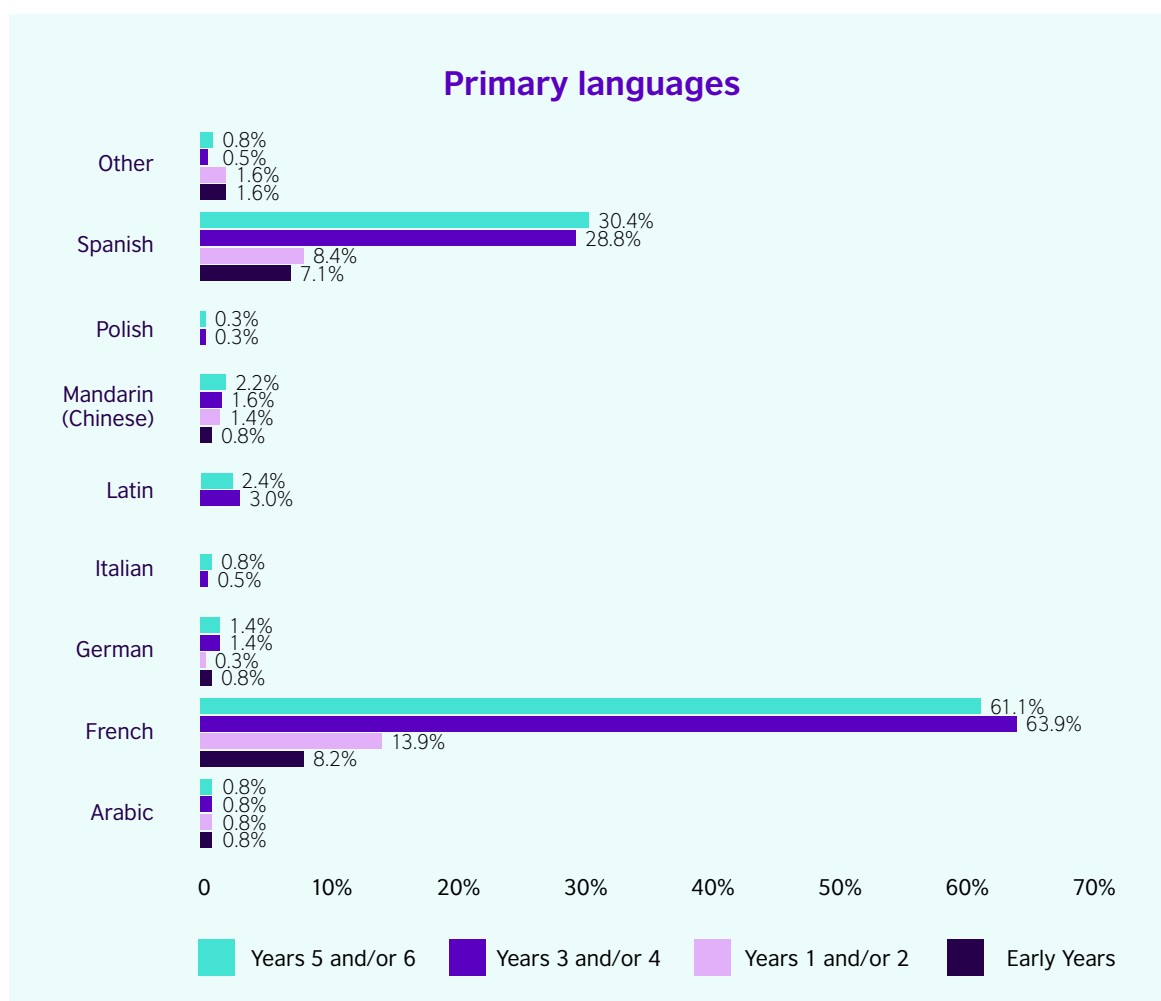


Figure 2: Languages taught in primary schools

Language Trends England asked schools to comment on the impact, if any, on time allocated for language learning because of additional time given to literacy and numeracy. Over a quarter (26.3 per cent) of responding schools (n=345) reported an impact on dedicated languages time, increasing from under one fifth in 2025. Respondents noted:

“Due to timetabling issues, our school has had to implement a system whereby languages are taught every two weeks rather than a weekly basis.”

“MFL tends to be left as a PPA subject and can be one of the first to be dropped for time.”

Primary language learning resources

Schools were asked which resources they use to deliver primary languages. We see a continued shift away from commercially-produced materials and towards resources developed in schools. Use of commercial resources has declined by ten percentage points compared to 2025, while use of school-produced resources has increased by seven percentage points, with smaller increases in the use of British Council resources and Oak National Academy materials (see Table 4).

The ‘other’ comments referred to Rachel Hawkes’ scheme of work, *Primary Languages Network*, *Language Angels*, *Twinkl*, *Languagenut*, *BBC Bitesize*, *Lightbulb Languages*, and resources that they themselves, as language specialists, had created.

Type of resource	2025	2026
Commercially produced resources	82%	72%
Drawing on the resources of multilingual pupils and parents	7%	9%
Resources provided by cultural institutes	10%	11%
Resources produced in school	41%	48%
Resources produced by other schools	10%	8%
Resources provided by the British Council	6%	8%
Resources from Oak National Academy	4%	7%
Resources produced/provided by a charity	1%	0.5%
Other	14%	16%

Table 4: Resources used in primary schools for language teaching

As in last year’s survey, around 12 per cent of primary school respondents received funding for the development of language resources. Among comments made by those who received funding, the highest noted allocation was £350. Most funding was received for CPD, subscriptions (e.g. *ALL*, *Languagenut*, *Language Angels*), cultural events and trips, and teaching materials.

When asked what sort of resources would be helpful in an ideal world, physical resources (e such as worksheets, books, authentic materials, dictionaries and games) were mentioned 116 times, specialist teachers 43 times, and technology (including iPads, interactive resources, video, and audio resources) 33 times. Other suggestions included more time, more training, and language assistants. Comments highlighted the variety of resources that would be helpful:

“Additional specialist support for generalist teachers and additional time for teaching and CPD, including cover for subject leader to provide more targeted and rigorous support for staff. Additional written materials and work with a native speaker.”

Over 40 per cent of respondents use apps to help their pupils with language learning, including: *Language Angels*, *Duolingo*, *Linguascope*, *Language Boosters*, *Language Nut*, as well as games apps like *Wordwall*, *Blooket* and *Kahoot*. Several schools also noted the use of Google Translate.

Primary schools were asked how often they make use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology such as ChatGPT in language teaching. Just over 60 per cent of respondents said they never use it, while almost a third reported using it occasionally in a few lessons per month. Compared with the 2025 figures, there is a demonstrable shift towards using AI in classrooms (see Figure 3).

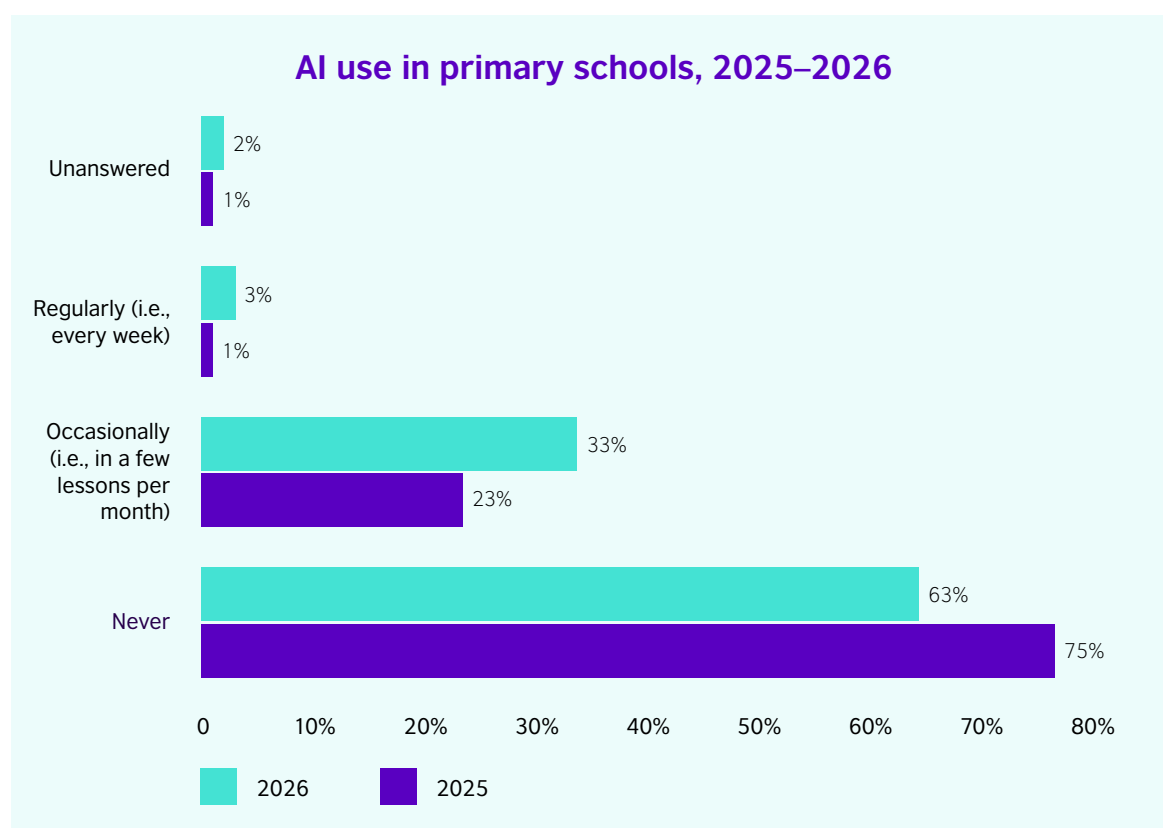


Figure 3: Frequency in the use of AI technology in language teaching in primary schools

Home, heritage and community languages in primary schools

In 2024/25, 21.4 per cent of pupils in state schools in England were recorded as having English as an Additional Language (EAL), up from 20.8 per cent in 2023/24. The Department for Education records pupils as having EAL if they are “exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English” (Department for Education, 2025e).

For state primary schools, the national average proportion of pupils with EAL is 23.4 per cent (up from 22 per cent in 2023), continuing a recent upward trend in pupils speaking a home language other than English. A substantial minority (around a third) of EAL pupils can access the curriculum without additional language support (Department for Education, 2020).

When asked whether they had pupils with EAL, 90.2 per cent of schools reported that they did, nine per cent did not, and under one per cent were unsure, findings broadly consistent with 2025. The average proportion of pupils with EAL in schools in the sample is 25 per cent, though this figure is considerably higher in quintiles 4 (36.8 per cent) and 5 (41.6 per cent) (see Table 5).

FSME quintile	Average % EAL pupils
1 – most affluent	12.4%
2	16.1%
3	21.7%
4	36.8%
5 – most deprived	41.6%

Table 5: Average percentage of EAL primary pupils in FSME quintiles

Languages other than English used at home and within local communities are often referred to as Home, Heritage and Community Languages (HHCL). Home languages are learned in childhood in the home. Heritage languages are minority languages that are often indigenous (such as Irish, Gaelic, Scots, Welsh, or Cornish), but can also refer to languages which have developed in local communities as a result of immigration over time, or through new arrivals to the local area. Community languages are generally spoken by minority groups or communities within a majority language context.

Over 80 per cent of schools commented on how they integrate pupils' home languages into the curriculum. Respondents highlight the many ways that HHCL are celebrated within the culture of the schools:

“We celebrate Mother Language Day in February by inviting parents to send in videos of children speaking, singing, reading and counting in their home language and they also send in food photos of dishes from their home culture. I could add so much more!”

“Most of the time pupils discuss the differences and similarities between the language they learn and their own language.”

“Individual needs are addressed and met with a bespoke offer to suit the child. In classes, home languages are reflected in display resources and children's literature. Our library reflects a range of languages in fiction and non-fiction.”

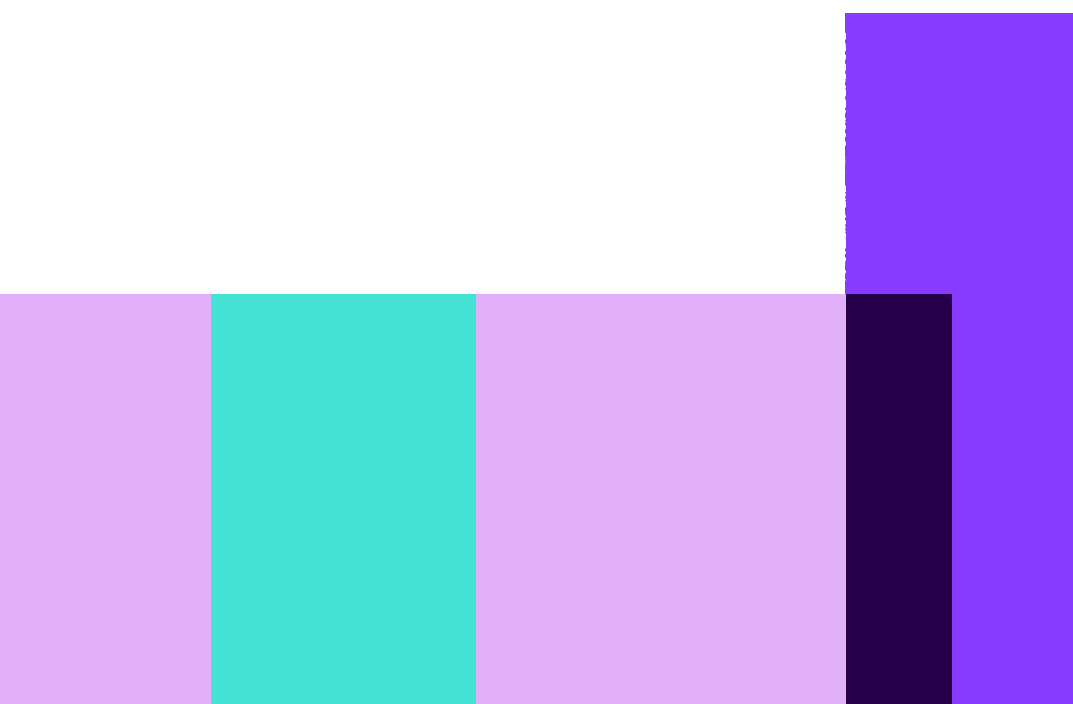
One respondent noted that more could be done to include HHCL in the curriculum, even while lots is being done in school life:

“We do a lot of work on celebrating multilingualism in MFL lessons and through celebrating children's heritage e.g. participation in the North East Festival of Languages. I think that more could be done to integrate home languages into the wider curriculum.”

The survey asked schools if they complement teaching of a single language with a programme that encourages broader multilingual awareness. Whereas in 2025 under half (47.8 per cent) of respondents answered positively, this year, two thirds of schools detailed the different ways that they foster broader multilingual awareness. Predominantly, this is through a whole school culture that celebrates diversity and includes HHCL in their discussions of language, as well as integrating language learning into other subjects. Other approaches included running clubs and schemes to encourage multilingualism outside the classroom:

“We teach French as our main modern foreign language, but we also aim to develop pupils’ broader multilingual awareness. [...] We [...] expose children to different languages in songs – this year, for example, they learned a Christmas song in French, German, and Mandarin – which helps them appreciate linguistic and cultural diversity.”

“The children are learning 'Language Detective Skills' which they can apply while studying any language. For example, we talk about cognates and false friends or how grammar might be different to English language and which other languages might use similar structure. We also offer children to try other languages during the European Day of Languages and at the end of a school year. Multilingual children are being given a voice to compare/contrast their home language to Spanish or English.”



International engagement

Language Trends England has mapped the picture of international engagement in state primary schools. The significant dip in engagement precipitated by Covid-19 and the UK's departure from the EU continues to recover, the percentage of schools reporting no international engagement continues to drop, and schools increasingly report links with partner schools abroad, becoming involved in international projects and participating in British Council events (see Figure 4).

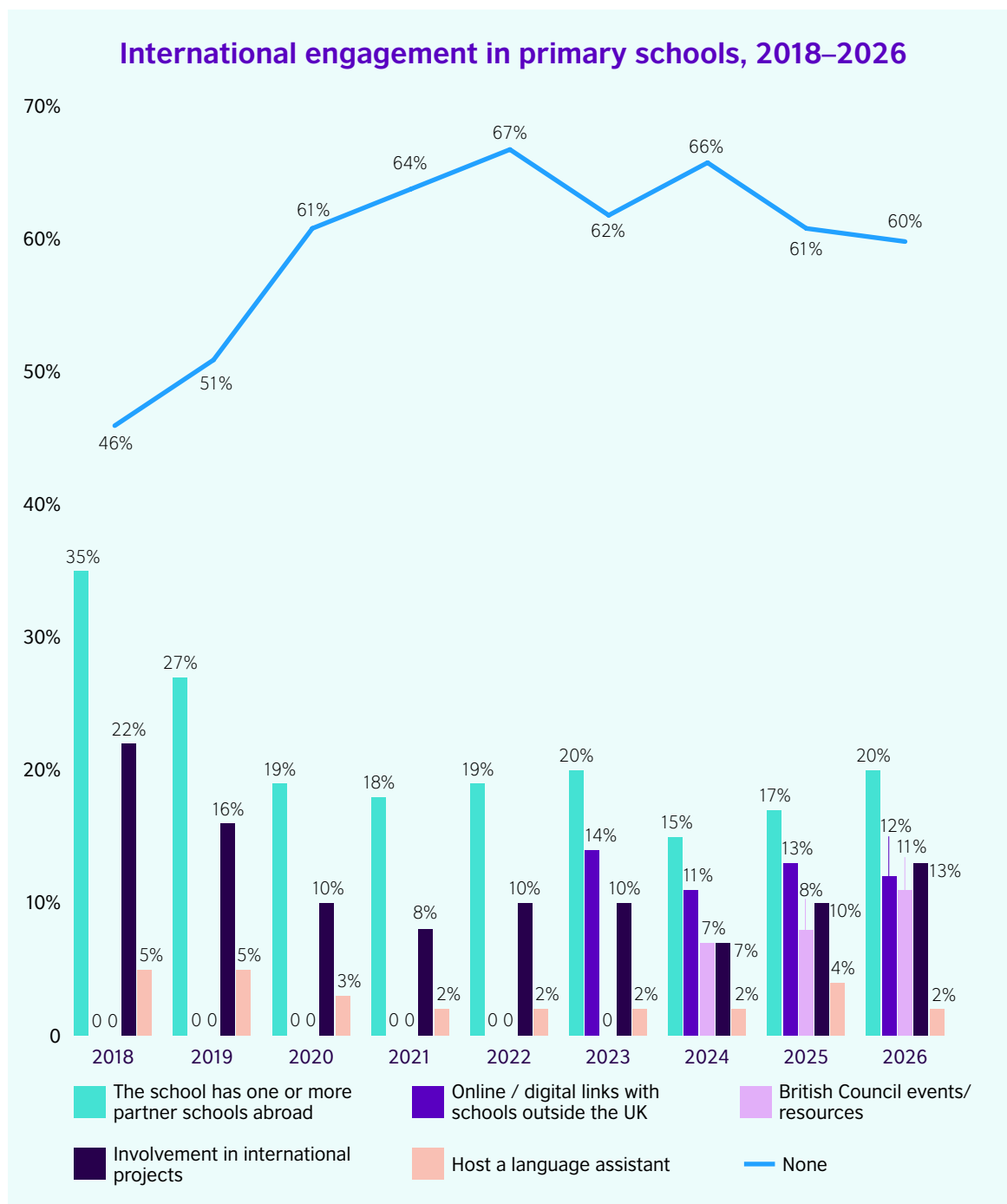


Figure 4: Longitudinal data relating to international engagement in state primary schools

Primary schools were asked if they have links with any outside organisations to promote language learning (see Figure 5). Much like last year, around half of schools reported no such links, while 15.8 per cent have links with local secondary schools, 14.1 per cent links with schools outside of the UK, 12.2 per cent links with the British Council, and 12.2 per cent links with the Association for Language Learning. Nine per cent of schools surveyed reported links with cultural institutes, including the Institut Français (twelve schools), Goethe-Institut (ten), Consejería de Educación (nine), UK-German Connection (seven), and Confucius Institute (four). All statistics are an increase on 2025.

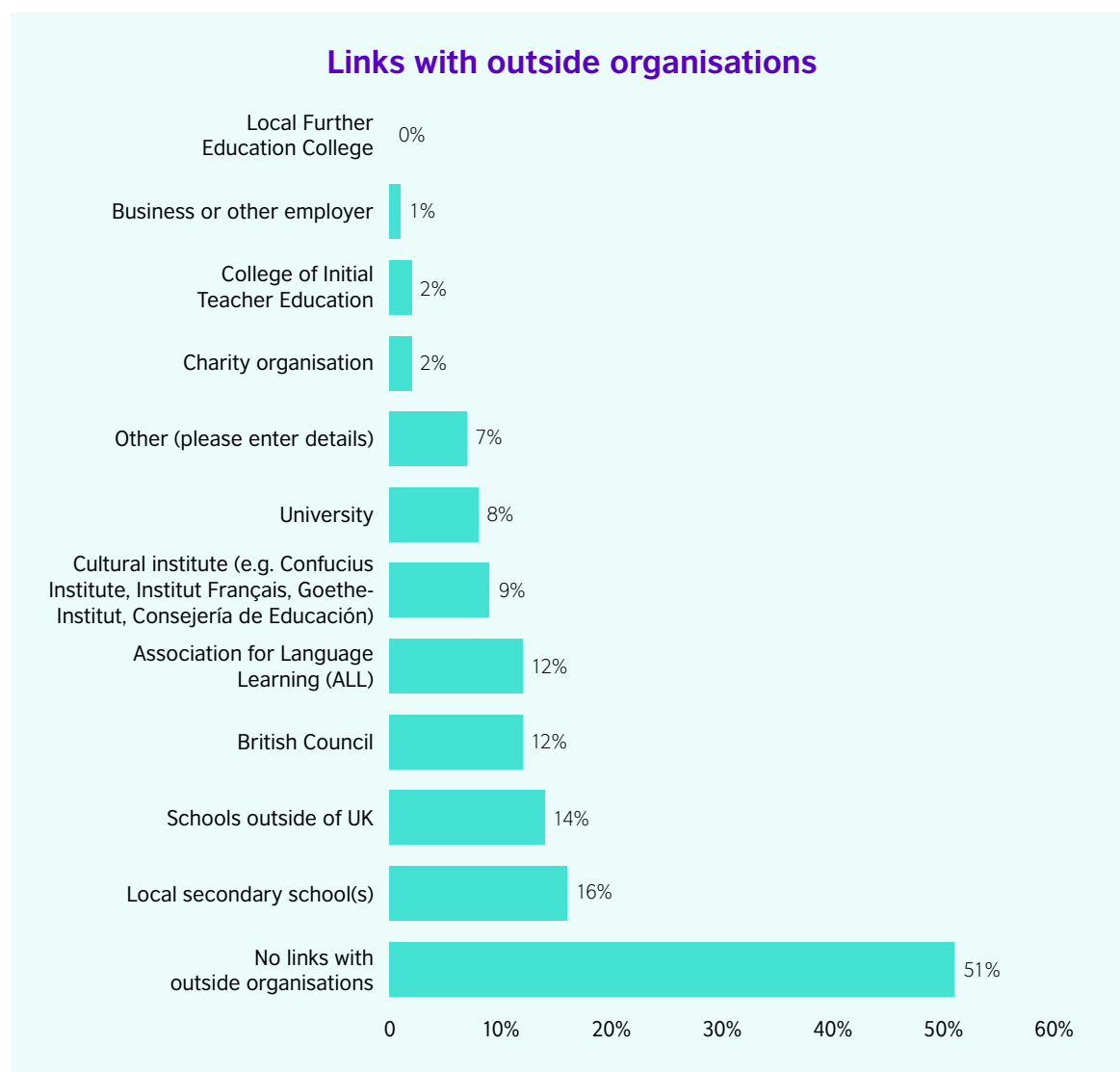


Figure 5: Percentage of schools with links to outside organisations to promote language learning (multiple answers permitted)

Curriculum review

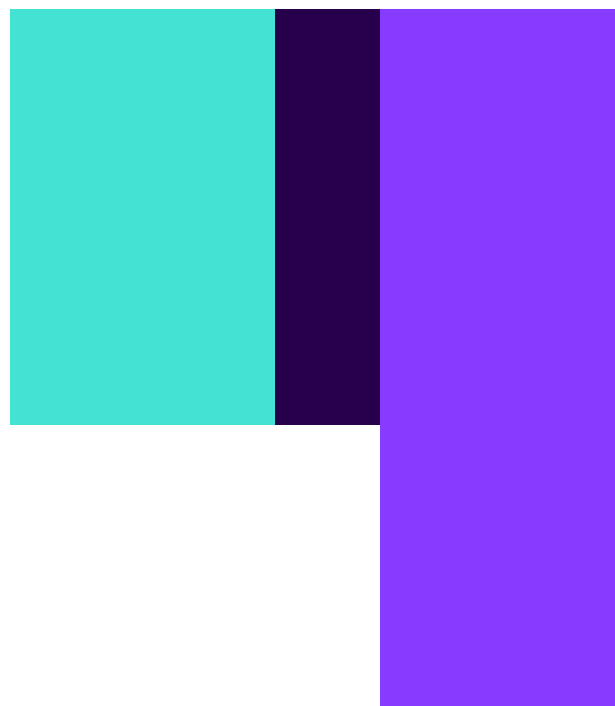
Language Trends asked primary schools about their thoughts on the outcomes of the Curriculum and Assessment Review in relation to language teaching and education. (55.4 per cent) of responding schools (n=267) felt positively towards these outcomes, 17.2 per cent felt negatively, and 18.4 per cent thought that there was potential for positive outcomes but had reservations around their implementation.

Over 80 per cent of responding schools (n=258) agreed that the review would impact their teaching. Thirty-nine respondents felt that review outcomes would bring clarity and consistency to language teaching, and particularly to progression through the primary years. Twelve per cent voiced concern that the review was too prescriptive, and that by reducing the choice of content for teaching, it would restrict creativity in teaching in schools with confident specialist teachers. Around ten per cent said that the review would strengthen the foundations of language learning at primary level and facilitate transition into Key Stage 3. Other comments referenced growth in teacher confidence, and improvement of equality of access for pupils, whilst acknowledging that any changes require additional funding to support them fully:

“Prescribed content feels a little like a double-edged sword. On one hand it supports the non-specialist with guidance as to what should be covered and helps with a basis of understanding e.g. if a child can do this then they are at this level. On the other hand, it takes away some of the spontaneity, which is currently afforded to primary MFL teaching, without the pressures of exams.”

“I welcome the panel’s recommendation for more clearly defined content at Key Stage 2 in French, German and Spanish. Clearly defined vocabulary lists combined with a focus on intercultural capital will be extremely valuable in supporting high-quality planning and delivery. These resources will help primary colleagues feel confident in teaching languages and will smooth pupils’ transition into Key Stage 3.”

“The recommendations are likely to impact Key Stage 2 language teaching by shaping what is prioritised in lessons. However, sufficient time, resources, and teacher support will be important to ensure languages continue to have a strong place in the curriculum.”



Barriers and additional support for primary language learning

Primary schools surveyed were asked to comment on the most significant barriers that they face in delivering high quality language lessons. The most significant issue highlighted by responding schools (n=298) was that of time (46 per cent of responses), followed by the lack of a specialist teacher (16 per cent). These figures are consistent with the findings of *Language Trends* over the past five years and emphasise the importance of addressing these two persistent barriers to language teaching and learning. In free text, respondents commented:

“Time and staff expertise: limited curriculum time and many non-specialists mean less confidence with pronunciation, progression, and retrieval practice.”

“Time and staff who feel less confident when teaching a language compared to other subjects. A jam-packed curriculum, so the last subject in (2014) still gets dropped off the end.”

Staff confidence and subject knowledge are other barriers, both mentioned in around 15 per cent of responses. Other factors include the need for more funding, lack of capacity to address pupils’ learning needs and a lack of training:

“Lack of money to pay for my time to work with each class consistently; lack of money to upskills the class teachers and TAs.”

“Rising number of children with SEN and only one professional in the classroom.”

“Children do not travel so lack ambition to learn languages. Curriculum time and finances for specialist teachers and quality CPD.”

When asked about what additional support would be welcomed for the development of language teaching, a third of respondents (n=260) said they would welcome further CPD opportunities. Other suggestions included engaging language assistants and better coordination with secondary schools:

“Good quality practical training with a native or fluent speaker, to support teachers' development – as part of ITT, and in schools. If it is a national curriculum subject, training should be given without additional cost.”

“Meetings with our feeder schools and support groups from the secondary schools who usually have either a native speaker or a subject specific teacher, to help non-specialists deliver high quality sessions.”



Good Practice

Language Trends invited educators to reflect on good language teaching practice in their schools. Almost 70 per cent of respondents told us about the enthusiasm of their specialist teachers, who use good schemes of work with clear progression to make language learning accessible for pupils. A quarter of schools pointed to the positive culture around languages, including celebrating home and curricular language and culture and engaging with cultural institutions. Twenty-five per cent emphasised the interactive nature of language learning in their school, through games, activities and speaking practice, with 8.3 per cent specifically mentioning the benefits of music and song in lessons. Comments celebrating these good practices include:

“Many of my students tend to perform very well in secondary. I believe that I provide them with a very good base, not only in grammar, pronunciation and general knowledge, but also in strategies to deal with the unknown, with the different skills involved in language learning. Plenty of songs to improve pronunciation, games to make drilling activities fun and to build confidence. We also have cultural lessons where we explore different festivities in different Spanish speaking countries.” (Quintile 1)

“Language learning is thoroughly embedded in school life. [...] I use a scheme of work that I have developed and written myself, and which I make available free on Light Bulb Languages. The materials are used by other schools all over the country.” (Quintile 2)

“Specialist teaching, teaching the same language from Reception to Year 6. Collaborative approach with other subjects, cross-curriculum, development of own scheme of work, learning objectives that incorporate culture. Consistent approach with progressive lessons with the 3 pillars of language learning: phonics, grammar and vocabulary.” (Quintile 3)

“In addition to our biweekly lessons, we introduce a new phrase of the week for the whole school which covers vocabulary and phrases. This is not synced to the units outlined in school which allows children to apply their conversational skills. Children then use this phrase in their lessons. We also have ordered lots of French books and resources related to our units for each year groups. We also have games in French which are used during extracurricular activities such as French club.” (Quintile 4)

“I think that exposing pupils to 4 different languages over KS2 has really enthused pupils about language learning and they make particularly good progress in Russian. [...] We know that it has been a very popular language in school as it is also offered as a lunchtime club, which many pupils opt to attend. Learning Latin has been excellent for developing cultural capital, making links with the wider curriculum (e.g. history) and it supports our focus on vocabulary teaching and etymology. It is also a great language to link to many of our pupils' home languages.” (Quintile 5)

Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3

Respondents to both the primary and state secondary surveys were asked whether they follow National Curriculum Programmes of Study when planning their languages curriculum. 77.7 per cent of respondents from primary schools (n=371) said they follow the Key Stage 2 Programme of Study, while a further 4.6 per cent follow the Programmes of Study for both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. These figures are largely consistent with the last three iterations of *Language Trends*.

Just over 60 per cent of respondents from state secondary schools reported either carefully considering (33 per cent) or somewhat considering (27.6 per cent) the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for the full 7–14 age range when planning for Key Stage 3. A further 33 per cent reported considering only the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study. These figures, too, are broadly consistent with previous years, although the proportion considering only the Programme Key Stage 3 has fallen by six percentage points since 2024, suggesting greater attention to continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3.

Contact between primary and secondary schools

Language Trends asked primary schools if they had any contact with local secondary schools in relation to language learning. Just under 30 per cent of respondents have contact with one local secondary school, and just over half reported no contacts with any secondary schools, as in 2025 (Table 6).

Contact with a secondary school?	2025 (n=503)	2026 (n=368)
Yes, with just one secondary school	31%	29.1%
Yes, with some secondary schools	13.7%	14.4%
Yes, with all the main receiving secondary schools	3.8%	3.3%
No contacts with secondary schools	50.9%	52.7%
Unanswered	0.6%	0.5%

Table 6: Primary school respondent answers to ‘Do you have contacts with your local secondary schools in relation to language learning?’

The percentage of primary schools who report being in contact with a local secondary school has remained largely consistent since 2018, with some fluctuations depending on response rates (see Figure 6).

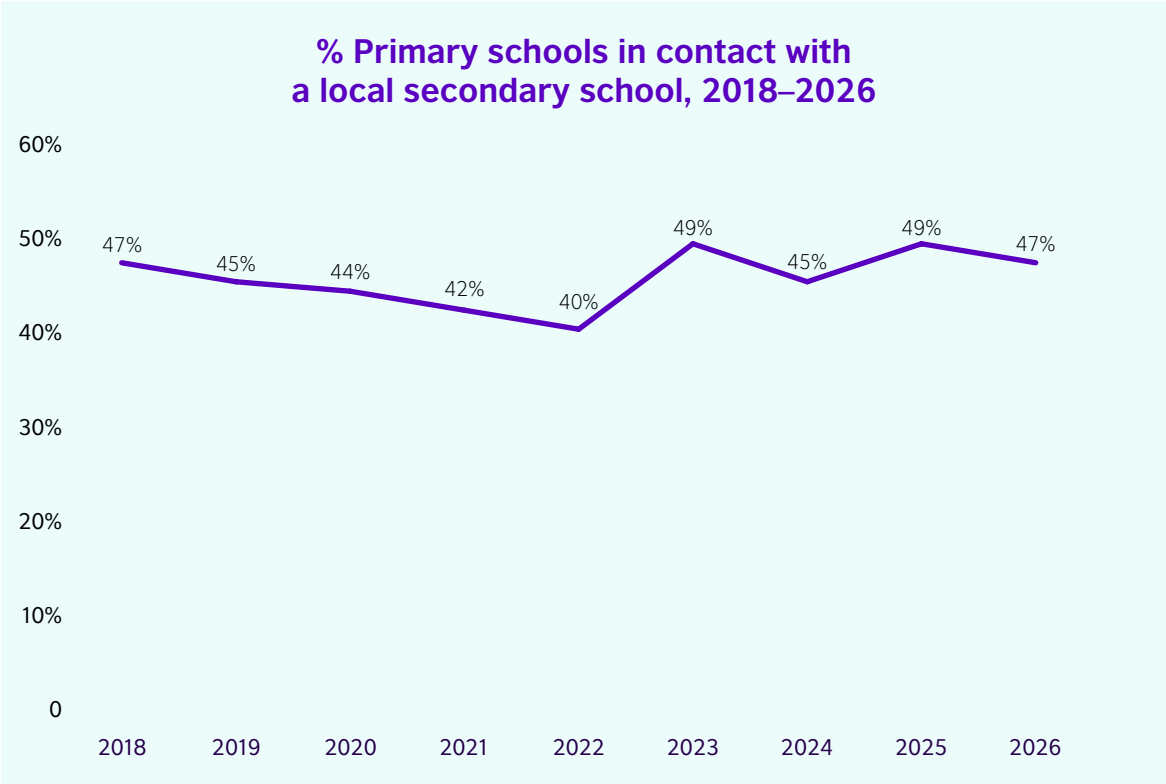


Figure 6: Percentage of state primary schools in contact with a local state secondary school in relation to language learning, 2018–2026

Of those primary schools who have contact with a local secondary school, 52 per cent reported that they exchange information on language teaching informally (compared to 51 per cent in 2025, 54 per cent in 2024, 53 per cent in 2023), with around a third taking part in network/cluster meetings (consistent with 31 per cent in 2025, 31 per cent in 2024, 30 per cent in 2023). At the point of transition between Key Stage 2 and 3, just over a fifth of primary schools with secondary contacts provide information on pupil progress in language learning (see Figure 7).

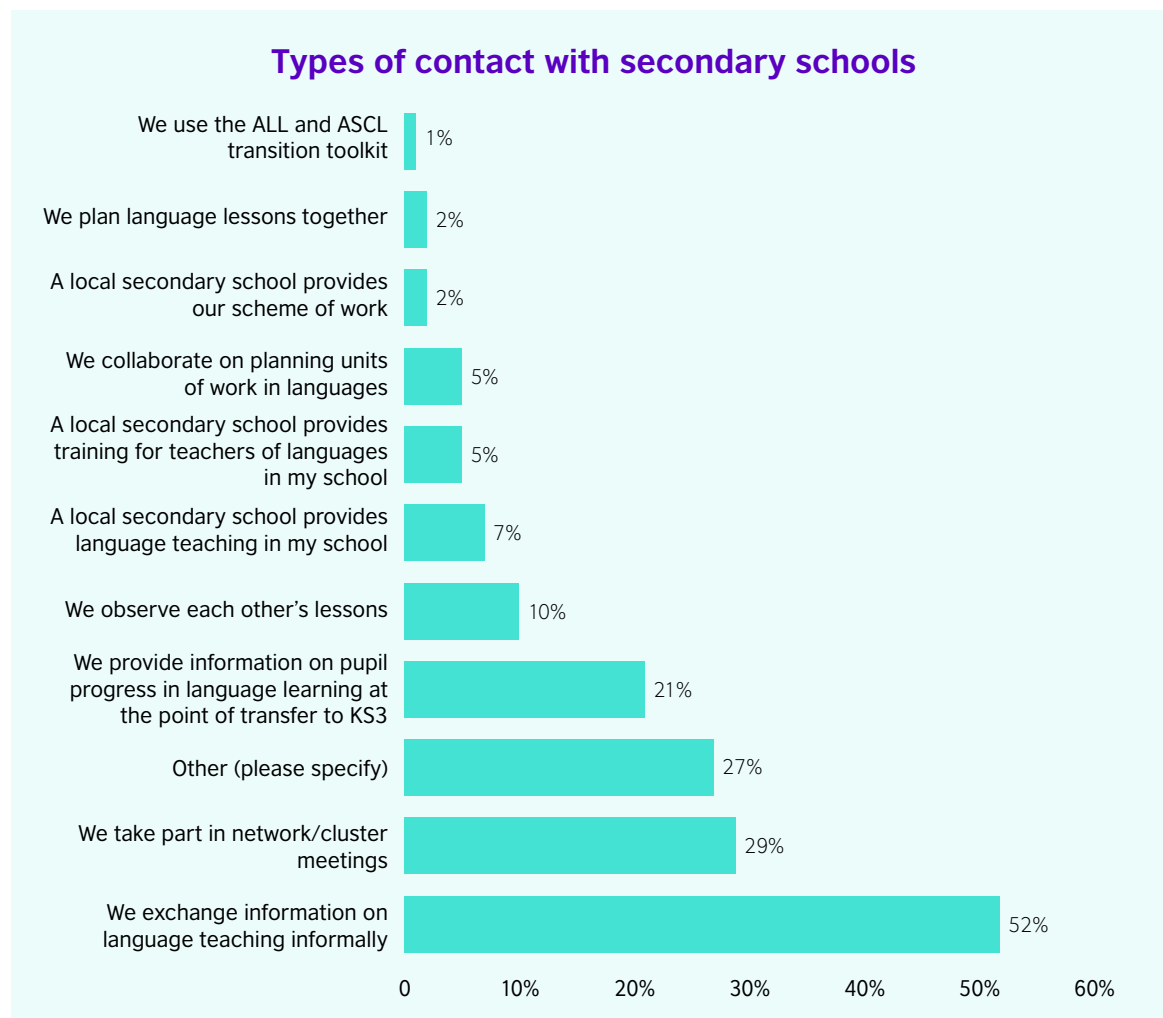


Figure 7: The type of contact that primary schools have with secondary schools (% calculated out of the number of primary schools who reported contact with local secondary schools, n=165)

Continuity from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3

Secondary school respondents were asked to reflect on how well Key Stage 2 language learning experiences have prepared their Year 7 pupils for language learning in Key Stage 3 compared to previous cohorts. Consistent with previous years, 58.1 per cent of respondents consider there to be little change, while 17.1 per cent consider pupils to be less well prepared (see Figure 8).

In 'other' comments, respondents noted that:

"The fact that there is no consistent second language taught at primary schools makes the observation of any progress difficult. Students that have taken Spanish, in our case, are prepared for the change. However, the ones that have studied another language or no language at all struggle at the start of the year mainly in terms of attitude for learning a second language."

"Students from some feeder schools are exceptionally well prepared, far better than previous cohorts. However, it's a real range between feeder schools."

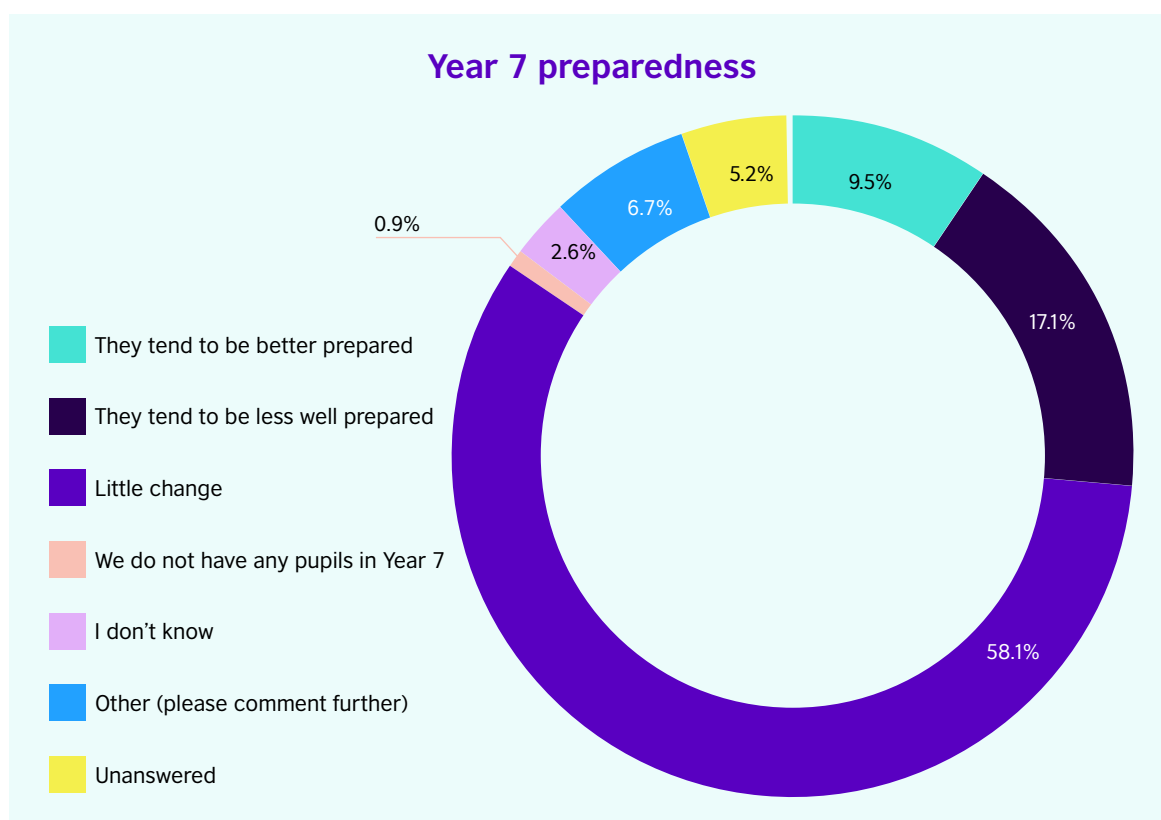


Figure 8: Secondary school respondents' responses to: Thinking about your current Year 7 pupils, how well has their language learning experience in Key Stage 2 prepared them for language learning in Key Stage 3, in comparison to previous cohorts over the last 5 years?

Language Trends asked primary schools what arrangements they had in place for transition. 44.6 per cent reported that they teach the same language as the main receiving school for their leavers to help facilitate transition; however, many noted the difficulty of this, as pupils go on to a variety of receiving schools. Secondary schools were asked if pupils in their school can continue with the same language(s) they learned at Key Stage 2. Only in a small number of schools do all pupils, or even most pupils, continue with the same language; in 61 per cent of schools, only some pupils are able to do so (see Table 7). In ‘other’ comments, secondary school respondents noted:

“All our feeder schools do different things – there is a mixture of French, German and Spanish taught but inconsistently and not linked to our curriculum at all. Therefore, we have to start from scratch when they get here due to the inconsistent approach.”

	2023 (n=586)	2024 (n=601)	2025 (n=445)	2026 (n=539)
All pupils continue with the same language	3%	2%	2%	2%
The majority of pupils continue with the same language	16%	15%	11%	13%
Some pupils continue with the same language	69%	68%	73%	61%
No, our pupils start a new language from scratch	7%	6%	6%	7%
Other (please comment further)	5%	9%	7%	6%

Table 7: State secondary responses to ‘Do pupils in your school continue with the same language they learned at Key Stage 2?’

Just over seven in ten secondary schools surveyed reported that they cannot organise classes for pupils in Year 7 according to the language(s) they learned at primary school.

Much work remains to be done on improving collaboration and continuity between primary and secondary phases. Respondents to both surveys highlighted challenges faced by those seeking to connect to strengthen transition, such as constraints of time and budget, differences in languages taught, and the number of feeder primaries linked to a given secondary:

“I believe that most of our secondary schools study French not Spanish. We do focus a lot on language learning skills which help with the transition. I believe that the secondary schools ask the children to complete a written task before they go to secondary school, but we don't have any links or transition in place. I used to write to the secondary school to try and make links, but it didn't really work out.” (Primary)

“There is very little transition of MFL, it is predominantly core subjects and pastoral care.” (Primary)

“We have a large number of feeder primary schools. Coordinating the same language for transition from KS2 to KS3 is very difficult, so some students start at secondary school with a basic knowledge of French (our language in Year 7), but plenty others have never studied it before.” (Secondary)

“There is little work with primaries regarding transition as different primaries do different languages, to a different level. We start completely from scratch with Spanish to make equal for all.” (Secondary)

Nonetheless, many respondents’ comments suggest that transition is well managed and effective, through taster sessions, discussions between KS2 and KS3 teachers, and KS3 teachers working in primary settings to encourage language learning:

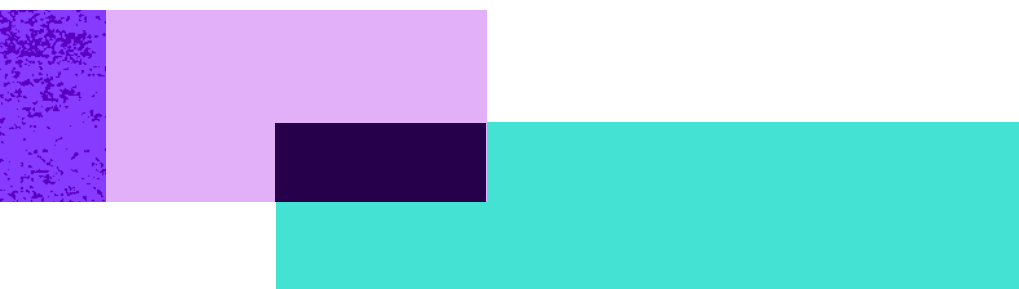
“We have a variety of languages in receiving secondary schools nearby. We have cluster meetings with other primary schools and our main secondary school to discuss how what we are doing complements what they teach and so we each have an understanding of what is being done.” (Primary)

“The language ambassadors from our local high school came and taught our children a French session.” (Primary)

“We have a very coherent KS2-3 transition programme. We have regular meetings with our feeder primary schools and students from these schools come to my school for taster lessons in Spanish and Mandarin during the spring term, as well as other transition activities in the summer term.” (Secondary)

“We didn't have any transition provision previously. Since starting our own MAT, we have designed a KS2 French curriculum that mirrors a research-based approach we take to language learning in secondary school. This has been shared with the 4 primary schools in our Trust and 10 primary schools within our local cluster. They now use our resources, outlines and assessments to deliver French. We are in the process of developing this further.” (Secondary)

“We do try to go and visit some, we even managed to get some of our Y9 students to go and teach Spanish for a few sessions in a local primary, but we would like to be more involved. We offer a Chinese New Year event to our local primary schools, and some manage to attend.” (Secondary)



Findings from state secondary schools

Profile of responding secondary schools

Responses were received from 539 secondary schools across the country teaching pupils aged 11–16 or 11–18. The lower response rates in the North-East are attributable to the comparatively higher number of middle and senior schools for whom our survey is not suitable (see Figure 9).

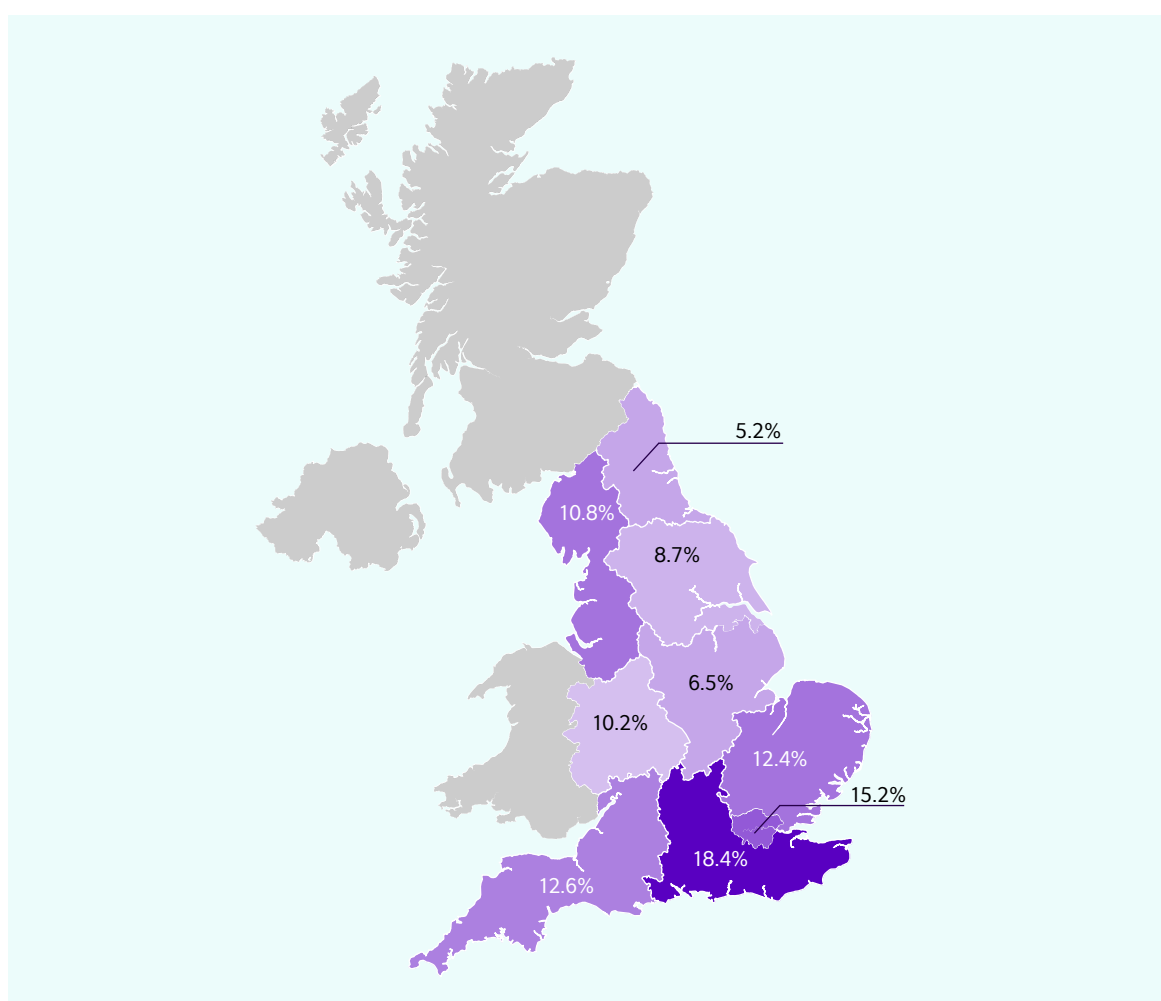


Figure 9: Location of state secondary schools

In 2025/26, 25.8 per cent of pupils in state secondary schools in England had FSME, similar to the national average for all school types and up from 24.1 per cent last year (Department for Education, 2025e). The average rate in the sample was slightly above the national average at 26.2 per cent.

The sample shows a relatively even distribution of schools across quintiles. In previous years, quintile 1 schools have tended to be overrepresented, accounting for 31.4 per cent of respondents in 2025 (see Table 8). The higher response rate and more balanced distribution achieved this year provide a broader picture of the different contexts and challenges associated with language education.

Quintile	Range (2025)	% respondents (2025)	Range (2026)	% respondents (2026)
1 – most affluent	0–14.2%	31.4%	0–15.4%	21%
2	14.3–20.6%	18.5%	15.5%–22.3%	19%
3	20.7–27.6%	16.5%	22.4 %–29.7%	19%
4	27.7–37.8%	19.5%	29.8%–40.2%	22%
5 – most deprived	37.9% and above	14.2%	40.3% and above	19%

Table 8: State secondary school quintiles

31.8% of responding schools (n=468) reported having pupils in Year 7 disappplied from languages. Where this occurred, cohort proportions ranged from less than one per cent to 20 per cent, with most falling in the low single-digit range (approximately 1–5 per cent). These pupils were typically identified as having special educational needs, particularly related to literacy, and schools in quintiles 1–3 were more likely to report disapplication. Some schools (5.6 per cent) reported other approaches, typically centred on partial disapplication (e.g. pupils attend for just an hour a week or study one language instead of two). Decisions are most commonly made by the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), often in collaboration with senior leadership, heads of department or other teaching leads.



Curriculum time for languages in state secondary schools

At Key Stage 3, over half of responding schools (n=484–492) allocate one to two hours of language learning per week, and almost a third allocate two to three hours. At Key Stage 4, almost three quarters of responding schools (n=482–489) allocate two to three hours per week (see Figure 10). Quintile differences are modest; patterns are broadly similar across contexts. Compared with 2025, state secondary schools show a shift in curriculum time allocation away from mid-range provision (2–3 hours per week) towards lower allocations (1–2 hours, and to a lesser extent under 1 hour), especially in Key Stage 3, with a decline of around 7–8 percentage points in the 2–3 hour band.

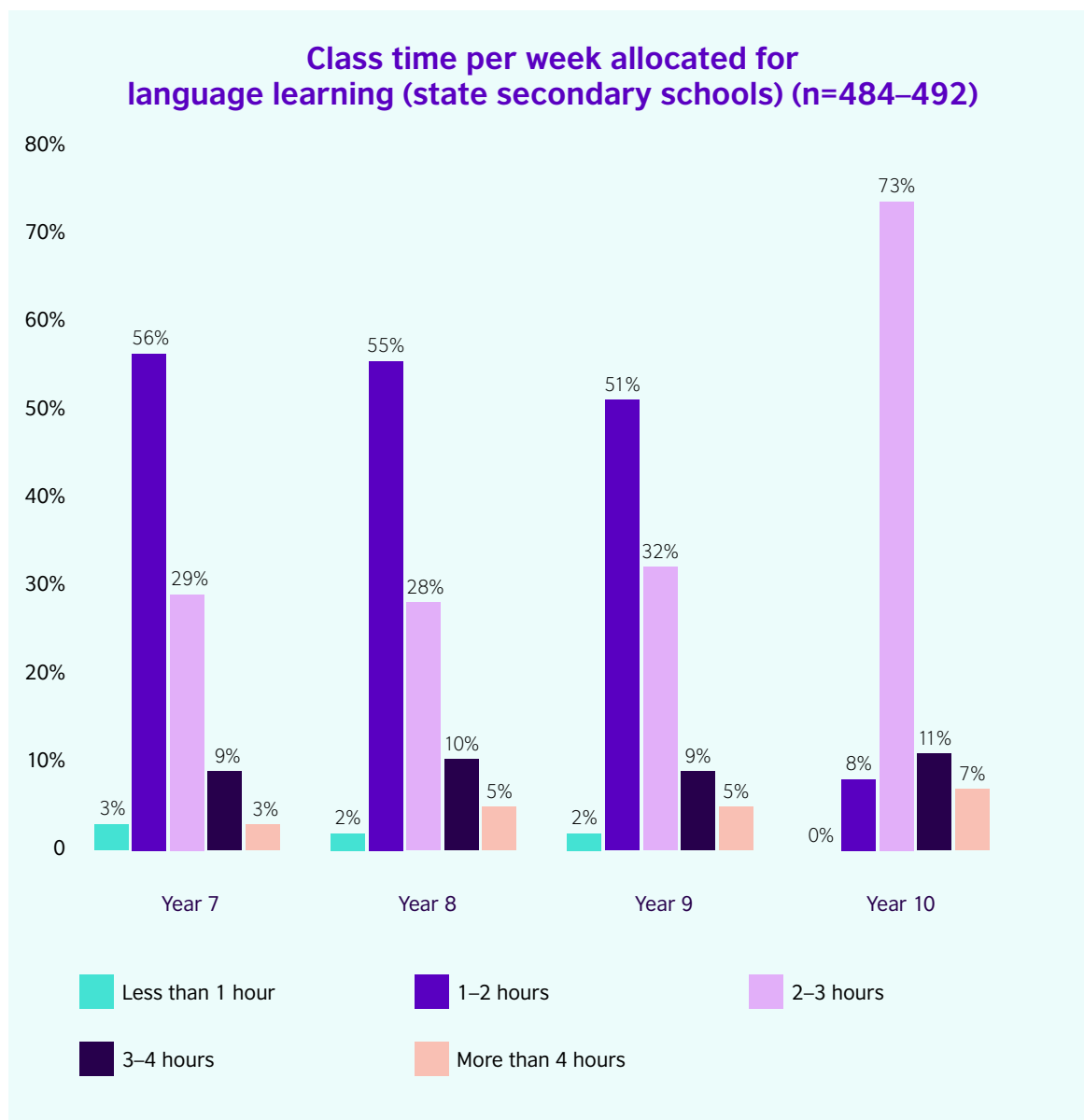


Figure 10: Class time per week allocated for language learning (state secondary) (n=484–492)

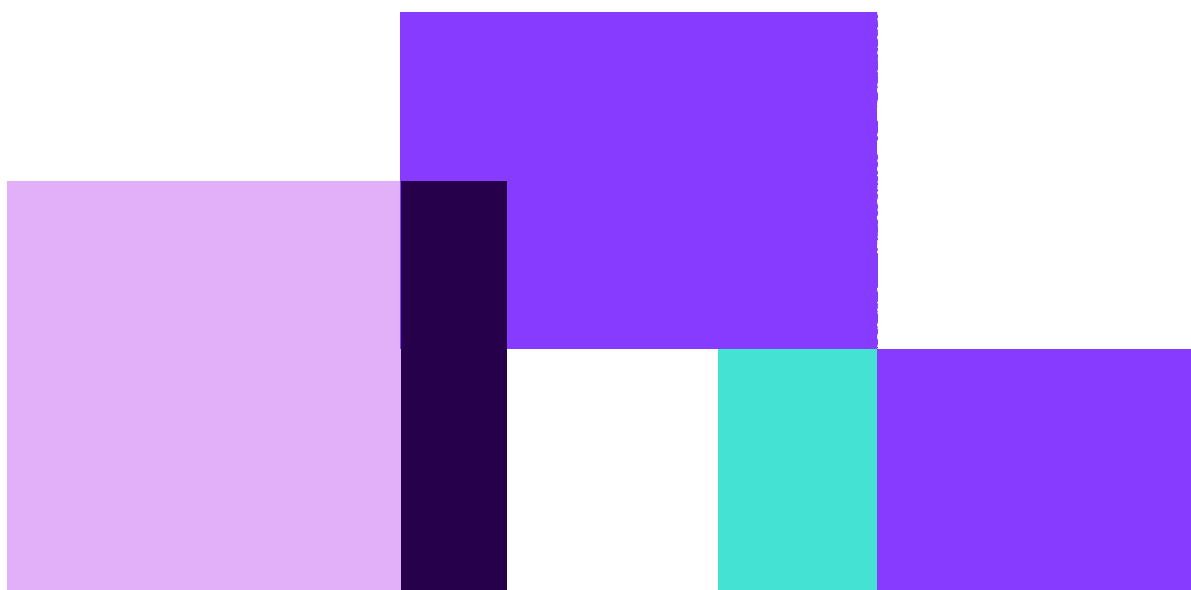
Almost three-quarters of responding schools (n=454) reported stable language teaching hours; however, almost a fifth reported a reduction in curriculum time allocation, primarily at Key Stage 3. Reported reductions were typically substantive rather than marginal, most commonly around 30 minutes per week or more. Compared with changes observed between 2024 and 2025, the 2026 pattern is more pronounced, suggesting a potential turning point at Key Stage 3.

These reductions were primarily attributed to competing curriculum demands and staffing pressures, alongside wider timetabling constraints and school-level rebalancing towards core

subjects, reflecting shifting institutional priorities. In some cases, respondents also pointed to broader policy and curriculum changes affecting the status and uptake of languages, including shifts in accountability frameworks and options processes, with reported downstream effects on both Key Stage 3 provision and subsequent GCSE take-up:

“This year we dropped from 5 hours which had previously been 6 hours. We had for 5 years been teaching a language to 80% of the cohort, this was dropped for our current year 11 who are the first group to not have to do a language. We have been fighting hard to maintain our place in school, particularly with an SLT who are only focussed on core! We used to offer French and German, however our German teacher fell ill and we are now left with only French. Due to the reduction in hours I cannot envision students being able to access 2 languages, which means that we are not able to produce true linguists. The attitude of students is that technology can do it we don’t need to know. The new GCSE will hopefully mean that students do see it as a more achievable subject, but this will only be true if grade boundaries are fair and achievable. I have tried to set up a day for year 9 and get universities and companies, including GCHQ to come into school. Unfortunately no one has engaged with the idea and yet universities need us at secondary school to instil a love and understanding regarding the importance of languages for their survival.”

“For 2026, we are facing huge cuts to MFL teaching hours, due to a) the Ebacc no longer being recognised, supported or acknowledge by the government and b) the new curriculum proposals. In September, we will have our KS3 MFL hours reduced from 5 to 4 per fortnight and we are expecting far less MFL GCSE classes next year, due to MFL becoming optional in the y9 options progress. Having worked so hard to get our Ebacc MFL entry to 80%, this is devastating news and we all feel very demoralised. We totally understand our school’s decisions - they are doing their best to follow the consequences of the scrapping of the Ebacc & the new curriculum proposals.”



Languages at Key Stage 3

French remains the most commonly offered language at Key Stage 3. Provision across languages has declined slightly year on year, except for Spanish, which remained unchanged between 2025 and 2026 (see Figure 11). Provision varies little across quintiles, although German provision is lower in quintile 5 (19 per cent compared with 31–39 per cent in the other quintiles).

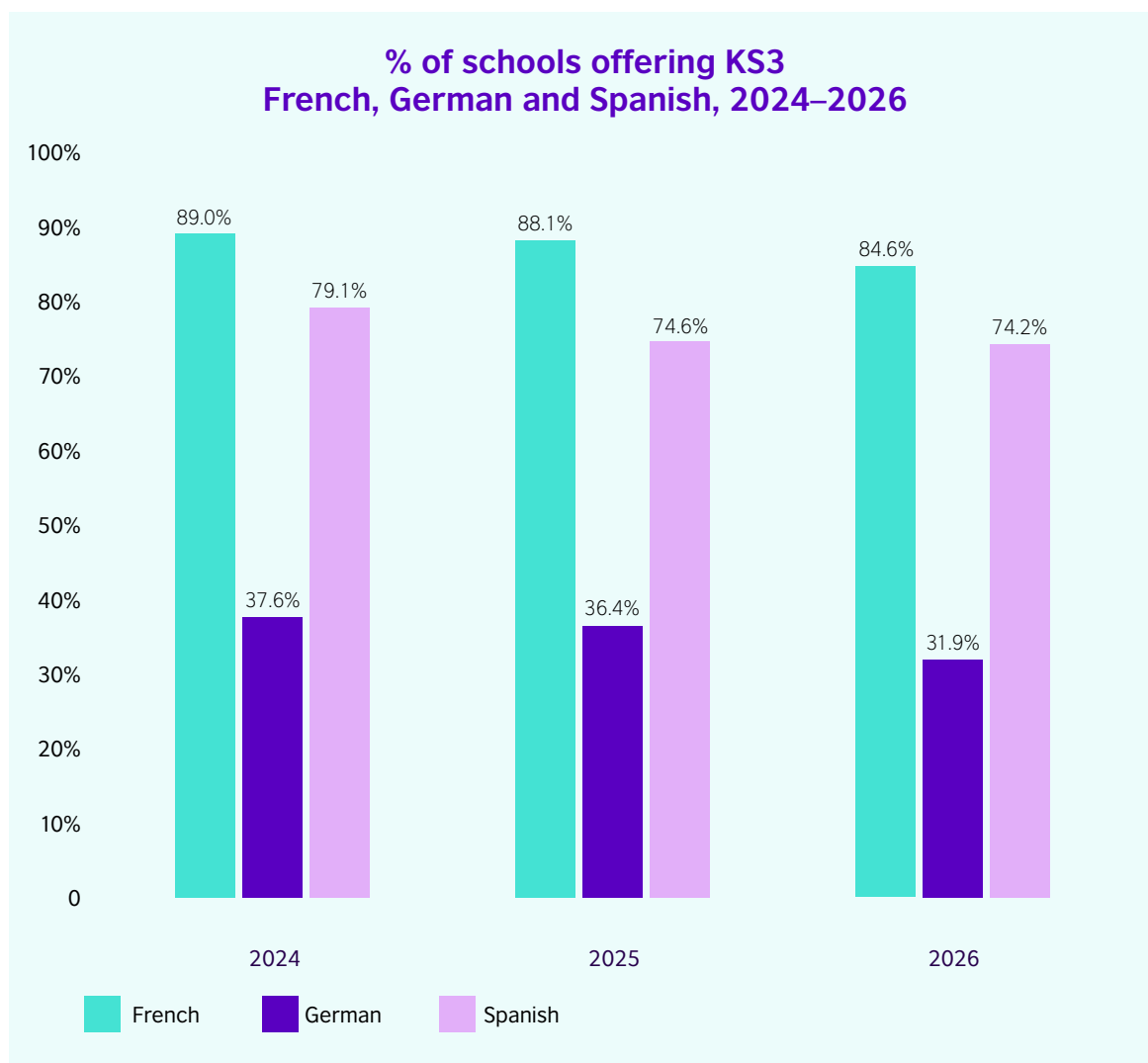


Figure 11: Percentage of state secondary schools offering French, German and Spanish at Key Stage 3 over the past three years

Provision for languages other than French, German and Spanish remains relatively limited overall and, apart from Chinese/Mandarin and Latin, is more commonly delivered through enrichment activities than as full curriculum subjects (see Table 9). Where schools offer languages as part of enrichment, activities are most often delivered at lunch time or after school.

	Ancient Greek	Arabic	Chinese / Mandarin	Italian	Japanese	Latin	Polish	Russian	Urdu	Other
Key Stage 3 – full curriculum subject	0%	2%	5%	1%	1%	5%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Key Stage 3 – enrichment	2%	2%	4%	4%	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%	3%

Table 9: Percentage of state secondary schools offering lesser taught languages at Key Stage 3

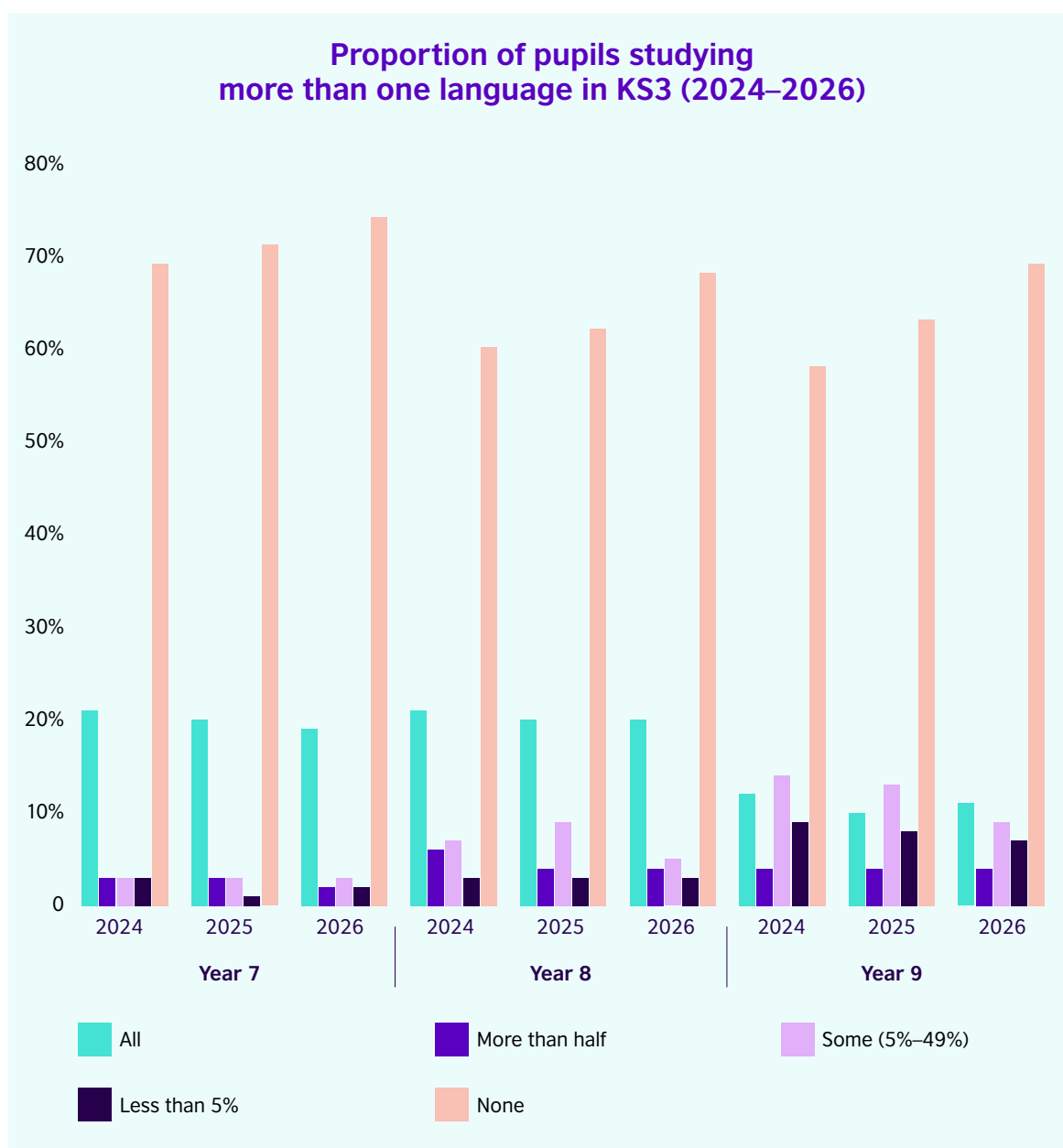


Figure 12: Proportion of pupils studying more than one language in KS3 (2024–2026)

Most responding schools (n=481–485) reported no pupils studying more than one language at Key Stage 3 (see Figure 12). This share has increased steadily since 2024 (by 5–11 percentage points across Years 7–9), alongside a decline in mid-level provision, particularly in Years 8 and 9. Other categories remained broadly stable, suggesting a shift away from mid-level multilingual provision towards no provision, rather than an increase in high-level provision. Nevertheless, around one in five responding schools reported that all pupils in Years 7 and 8 pupils studied more than one language, falling to around one in ten schools for Year 9, and these proportions have remained broadly stable over time.

Languages at Key Stage 4

In a year where the number of GCSE entries across subjects remained relatively stable, languages showed divergent trends (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2025a). Spanish performed strongly, with entries rising by 2.2 per cent on 2024 and 35 per cent on 2019 (pre-pandemic), overtaking French as the most popular GCSE language for the first time on record (The Standard, 2025). Entries for Other Modern Languages (i.e. except French, German, Irish, Spanish and Welsh) also increased, up 1.5 per cent on 2024 and 35.9 per cent on 2019. French fell slightly compared to 2024 (–1.6 per cent) but remains above pre-pandemic levels (+3.3 per cent on 2019). German continues its decline, down 7 per cent on 2024 and 21.7 percent on 2019 (see Figure 13). Overall, recent national and local efforts to strengthen language teaching may be contributing to stability and growth in some subjects, but it remains to be seen whether targeted initiatives such as the German Promotion Project can reverse the downward trend of German.

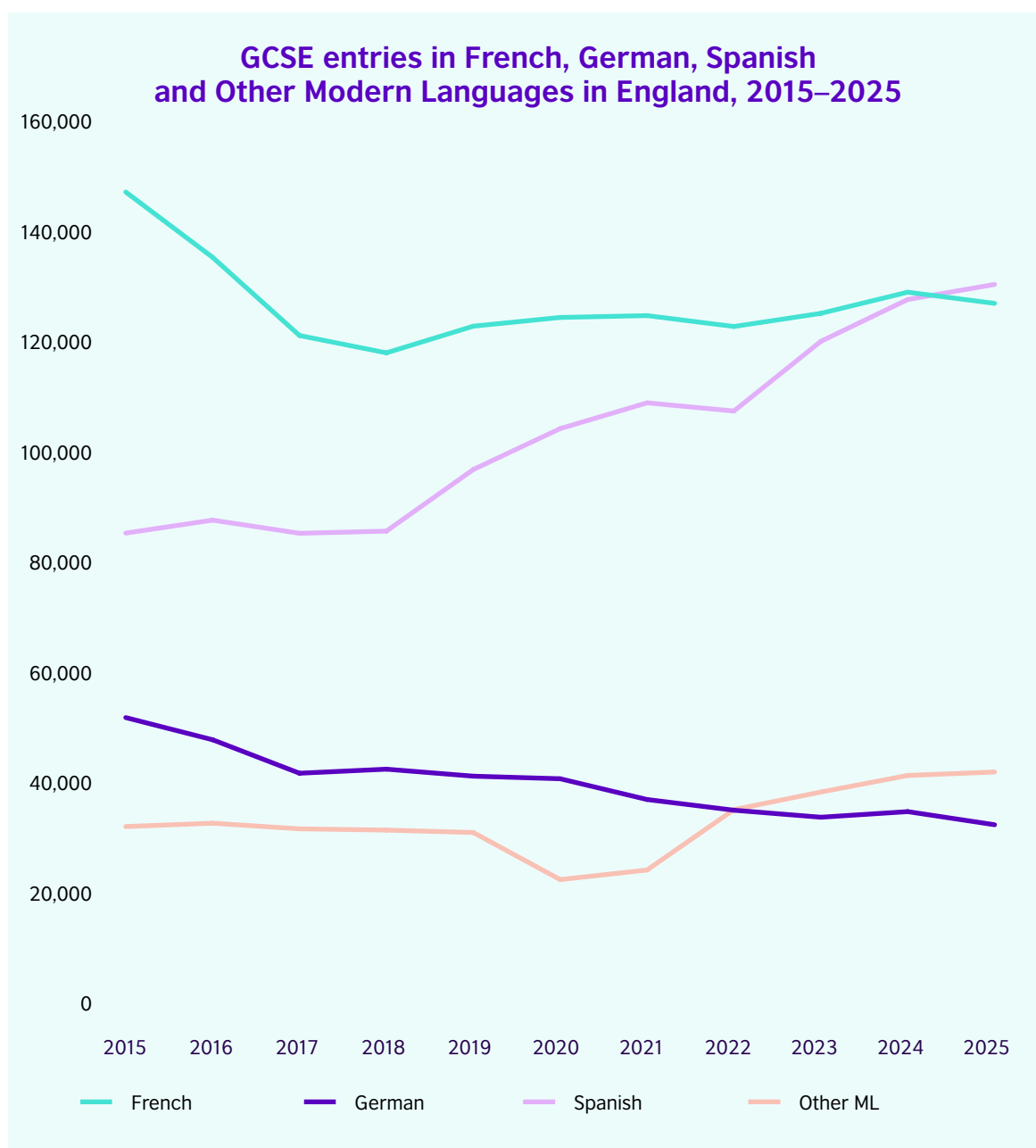


Figure 13: GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015–2025

Southern and especially south-eastern England showed higher entry rates for the “big three”, with the northern regions recording lower rates (see Figure 14) (Ofqual, 2025). One exception is the North-East, which, alongside London, showed the highest percentages for French entry. French showed comparatively limited regional variation, suggesting it remains the most established language nationally, despite being entered by fewer total pupils overall than Spanish. By contrast, Spanish showed the most pronounced regional concentration, with the high figures in London and the North-West suggesting uptake is strongest in metropolitan and globally connected regions. The South-West showed the most even balance across languages.



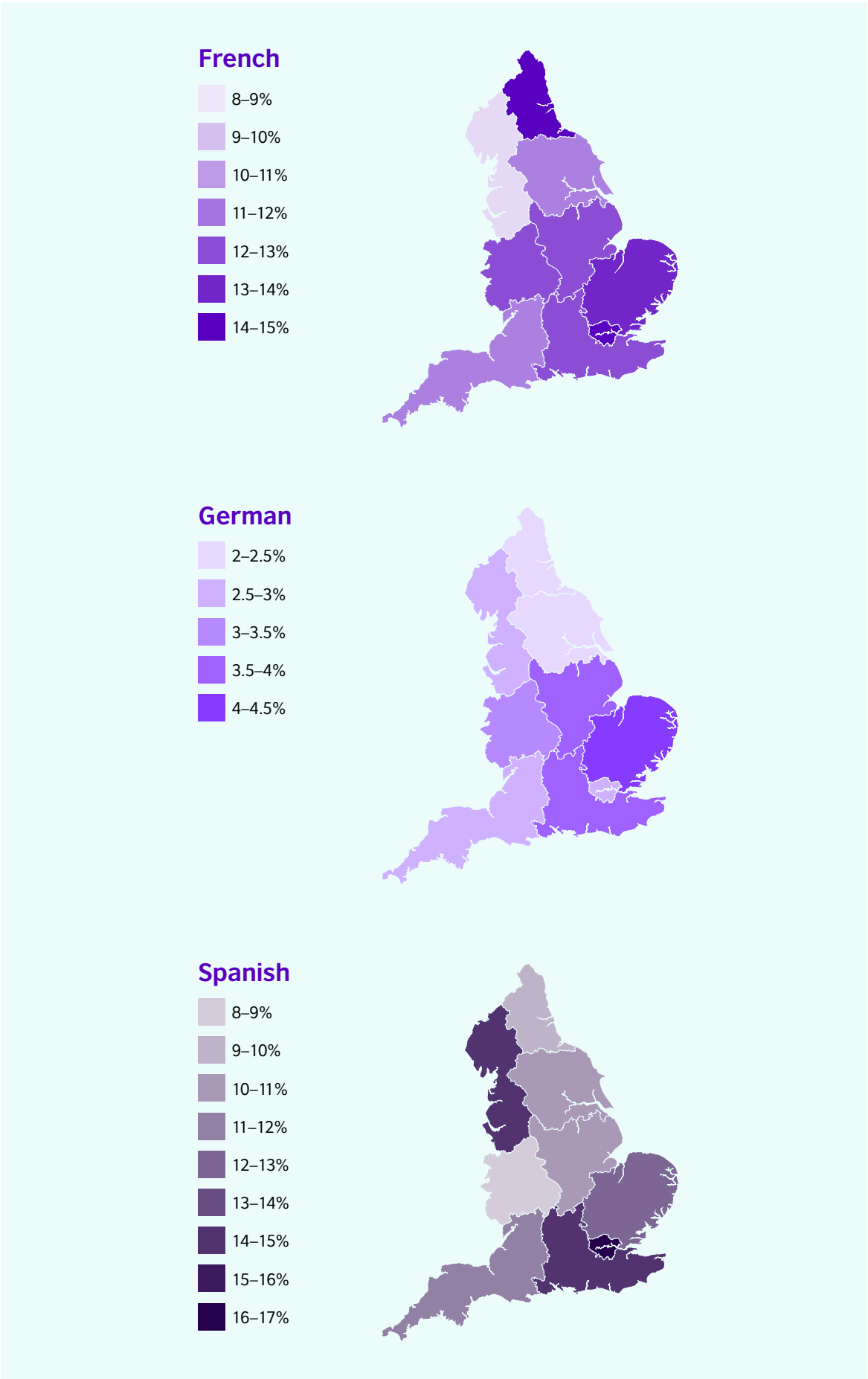


Figure 14: Regional distribution of the percentage of pupils receiving a result in GCSE French, German or Spanish in England (2025)

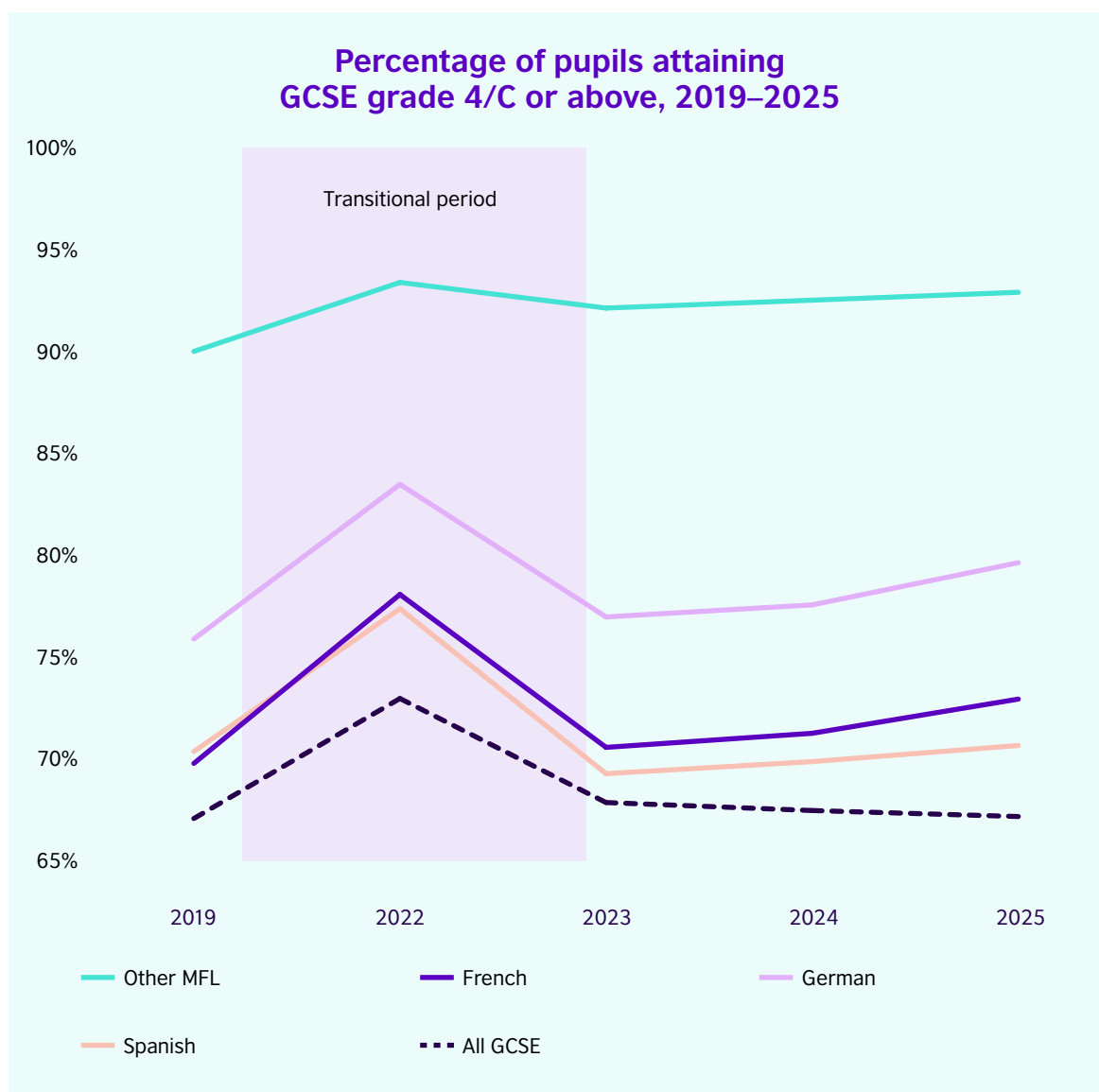


Figure 15: Percentage of pupils attaining GCSE grade 4/C or above (2019–2025)

GCSE outcomes remained broadly stable in 2025, with modern foreign languages showing slight improvements, particularly in German (see Figures 15 and 16). MFL subjects continue to record above-average proportions of pupils achieving grades 7+ and 4+, maintaining a gradual upward trend since 2019. This may reflect, at least in part, the impact of recent reforms and support initiatives in languages education.

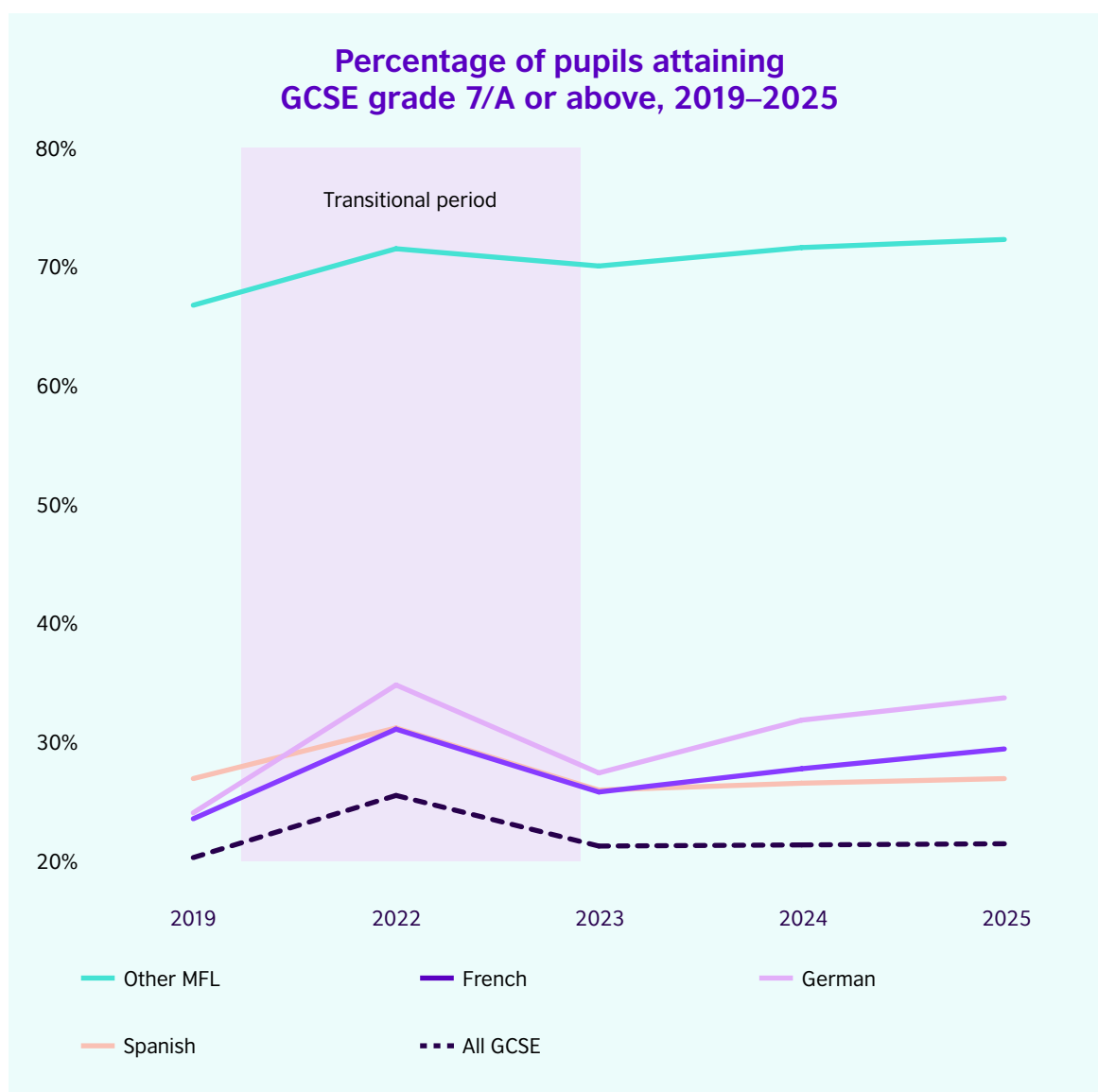


Figure 16: Percentage of pupils attaining GCSE grade 7/A or above (2019–2025)

In terms of sex, differences in GCSE entry for languages were modest; French and Spanish entries were slightly female-skewed (around 56 per cent female), German was broadly balanced (around 48 per cent female) and Welsh showed near parity. Irish and Other Modern Languages showed a stronger female skew (around 58 per cent and 69 per cent female respectively; Joint Council for Qualifications, 2025a). Attainment differences were more pronounced. Across language subjects, female pupils outperformed male pupils at both Grade 7+ and Grade 4+, with larger gaps than those observed across all GCSE subjects (see Table 10).

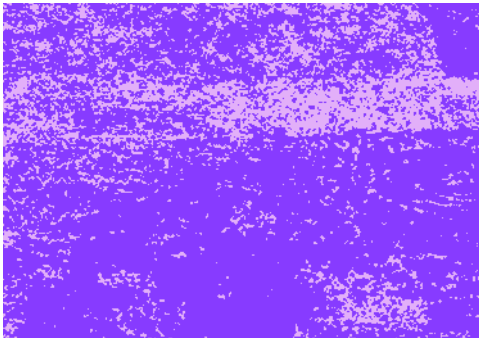
	All GCSE subjects		French		German		Spanish		Other Modern Languages	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Grade 4 and above	64.1%	70.2%	67.9%	76.9%	76.7%	82.6%	65.4%	75.0%	91.1%	94.4%
Grade 7 and above	19.3%	24.2%	25.1%	33.4%	30.8%	37.4%	22.4%	31.0%	68.9%	75.5%

Table 10: Percentage of male and female pupils attaining key GCSE grades in England (2025)

Teachers in our data set estimated that, on average, 50 per cent of Year 11 pupils were studying a language at GCSE, a decrease of three percentage points compared to 2025. This overall decline sits alongside a notable change in patterns by school context. Previously, quintile 1 schools were considerably more likely to report higher levels of language participation at Key Stage 4; in 2025, the gap between quintile 1 schools and schools in other quintiles was 20 percentage points. In 2026, reported participation is more evenly distributed across quintiles (Table 11).

	2025	2026
Quintile 1 – most affluent	69%	49%
Quintile 2	47%	48%
Quintile 3	46%	46%
Quintile 4	46%	54%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	47%	50%

Table 11: Average percentage of pupils in Year 11 studying a language by teacher estimate



As at Key Stage 3, French remains the most widely offered language at Key Stage 4. Provision across languages has declined slightly year on year (see Figure 17) and is broadly similar across quintiles, with the exception of lower German provision in quintile 5 schools. Unlike at Key Stage 3, only 1.6 per cent of responding schools (n=488–490) reported that more than half of Year 10 pupils studied more than one language. 11.3 per cent reported that 5–49 per cent did so, while 87 per cent reported that less than 5 per cent or none did, suggesting that multilingual pathways are primarily an early-stage curriculum feature with limited continuation into GCSE years.

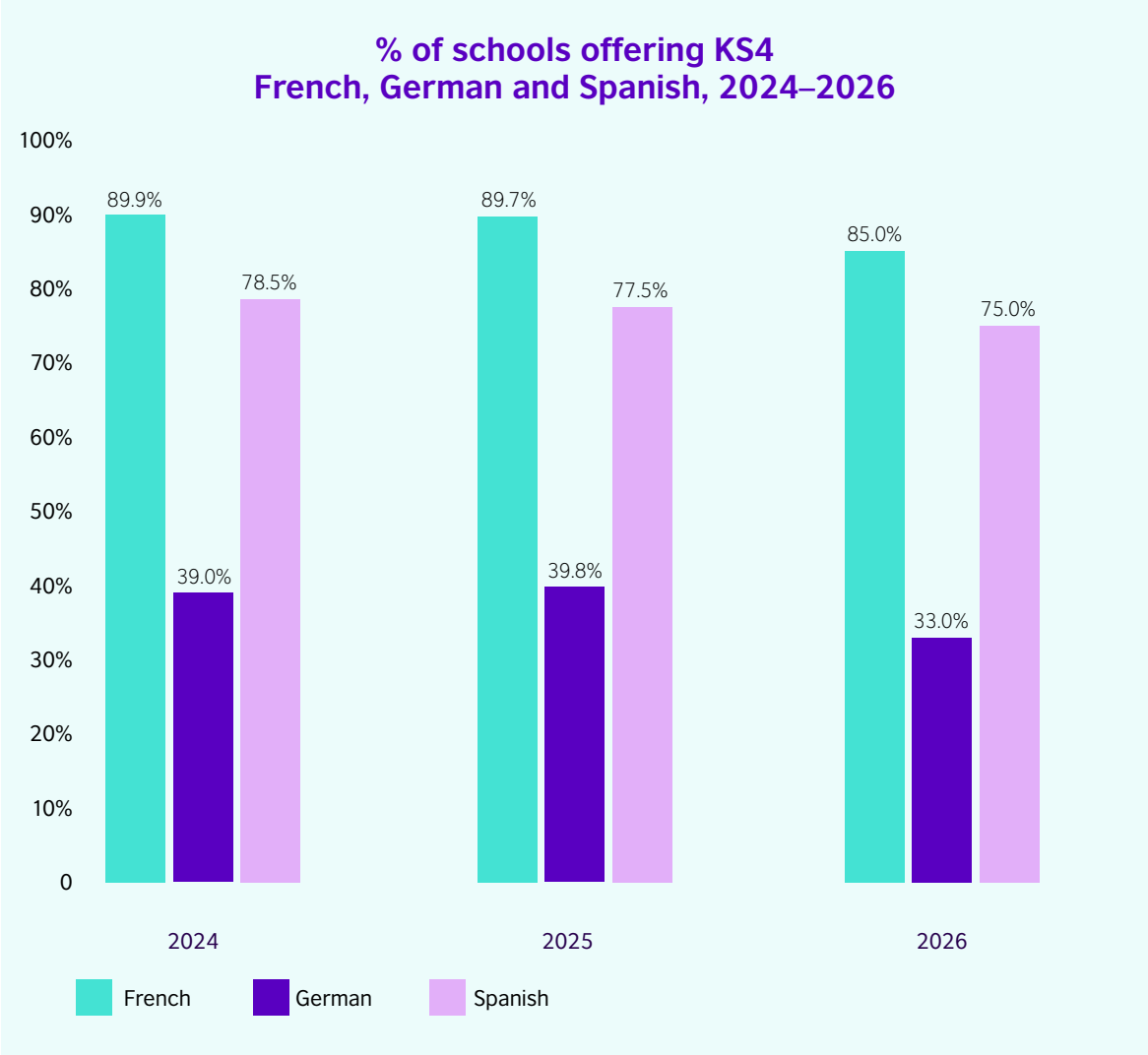


Figure 17: Percentage of state secondary schools offering French, German and Spanish at Key Stage 4 over the past three years



Our data show clear regional variation in language provision, broadly aligned with GCSE entry patterns (see Figure 14). German shows its strongest representation in the East Midlands and East of England, with lower provision in London, the North East and Yorkshire and the Humber. Spanish shows its strongest representation in London and the South East/South West, while the North East and Yorkshire & Humber tend to have lower provision. French is the most consistently offered language across all regions, with comparatively small variation overall. (see Figure 18).

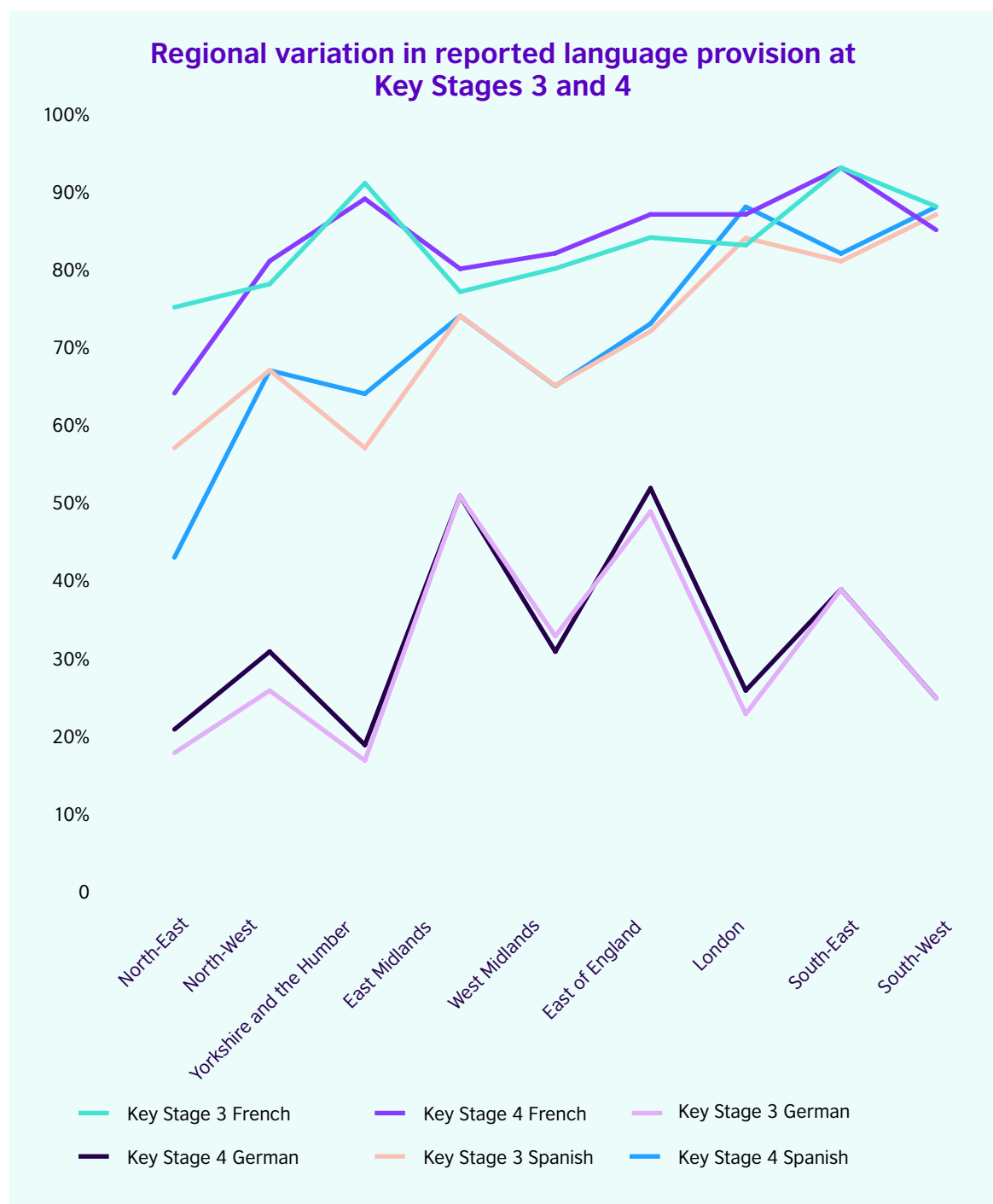


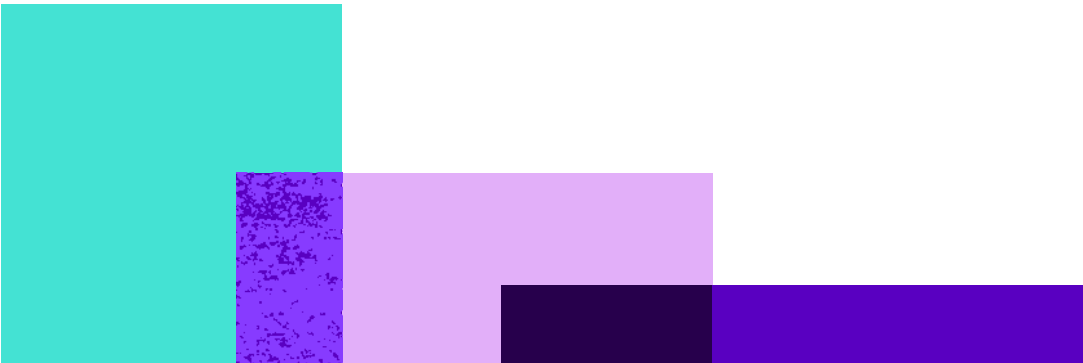
Figure 18: Regional variation in reported language provision at Key Stages 3 and 4

Chinese/Mandarin and Polish are the most commonly offered lesser-taught languages,, with 14 per cent of schools reporting provision as either full curriculum subjects or enrichment activities (see Table 12). These are followed by Italian (13 per cent), Arabic, Latin, and Urdu (12 per cent), and Russian (10 per cent). Patterns across FSME quintiles are mixed, although provision in Arabic and Urdu is marginally more common in schools in higher quintiles. The prominence of community languages such as Arabic, Polish and Urdu reflects broader patterns of HHCL learning documented elsewhere in the report. Provision at Key Stage 4 is more closely linked to accredited study than at Key Stage 3, with lesser-taught languages more commonly offered as full curriculum subjects than enrichment activities. Patterns are broadly similar to those reported in 2025.

	Ancient Greek	Arabic	Chinese / Mandarin	Italian	Japanese	Latin	Polish	Russian	Urdu	Other
Key Stage 4 – full curriculum subject	2%	9%	10%	9%	4%	9%	9%	7%	9%	5%
Key Stage 4 – enrichment	1%	3%	4%	4%	2%	3%	5%	3%	3%	3%

Table 12: Percentage of state secondary schools offering lesser taught languages at Key Stage 4

We asked teachers about their perceptions of take-up for languages at Key Stage 4. Compared to previous years, there is a marked decline in the proportion of responding schools (n=498) reporting that more pupils are taking a language, a smaller but still notable decline in those reporting that languages remain compulsory and a stark increase in those who perceived that fewer pupils are taking a language (see Figure 19).



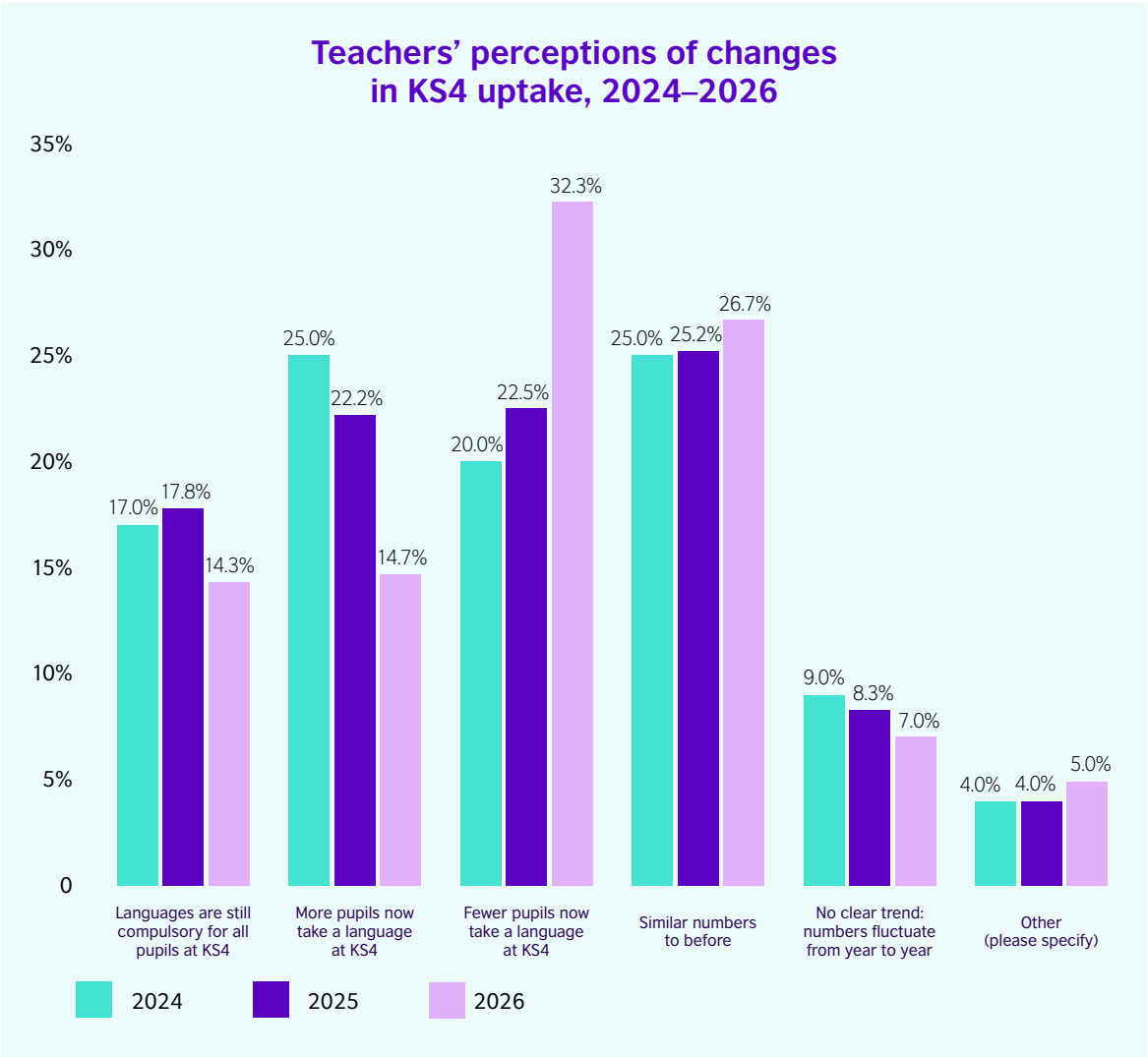
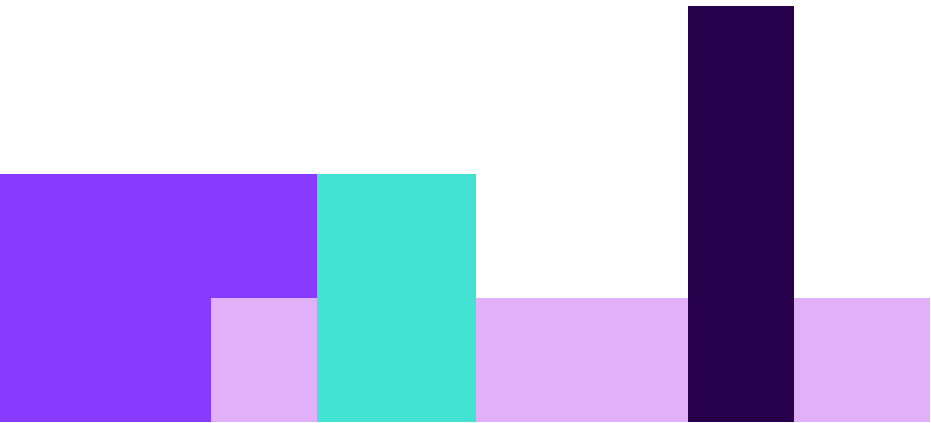


Figure 19: State school teachers' perceptions of language uptake over the past three years at Key Stage 4



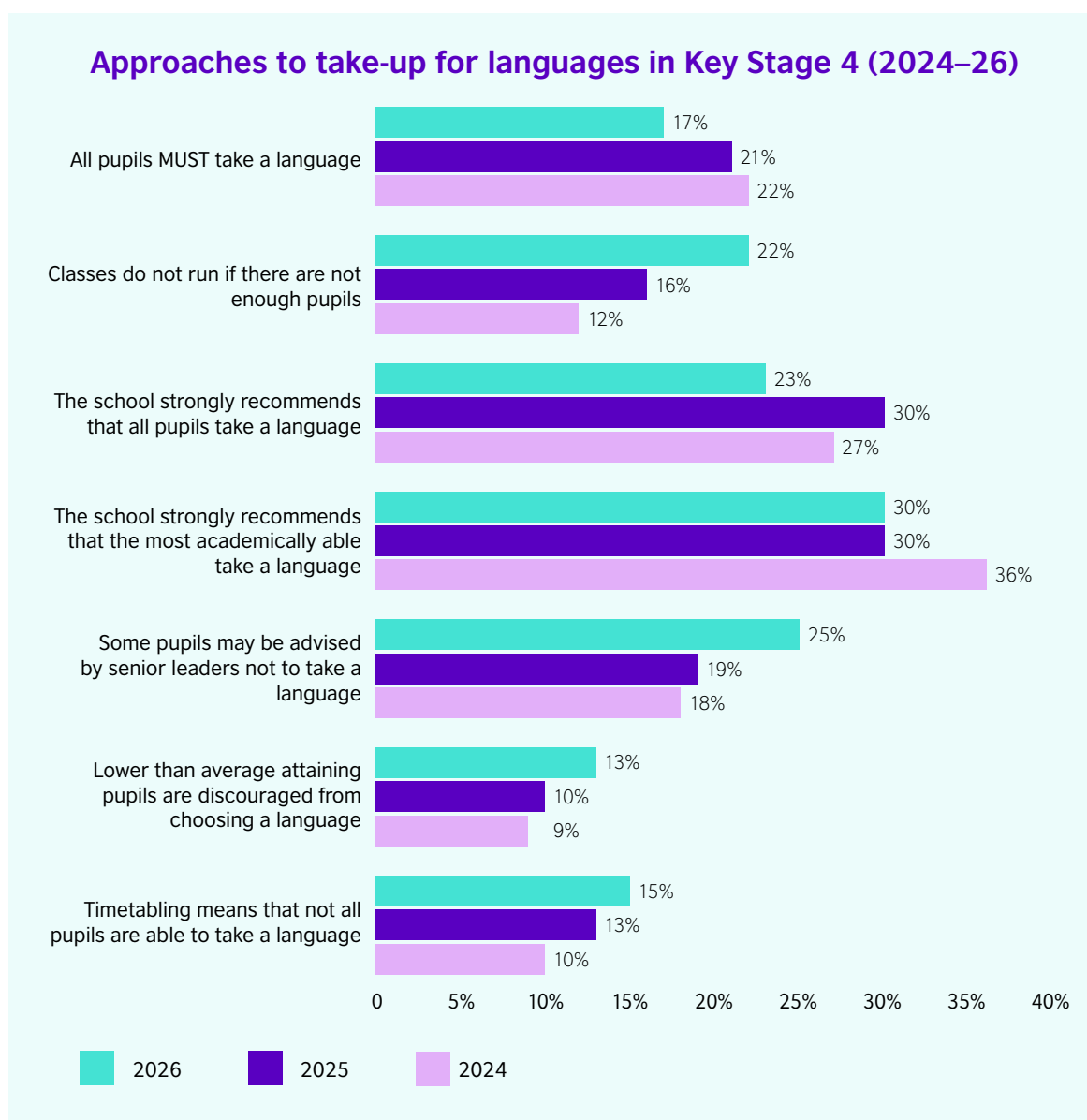


Figure 20: Approaches to take-up for languages in Key Stage 4 (2024–26)

A mixed-policy landscape emerged among responding schools (n=494) when asked about their approach to take-up for languages at Key Stage 4 (see Figure 20). Over time, there has been an increase in schools reporting constraints on language provision, including timetabling limitations and classes not running where pupil numbers are insufficient. There has also been a rise in schools advising some pupils not to take a language and in discouraging lower-attaining pupils from doing so.

In contrast, more universal expectations have declined, with fewer schools requiring all pupils to take a language or strongly recommending it for all pupils, alongside a slight reduction in expectations for the most academically able. Overall, the data suggests a gradual shift away from universal entitlement towards more conditional provision shaped by attainment, timetabling and cohort size.

With the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish content now in its third year of teaching (for first award in summer 2026), we asked teachers whether they thought it would have a positive or negative impact on uptake. Compared with 2024, the proportion of respondents expecting a positive impact has increased (up 3.3 percentage points), but this has fallen compared with 2025 (down 9.4). Overall, responses remain dominated by those expecting no impact, with relatively small changes in perceptions of negative impact and uncertainty (see Table 13).

	2024	2025	2026
Large negative impact (numbers will go down significantly)	1%	0.7%	1.1%
Small negative impact (numbers will go down slightly)	2%	2.5%	3.5%
I do not expect any impact, positive or negative	64%	50.8%	51%
Small positive impact (numbers will go up slightly)	22%	34.2%	25.6%
Large positive impact (numbers will go up significantly)	2%	2.5%	1.7%
I don't know	–	8.8%	9.8%
Did not respond	0.3%	0.7%	7.2%

Table 13: Teachers' responses to the question 'To what extent do you think the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish that is now underway with YR10 pupils will have a positive or negative impact on uptake at GCSE?'

When asked whether the new GCSE had affected their Key Stage 4 curriculum planning, 95% of teachers responding to this free-text question (n = 457) reported that it had. Around one in six respondents described a major rewrite, overhaul or complete replanning of the curriculum, while many others reported adapting existing provision to align with the new specification through the development of new resources, assessments and lesson materials.

The most frequently cited adaptations were increased attention to dictation (around 15% of respondents), alignment with prescribed vocabulary lists (55 respondents), reading aloud (around 12%) and phonics (around 9%). Around 15% of respondents indicated that these changes had also influenced their Key Stage 3 provision.

A recurring theme was the increased workload associated with implementing the changes, often without additional time being made available. However, some teachers reported that the process had been professionally rewarding and saw benefits in the resulting curriculum developments. Illustrative comments included:

"The GCSE has had to be planned from scratch and that in turn, has affected KS3, which we are adapting as we teach year 7, 8 and 9."

"We have spent a significant amount of time working on the new curriculum, taking part in CPD and re-writing the schemes of work without any additional time given."

"Best lessons we have ever taught but it has been very time consuming – totally worth it."

"Greater focus on dictation, readaloud, mastery, sentence builders, less vocab taught, less teaching as a topic and more a focus on skills."

Languages at A-level

In England, the number of A level entries overall fell very slightly in summer 2025, down to 814,224 from 816,948 in summer 2024 (Joint Council for Qualifications, 2025b). The picture for MFL is mixed: Spanish and Other Modern Languages show an upward trajectory since 2023, whereas French and German entries declined after increasing between 2023 and 2024 (see Figure 21). Spanish remains the most popular A-level language for the seventh consecutive year, with entries increasing by 1.4 per cent compared with 2024, although they remain two per cent below pre-pandemic (2019) levels. Entries for Other Modern Languages increased by 3.9 per cent on 2024, but remain 18.5 per cent below 2019 levels. In contrast, French entries fell by 8.5 per cent on 2024 and are down 15.8 per cent on 2019, while German, with entries decreased by 6.9 per cent on 2024 and 26.5 per cent on 2019.

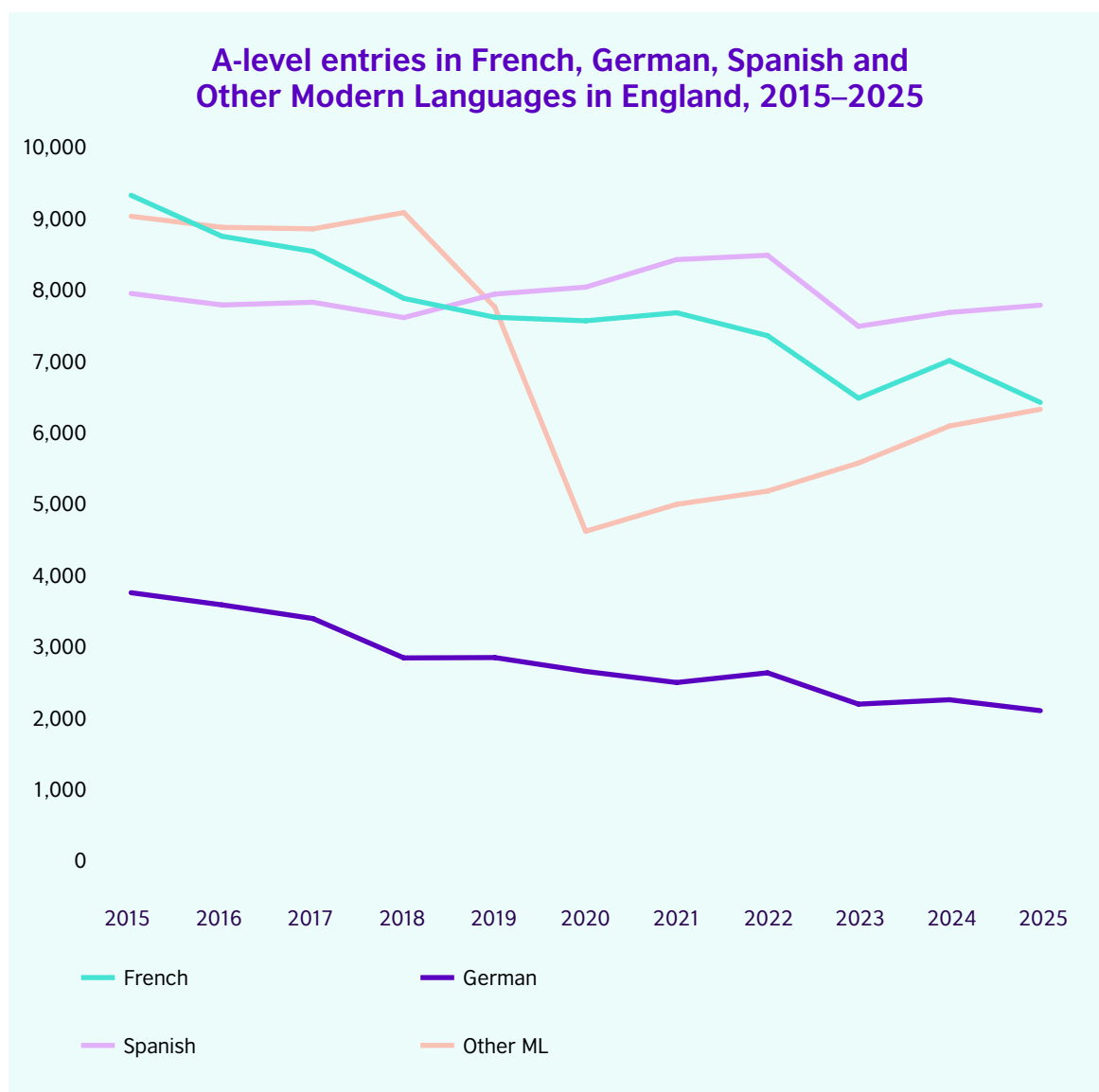


Figure 21: A-level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015–2025

47.9 per cent of schools reported having post-16 language provision delivered either within the school or in collaboration with a neighbouring school, down from 54 per cent in 2025 and 56 per cent in 2024. Fully in-school delivery has also declined, from 47 per cent in 2024 to 39.5 per cent in 2026. Overall provision is lower still in quintile 5 schools, where only 39 per cent reported offering post-16 languages.

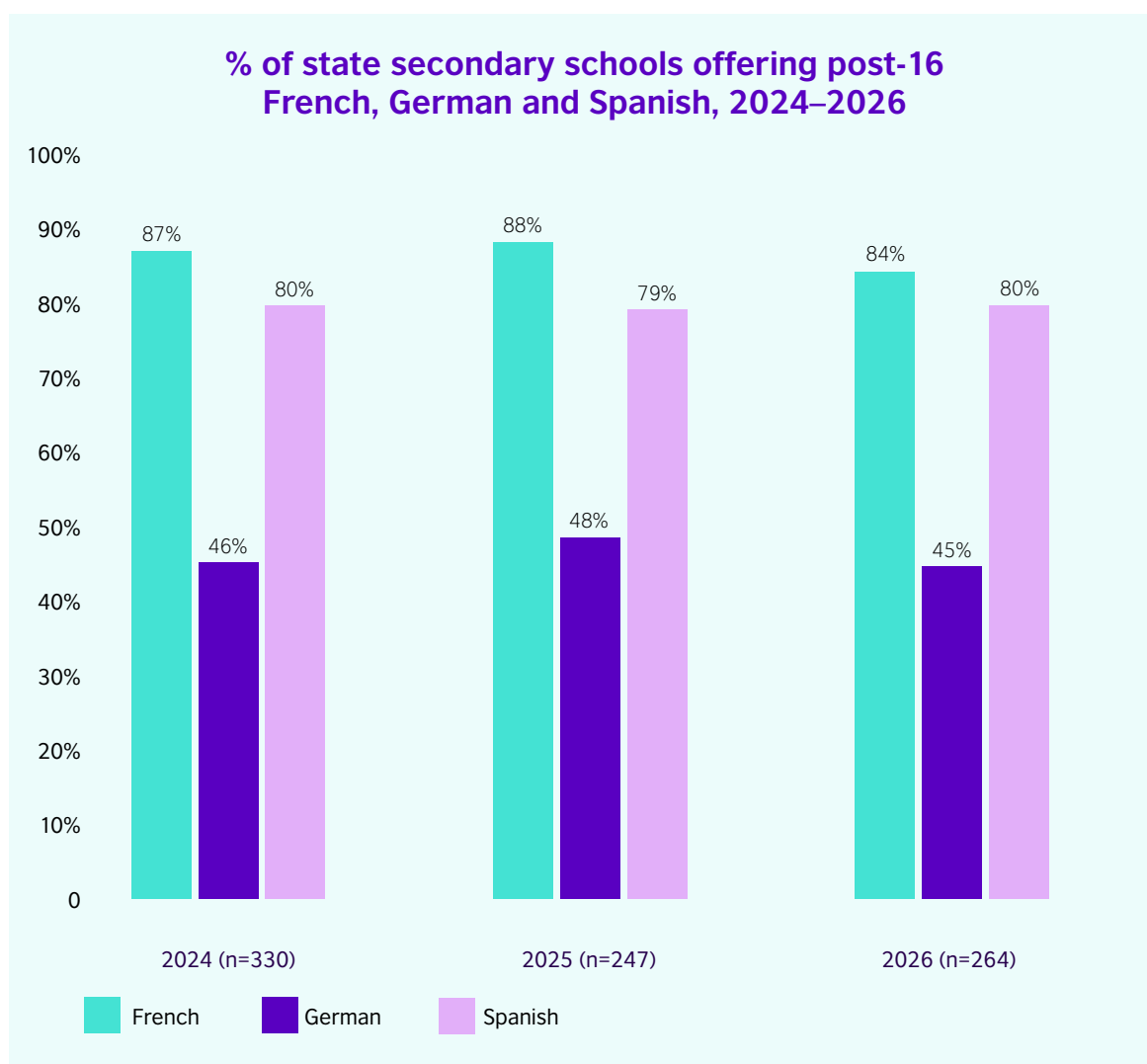


Figure 22: % of state secondary schools offering post-16 French, German and Spanish, 2024–2026

Note: Percentages are calculated using only schools that responded to the post-16 question.

Post-16 provision across French and German also shows a downward trend over recent years (see Figure 22), though French remains the most commonly offered language (84 per cent of schools), followed closely by Spanish (80 per cent). German is the least commonly offered (45 per cent).

For lesser-taught languages, those most commonly offered with examination entry were Chinese/Mandarin (six per cent of schools), Latin and Russian (five per cent), and Polish, Arabic and Italian (four per cent).

The situation contrasts with that in Ireland, where the *Language Trends Ireland* report found that 70 per cent of young people continue learning an MFL to age 18. The structure of the Irish Leaving Certificate, coupled with Irish university entry requirements, means that languages there are in a comparatively healthier state.

When asked about perceived changes in take-up and provision for languages post-16, teachers' responses suggest contrasting patterns across languages. French was more commonly associated with declining than increasing post-16 take-up, while Spanish was more often reported as stable or increasing. German attracted relatively few reports of change in either direction, consistent with its more limited post-16 provision.

Cohort sizes among schools offering post-16 languages remain broadly stable over time (see Table 14), with around one-third of responding schools (n=258) reporting five or fewer students in both Year 12 and Year 13.

	Year 12 2024	Year 12 2025	Year 12 2026	Year 13 2024	Year 13 2025	Year 13 2026
5 or fewer	34%	36%	34%	36%	40%	34%
6–10	20%	18%	19%	20%	15%	18%
11–15	12%	11%	9%	9%	11%	11%
15–20	8%	8%	6%	8%	8%	7%
20+	11%	13%	14%	10%	10%	11%
None	16%	15%	19%	18%	15%	18%

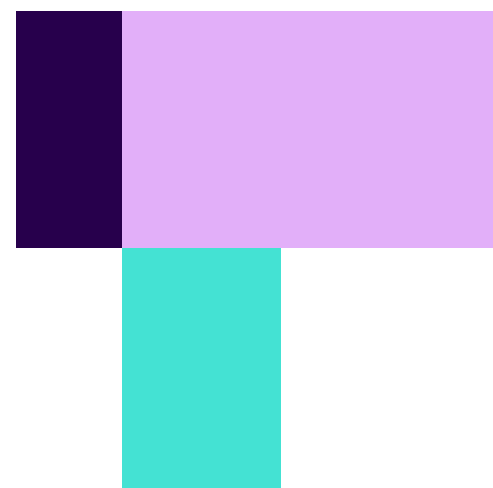
Table 14: State secondary teacher responses to how many post-16 pupils in their school currently study one or more languages

Small post-16 class sizes continue to present challenges for language provision. As in 2025, 60 per cent of responding schools (n=258) reported needing a minimum number of pupils for classes to run, with a median threshold of 5 pupils and a strong concentration of responses at 3–5 pupils. The reported range was 2–20 pupils. This stability in both the overall pattern of minimum thresholds and the proportion of schools reporting an explicit threshold contrasts with an increase in the proportion of schools reporting that language classes do not run due to insufficient numbers, suggesting that the challenge lies less in changing formal viability requirements and more in difficulty meeting existing thresholds.

When asked what arrangements are in place when the minimum number is not met, 43 per cent of the 258 schools responding to this question said that classes do not run, up from 35 per cent in 2025 (see Table 15). If three pupils in each of these schools had wished to continue studying a language, this would equate to around 333 young people unable to continue language study post-16 because of low class numbers. Where arrangements are in place, running classes on a reduced timetable is becoming increasingly common, while relatively few schools reported shared provision with another school.

	2024	2025	2026
Year 12 and Year 13 classes are taught together	13%	13%	11%
Classes do not run	39%	35%	43%
Class run at a reduced timetable	28%	25%	33%
Shared arrangements with another school	10%	11%	9%
Other (please give details)	34%	29%	11%

Table 15: What arrangements are in place, if any, when only a few pupils wish to study a language post-16?



When asked to comment on reasons for changes in take-up or provision, teachers most cited low cohort sizes, formal viability thresholds, budgetary pressures, staffing constraints, and competition with other subjects—particularly STEM and other vocationally perceived routes—as well as wider timetabling restrictions and limits on the number of A Levels students are willing or permitted to take. Where provision remained stable or increased, explanations tended to focus on stronger GCSE cohorts, improved KS3–KS4 curriculum design, sustained or improved teaching quality, and targeted interventions such as trips, exchanges, AS-level pathways, or active promotion of languages within school or trust structures:

“Strong target-language teaching in KS3 and KS4 and the continued German exchange has meant that more students have felt confident to do A level German. French and Spanish are also strong. We have a fine record of Oxbridge success and students going on to do MFL at university.”

“Languages are seen as difficult and there is an element of subjectivity in marking. STEM is strong in our school - especially Maths and Further Maths. Students don’t see the benefits in terms of financial reward or career progression of having A level MFL despite our efforts to change this message. We follow the national trend - Spanish is often better, German and French vary year on year but are generally diminishing. The literature element puts students off from choosing the subject, although they do quite enjoy it in the end.”

“Students no longer being allowed to take 4 A Levels, where before they were just ‘discouraged’. School are enforcing minimum numbers more strictly. Students are only taking subjects they think are relevant to their future careers, often this is just science and/or maths. STEM is hugely dominating, pushing out other subjects [...] These courses are in danger of ‘dying out’.”

The proportion of schools reporting collaboration with a local university through ambassador or mentoring schemes, in which undergraduate students support pupils in languages, has increased to 15.8 per cent, up from 3.6 per cent in 2025.

Home, heritage and community languages

The proportion of pupils in state secondary schools with English as an Additional Language (EAL) continues to rise, reaching 19.2 per cent in 2025 (up from 18.6 per cent in 2024 and 18.2 per cent in 2023).

FSME quintile	Percentage of pupils with EAL in our data
1 – most affluent	15.9%
2	14.6%
3	18.6%
4	20.9%
5 – most deprived	22.1%

Table 16: Average percentage of pupils with EAL by FSME quintile (state secondary schools)

The average EAL rate in the sample was 18.4 per cent, again close to the national average. The pattern across FSME quintiles is similar to that observed in previous survey data, with schools in more disadvantaged quintiles reporting higher average proportions of pupils with EAL (see Table 16). Compared with 2025, EAL rates were slightly higher in quintiles 1–3 (e.g. 12.8 per cent in quintile 1 in 2025) and lower in quintiles 4–5 (e.g. 29.8 per cent in quintile 5), suggesting that the gap between the most and least disadvantaged quintiles in the responding sample was smaller than in 2025.

Type of support	2024	2025	2026
The school pays examination entry fees for pupils	79%	78%	79%
The school is aware of complimentary schools (e.g. Supplementary / Saturday schools) but does not collaborate with them	13%	15%	15%
The school actively collaborates with and promotes Saturday schools	2%	5%	3%
The school facilitates teaching of 'community' languages during the school day	4%	6%	6%
No support provided	11%	12%	10%
Other (please specify)	18%	15%	19%

Table 17: Support offered by schools to pupils to take examinations in home, heritage and community languages

Provision for pupils to take examinations in home, heritage and community languages remains widespread. The majority of responding schools (472 out of 506) reported that they offer opportunities for pupils to take examinations either in school or externally. Table 17 shows broad stability in the types of support offered, with minimal changes across categories year on year. The small number of schools reporting 'no support' is more evenly distributed across quintiles than in previous years, having previously been concentrated in quintile 1. However, differences should be interpreted with caution given the small number of schools involved.

Free-text responses provide further insight into the role of schools as examination centres for home and community language qualifications, often operating outside core curriculum provision. Schools reported providing exam materials, guidance on exam structure and expectations, and general encouragement, as well as access to mock examinations, feedback, and revision sessions where capacity allows. Coordination is often led by staff without necessarily specialist language expertise such as heads of department, teachers, or other designated staff, whereas language-specific support is shaped by staff expertise and external networks such as multi-academy trusts and collaboration with other schools. Some responses indicated the presence of dedicated EAL leads supporting the organisation of entries and examinations, although this was not consistently reported. Many schools reported sourcing external examiners to conduct speaking assessments, although access to examiners was variable and dependent on local availability; in some cases, examinations could only take place where internal staff with appropriate linguistic expertise were available. Overall, provision for home and community language examinations is widespread, with variation in delivery reflecting differences in staffing capacity and access to appropriate linguistic expertise.

Resources and pedagogical approach

We asked teachers an open-ended question regarding whether their language department has a preferred pedagogical approach. Just over half of responding schools (n=474) reported adopting the Extensive Processing Instruction approach, characterised by structured input, sentence builders, repetition, and the MARS EARS sequence. Across responses, departments emphasised developing fluency, confidence, and long-term retention through carefully scaffolded language practice. Explicit grammar teaching, together with an increased focus on phonics and pronunciation, was also widely reported. Many departments combined such approaches with more traditional communicative and grammar-focused methods. Other commonly reported principles included vocabulary retrieval and recycling, use of the target language in lessons, and the integration of cultural content. A substantial number of schools described hybrid or mixed pedagogical models, drawing on NCELP/LDP resources, communicative language teaching, Rosenshine-inspired direct instruction, and textbook-based approaches:

“KS3 SoW is based on the Ofsted three pillars (vocabulary, phonics, grammar), with non-negotiables each half term [...] We use Conti-type chunking methods to teach grammar, e.g. learning set phrases (I like/ I used to like / I would like), and using this to demonstrate grammar.”

“We use a mixture of approaches [...] sentence builders, phonics work from both the books and the original NCELP materials are also used, and staff are free to adapt and add as they wish to whatever suits the classes best. Different abilities, subjects and parts of the course lend themselves to different pedagogies and it is important to use what works well in that situation as opposed to one size fits all.”

Teacher use of AI technologies such as ChatGPT continues to increase. Most respondents reported using AI either regularly (28 per cent) or occasionally (54 per cent), an increase from 2025 when 52 per cent reported occasional use and just 12 per cent regular use (see Figure 23).

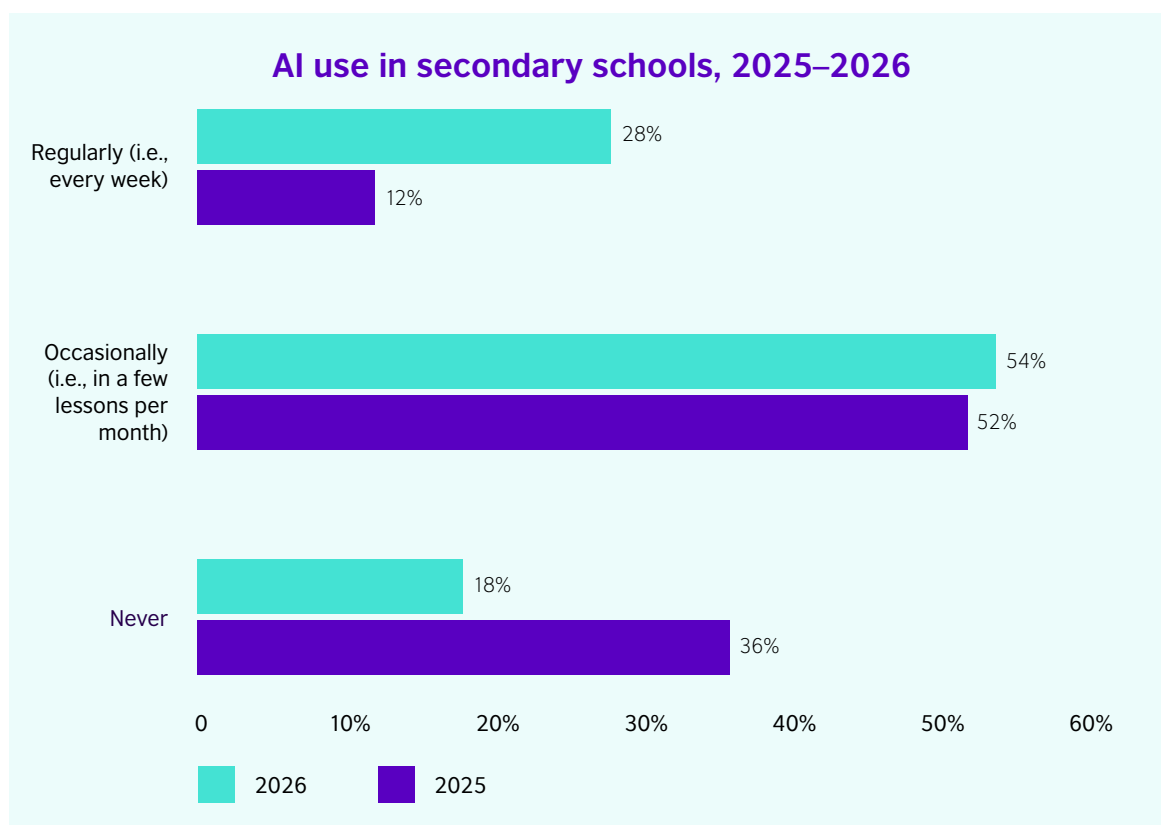


Figure 23: Frequency in the use of AI technology in language teaching in state secondary schools

Respondents reported greater openness towards pupil use of AI to support learning, with around a quarter saying they allow or actively encourage it (compared to 16 per cent in 2025). Examples of AI-supported activities included vocabulary learning, revision, translation, feedback, research projects, and, particularly at Key Stage 5, speaking practice. A smaller number of schools reported explicitly teaching pupils how to use AI effectively through prompt design and critical evaluation of outputs. However, many respondents emphasised that AI should support rather than replace language learning, expressing concerns about over-reliance, academic integrity and production of language beyond pupils' actual proficiency. Among schools discouraging pupil use of AI, many referred to the absence of school or national policy guidance, suggesting that practice in this area is still evolving and may change further as guidance and confidence develop:

“It is discouraged due to the fact that AI, as I understand it, tends to give students answers rather than encourage and develop the skills required for successful language acquisition.”

“Teachers actively guide students on how to use AI tools effectively, ethically, and in a way that supports learning rather than replaces it [...] A strong emphasis is placed on maintaining students' independent thinking and critical skills. For example, students are discouraged from asking AI to complete work on their behalf. Instead, they are guided to analyse AI-generated responses, question them, refine them, and then produce their own work, ensuring that learning remains meaningful and internalised.”

“They are instructed on prompt creation. They use copilot as we can monitor that. They use it to explain vocabulary and give multiple examples.”



International engagement

The international engagement picture is more mixed for secondary than primary (see Table 18). Some areas show sustained activity: reported trips abroad remain relatively high, and there has been an increase in schools combining trips with other departments. However, engagement with partner schools, cultural institutes and language assistants has declined since 2025. In 2026, quintile 5 schools least likely to report engagement across these areas (13 per cent reported partner schools, 11 per cent employment of a language assistant, and 15 per cent engagement with cultural institutes). Nonetheless, it is notable that only 17 per cent of schools reported no international opportunities, compared with twice that figure in 2024. Overall, this suggests that international engagement shows signs of partial recovery following a post-pandemic decline, but remains below 2018 levels for some indicators and is less consistent across different forms of activity than in 2025.

	2018	2024	2025	2026
Pupils go on trips abroad	–	–	74%	71%
We employ language assistants	23%	24%	27%	19%
We engage with cultural institutes (e.g. Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut français, Gael Linn, Consejería de Educación)	–	25%	28%	22%
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	31%	15%	27%	21%
The school has combined school trips abroad with other departments	–	–	22%	25%
Pupils can do work experience abroad	–	–	7%	5%
British Council international opportunities	–	8%	10%	9%
Other	–	23%	7%	8%
None	11%	35%	13%	17%

Table 18: Opportunities for pupils and/or teachers to gain international experience in state secondary schools (respondents ticked all that applied)

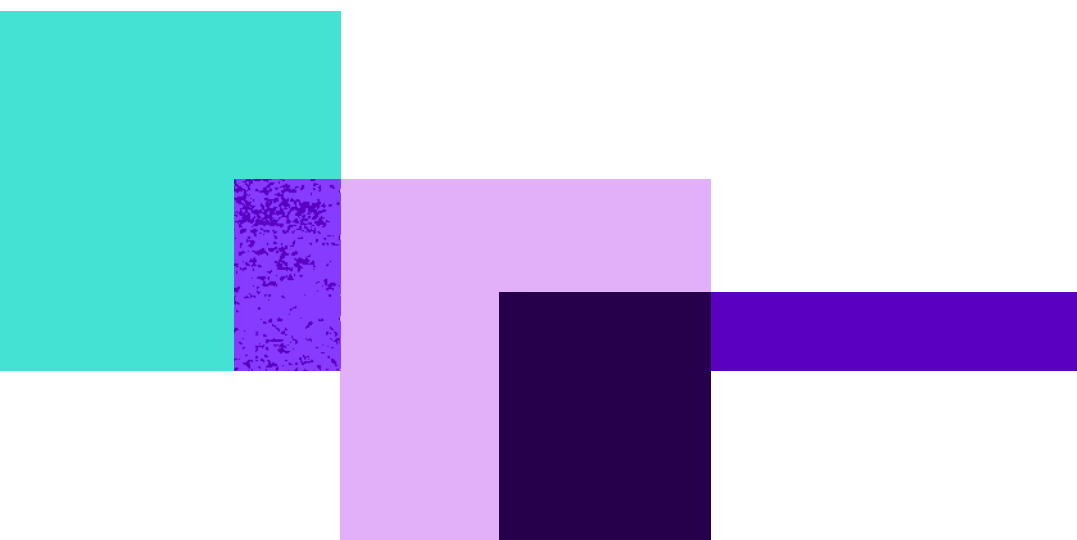
Regarding engagement with cultural institutes, the most commonly reported collaborations were with the Institut Français (13.4 per cent of schools), the Goethe-Institut (11.9 per cent), and the Consejería de Educación (9.1 per cent). A further 6.5 per cent reported engagement with the UK-German Connection, and 3.3 per cent with the Confucius Institute. Compared with 2025, these figures remained stable for Spanish and Chinese institutions but declined for French and German organisations (down 4.1 percentage points for the Institut français, 5.6 for the Goethe-Institut, and 2.6 for UK-German Connection); in line with the broader trends in languages taught reported earlier. Compared with 2025, when engagement was concentrated in quintiles 1 and 2, responses in 2026 are more evenly distributed, though engagement remains lower among quintile 5 schools (28 schools) compared quintiles 1–4 (48–73 schools).

The proportion of schools who said they employ a language assistant has declined compared with 2025, most notably by 7.3 percentage points for French and 7.2 percentage points for Spanish (see Table 19). Language assistants are less commonly reported in state secondary schools than in independent schools (see next section). Quintile 5 schools were least likely to report employing language assistants and German-speaking assistants were especially rare.

	Percentage of responding state secondary schools	
	2025	2026
French speaking language assistant	22.7%	15.4%
German speaking language assistant	12.8%	9.1%
Mandarin speaking language assistant	4.3%	2.6%
Spanish speaking language assistant	20.9%	13.7%
Language assistant for other language (Italian, Russian, Urdu, Japanese)	1.3%	1.1%

Table 19: Language assistants employed in state secondary schools

Fifty-six per cent of respondents said they were aware of the Turing scheme. Of these, 48.5 per cent had not applied, 4.5 per cent had had a successful application, and 3.2 per cent reported an unsuccessful one. Awareness of the scheme appears to have increased: in 2025, just over half of respondents (49 per cent) indicated they had never heard of it. Overall awareness was slightly lower among quintile 5 schools (49 schools), compared with 58–75 schools in quintiles 1–4.



Curriculum review

When asked about the impact of the Curriculum and Assessment Review on uptake of languages at Key Stage 4, 19.7 per cent of respondents said they expected a positive impact, 34 per cent a negative impact, and 40 per cent no impact. When asked for general thoughts on the outcomes of the review in relation to language teaching and education, responses were broadly supportive of the direction of travel, though often distinguished between the educational aims of the review and its likely impact on participation.

Many respondents welcomed proposals to strengthen primary languages, improve curriculum coherence, place greater emphasis on cultural knowledge and clarify vocabulary expectations. Several argued that these changes could support deeper language learning, improve progression through the key stages, and raise the status of languages. However, concerns were raised about implementation, particularly around the transition between primary and secondary phases, the potential effects of a stepped qualification, and the removal of the EBacc. A recurring theme was that, while respondents were supportive of the educational principles underpinning the review, they were less convinced that the wider policy environment would support increased language uptake and sustained improvement.

These mixed views were reflected in qualitative comments:

“A more clearly defined KS2 curriculum should help delivery. The EBacc has never really had much standing as a measure, at least in our context. In some quarters its removal may make a GCSE in a language harder to sell. I hope the new GCSE will be left alone for a while to bed in.”

“It is pleasing that there will be more of a focus on Languages at Primary but it doesn't solve the issue of transition and the fact that many pupils won't study the same language when they get to secondary level. I have concerns about the stepped language qualification in that it may discourage GCSE study.”

“Fewer but more specific vocabulary will be helpful as there's not as much to teach and remember. Cultural capital increases the importance and relevance of languages. A stepped qualification may provide lower ability students with the opportunity to learn in a different way. Better transition between KS2 and 3 will increase confidence for KS3 students and provide prior knowledge”

“Devastated. The reports purports to support MFL teaching, but all of the incentives (Ebacc measure) and support have been pulled away at secondary level.”

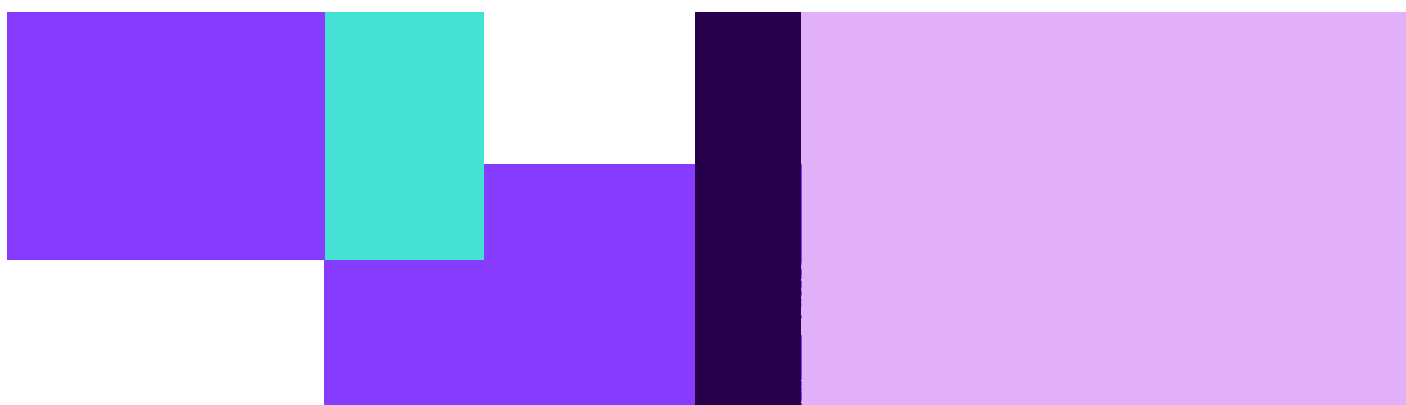


The recommendation for removal of the EBacc was mentioned across open-text questions in 179 comments from 152 unique respondents. 111 expressed the view that removal is likely to have a negative effect on language uptake, eight felt it may have a positive effect, 28 were neutral or did not state a clear position, and five expressed mixed views. Negative impacts cited included languages becoming optional, reduced promotion of languages and accountability among senior leaders, constraints on curriculum time, staffing and resources, reduced parental support, and an overall decline in uptake. Positive effects included improved pupil engagement where uptake is driven by interest, and reduced pressure on staff and students.

Stakeholder engagement

We asked respondents to what extent they engage with parents/carers around GCSE languages. Engagement is generally high across schools and is mainly conducted through structured school events such as parents' evenings and Year 9 options evenings (66 per cent of responding schools, n=504), supported by information disseminated either in writing by email, letter, website, social media, bulletin, newsletter or report, or oral advice given to parents/pupils (31 per cent) and phone calls (six per cent). Most schools report using these touchpoints to provide advice on GCSE choice, revision support, the value of languages, and school trips. A smaller proportion of schools report limited engagement, typically where languages are compulsory.

Most schools report broadly positive senior leadership engagement with languages, with the majority describing SLT as either very supportive (38.5 per cent) or somewhat supportive (35.6 per cent), typically reflected in time allocation, promotion, and compulsory provision. A smaller group (12.8 per cent) report limited support or structural pressures in which languages lose out to other "core" subjects, alongside a similar proportion noting explicit representation for MFL in SLT. A minority (under 10 per cent) describe weaker engagement due to limited practical support, lack of understanding, or low perceived value of languages, with or without underlying goodwill.



Challenges to language learning in state secondary schools

When asked about challenges to providing high-quality language learning experiences, an overall pattern of assessment and curriculum constraints alongside wider contextual factors dominates state secondary responses (see Figure 24). The most frequently cited challenge was around global English, followed by concerns about the nature, content, and marking of external examinations; the UK's exit from the European Union; curriculum time; and lack of opportunities to practise languages outside the classroom. With the exception of the UK's exit from the EU, these were also the most frequently cited main challenges. System-level factors relating to the status of languages as a careers option and senior leadership support were also prominent.

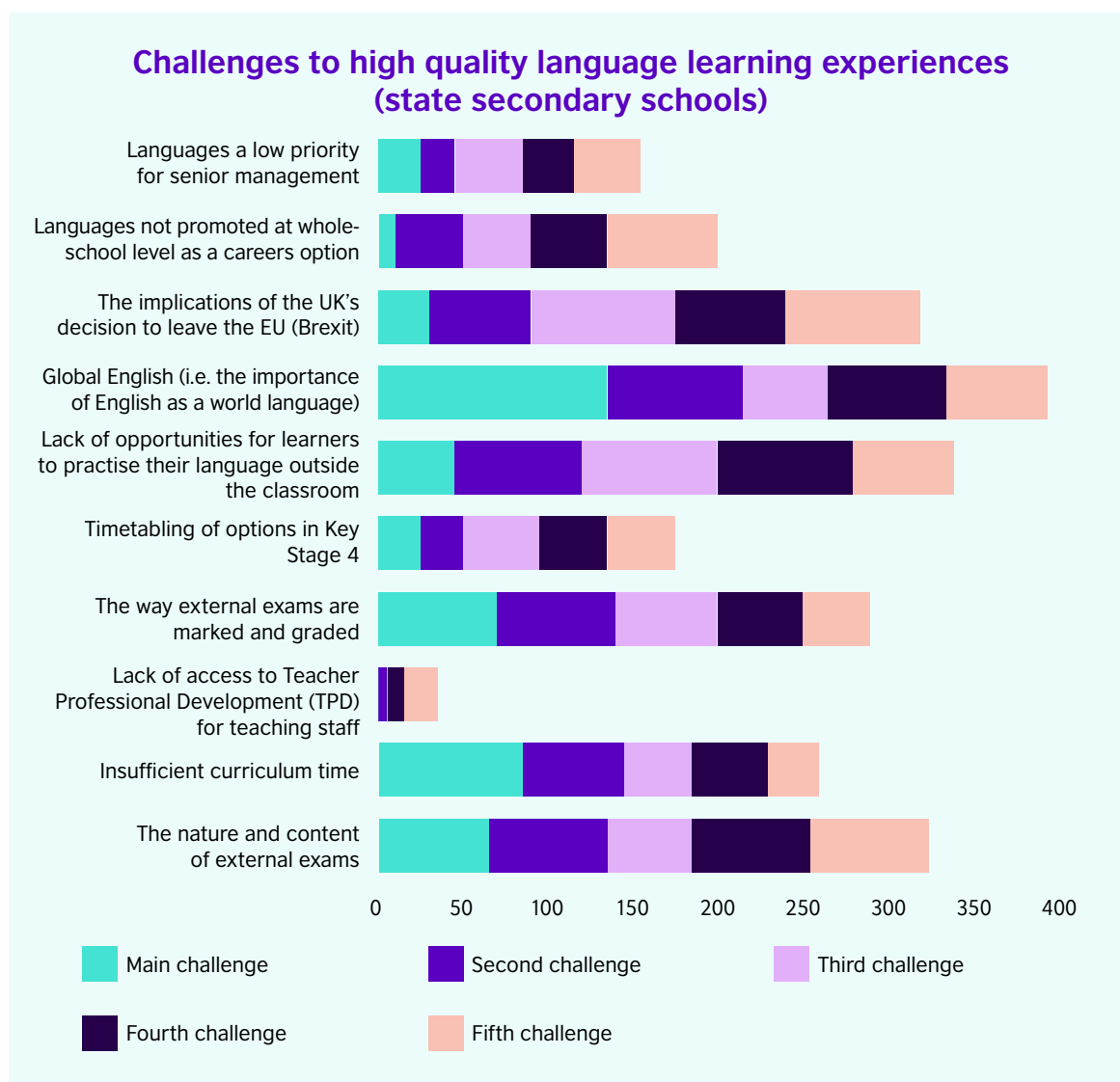


Figure 24: Answers from teachers in state secondary schools to 'Which of the following, if any, do you see as challenges to providing high quality language learning experiences for pupils in your school?'

Note: Base sizes vary by item, with 533 respondents selecting a first challenge, 522 a second, 494 a third, 435 a fourth, and 384 a fifth.

Just over half of state secondary schools (51 per cent) reported that recruitment of qualified MFL teachers is an issue, down from around two thirds in previous years (see Table 20). Unlike in 2025, when quintile 5 schools were most likely to report difficulties recruiting MFL teachers, responses in 2026 are broadly even across levels of social deprivation.

	State Secondary 2024	State Secondary 2025	State Secondary 2026
Yes, a major issue	33%	31%	21%
Yes, a minor issue	31%	32%	30%
No, not an issue	30%	31.0%	38%
I don't know	3%	2.5%	3.7%
Other	3%	3.5%	4.6%

Table 20: Teachers' responses to the question on whether recruitment of languages teachers is an issue

When asked to comment further on the recruitment challenges faced by the languages department in their school, by far the dominant theme was a shortage of qualified MFL teachers and a limited pool of applicants. Schools frequently reported receiving few, if any, suitable applications, particularly for dual linguists and teachers of German, with many respondents expressing concerns about the preparedness and experience of trainees and early career teachers. Recruitment of maternity cover and temporary staff was identified as a particular challenge, often resulting in repeated advertising, reliance on supply or non-specialist teachers, or vacancies remaining unfilled. Respondents also highlighted retention challenges, with wider factors including geographical location, workload, funding constraints and visa requirements further exacerbating recruitment difficulties.

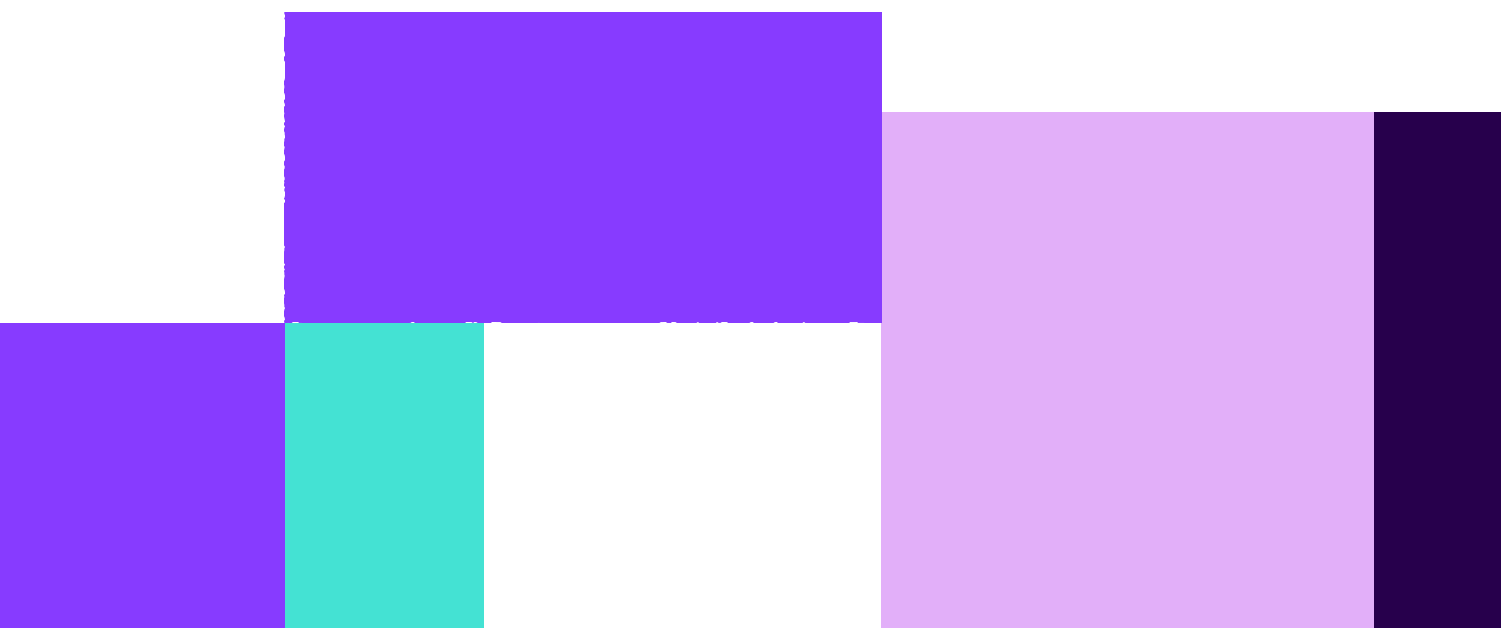
Language Trends England also asked several open-text questions to give teachers the chance to give their thoughts on the broader contextual challenges facing languages education in England. When asked about the impact of course closures in UK university MFL departments on staff and pupil attitudes to modern languages, around a fifth of respondents highlighted concerns about staff morale. Many expressed fears that closures would restrict university choice and progression pathways for pupils (56 responses), reduce uptake post-16 (55), and exacerbate concerns about the future supply of language teachers (50). Forty-five respondents referred to the continued devaluation of languages and declining interest more broadly. Smaller numbers mentioned loss of enrichment opportunities and reduced regional access to languages. Eighty-eight respondents reported no impact or no impact yet, often because their schools did not offer post-16 provision.

"A level recruitment is already very challenging. T levels do not include any languages. This is just an additional negative hurdle. Universities and Secondary schools need to start working together from Y7 offering outreach programs. They start in Y12. By that time we do not have any students to send on university outreach programs because they did not even choose A level languages."

"We have worked with Nottingham University for decades. It is awful and will negatively impact our students as the outreach opportunities will no longer be available. This year our Y13 students are having individual meetings with professors from Nottingham University for their IRPs which is exciting and a positive opportunity. Some of our linguists want to stay at home but study languages. They would go to Nottingham University if the courses were running. It will also have a negative impact on the PGCE that Nottingham University runs."

When asked what is working well in language education in their school this year, respondents most frequently highlighted strong pupil engagement and enthusiasm for languages, alongside the dedication and creativity of teaching staff. Many referred to successful curriculum design approaches and resources, including the implementation of EPI and strategies to support the new GCSE. Around a quarter mentioned the positive impact of trips, exchanges and wider cultural opportunities in motivating pupils and bringing languages to life. Smaller numbers highlighted good uptake at GCSE and post-16, supportive leadership, and pupils' recognition of the value of languages for future careers.

When asked what could be done to improve language learning in schools and across the system, respondents mostly called for further adaptations to GCSE and A level qualifications, including fairer grading, simpler speaking assessments and more accessible content. Many again stressed the need for better curriculum continuity from primary to secondary school, greater investment in teacher recruitment and retention, and more funding and resources. Respondents frequently highlighted the importance of raising the profile of MFLs through careers promotion, enrichment opportunities and affordable trips and exchanges. Smaller numbers referred to the need for more curriculum time, improved access to native speaker support, and stronger government backing. Overall, these responses suggest a strong commitment across the sector to addressing many of the contextual challenges highlighted elsewhere in the report.



Findings from independent secondary schools

We received 76 complete responses (13 more than in 2025) from independent secondary schools across regions (see Table 21).

Location	No. of schools
East Midlands and the Humber	7
East of England and North-East London	8
Lancashire and West Yorkshire	2
North of England	7
North-West London and South-Central England	7
South-East England and South London	29
South-West England	8
West Midlands	8

Table 21: Regional location of participating independent schools

As fewer than one hundred independent schools responded, data are presented as raw figures.

Entrance exams in independent schools

Independent schools (i.e. those that do not receive government funding) are not obliged to adopt the National Curriculum and may design their own admissions processes. We asked respondents what proportion of pupils enter via the Common Entrance Exam⁴, a set of selective admissions tests used by some independent schools. Among the 54 schools that responded, only 12 reported that pupils enter via this route, with use ranging from 5 per cent to 100 per cent of entrants.

The majority of schools (64) reported that some or all pupils enter via their own admissions tests, with 47 indicating that all pupils are admitted through this route. Nine said they assessed MFLs as part of this process, with a further three indicating MFL is assessed for specific purposes such as scholarships or entry at Year 9 or Year 12.

4

For further information, see <https://www.isc.co.uk/schools/sub-pages/common-entrance/>.

Language provision and enrichment subjects in independent schools

Time allocations in independent schools are broadly similar to those reported in state secondary schools, with most schools offering between one and four hours at Key Stage 3 and two to three hours at Key Stage 4. However, at Key Stage 3 there is a clear shift towards higher time allocations, with more independent schools offering three or more hours of language teaching and fewer offering one to two hours.

Compared with 2025, independent schools show a shift in curriculum time allocation away from mid-range provision (1–3 hours per week) towards higher allocations (3+ hours), alongside smaller movements into the lowest band (<1 hour). The most notable changes occur in the 2–3 hour band, with declines of up to around 18–23 percentage points, particularly in Years 7 and 8. This suggests a modest divergence from the pattern seen in state secondary schools, where changes are primarily concentrated in reductions rather than increases in curriculum time.

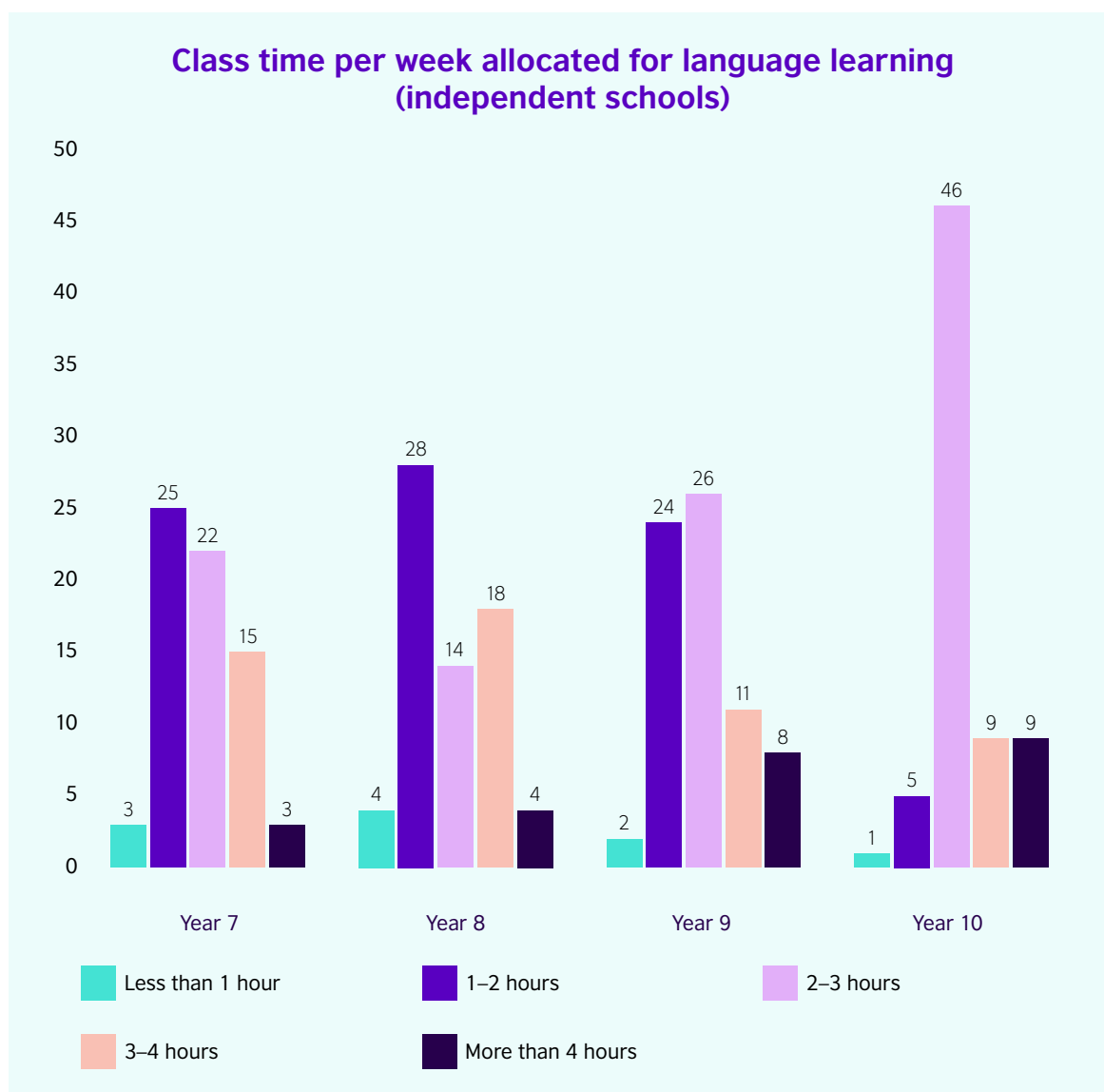


Figure 25: Class time per week allocated for language learning (independent)

Note: Figures show the number of responding schools (n=68–71)

The two most widely taught languages in independent schools remain Spanish and French, both offered in all but seven responding schools at Key Stage 3, and all but thirteen at post-16. At Key Stage 4, Spanish provision has marginally overtaken French for the first time, with all but seven schools offering Spanish and all but nine French. Just under two-thirds of schools offer Latin and German at Key Stage 3, rising to around three-quarters at Key Stage 4 post-16 German Latin slightly behind (see Table 22).

	French	German	Latin	Spanish
Key Stage 3	69	49	48	69
Key Stage 4	67	54	48	69
Post-16	63	52	46	63

Table 22: Provision of French, German, Latin and Spanish in independent secondary schools

Uptake of more than one language is higher in Key Stage 3 in independent schools, where the majority report that either all or more than half of pupils study more than one language in Year 7 (44 schools reporting “all” and 6 reporting “more than half”) and Year 8 (41 and 10 respectively). This then declines in Key Stage 4. In state schools a similar decline is observed but with much lower uptake overall and a majority reporting no pupils studying more than one language.

Compared with state secondary schools, independent schools show a more extensive and exam-focused pattern of provision for lesser-taught languages, with notably higher levels of Key Stage 4 and post-16 examination provision across most languages (see Figure 26). Classical languages dominate, with Latin and Ancient Greek being the most widely offered and Mandarin and Italian particularly prominent among other curricular modern languages.



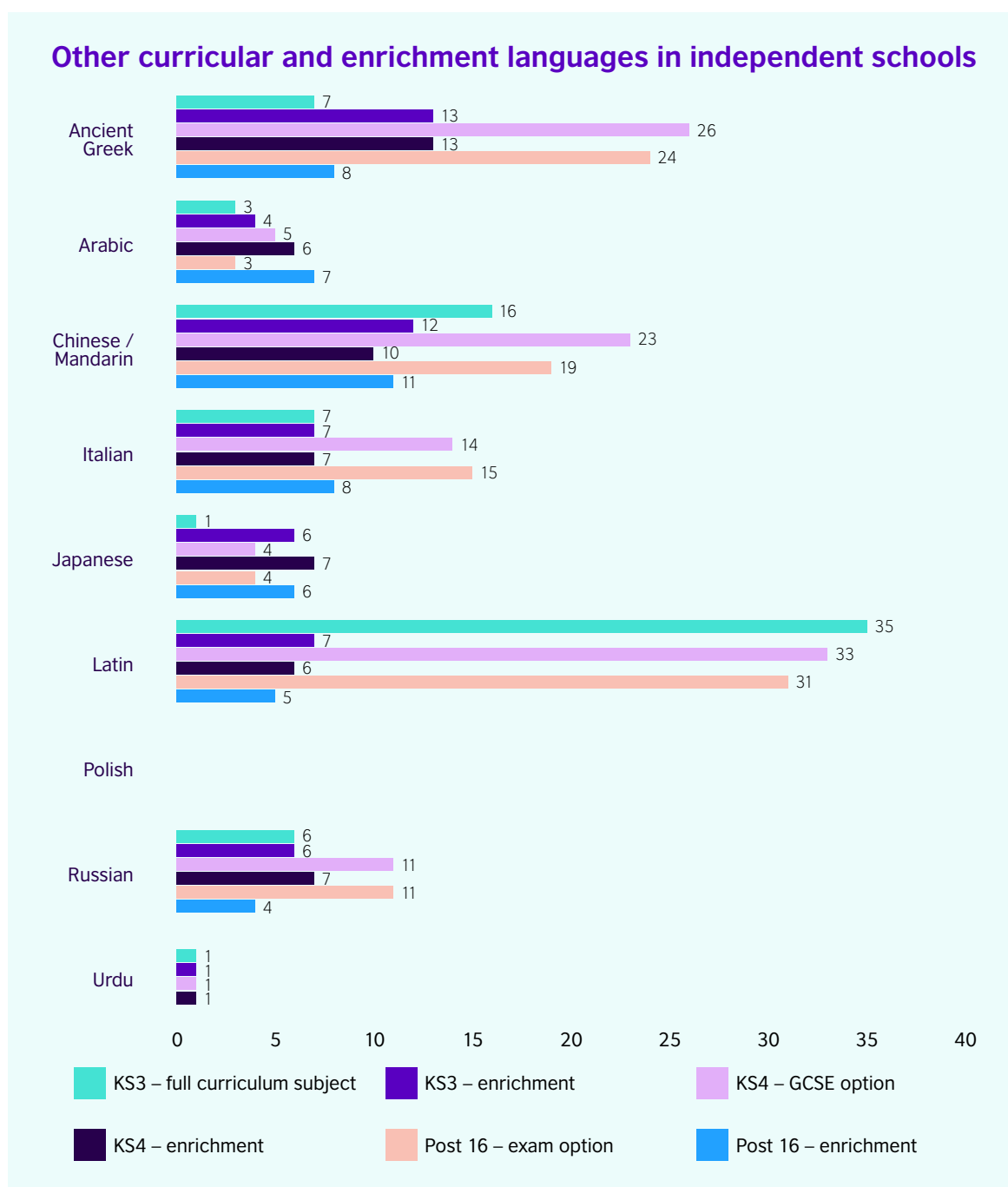


Figure 26: Curricular and enrichment language subjects offered in participating independent secondary schools

Independent schools offering languages as enrichment subjects mostly provide lessons outwith timetabled curriculum time, most commonly during lunchtime (20) or after school (21). A smaller number reported other arrangements during the school day, including timetabled enrichment slots (11) and withdrawal from other timetabled subjects (1), with one school noting outreach activities, and a themed “field day”.

Home, Heritage and Community Languages in independent schools

Nearly all (67 out of 76) independent schools reported that their pupils have opportunities to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities. Thirteen schools said they pay examination fees for pupils wishing to undertake HHCL examinations, down from twenty-two in 2025 and substantially lower than in the state secondary sector, where around four-fifths of schools reported providing this support (see Table 23).

Type of support	No. of schools
The school pays examination entry fees for pupils	13
The school is aware of Saturday schools but does not collaborate with them	17
The school actively collaborates with and promotes Saturday schools	3
The school facilitates teaching of HHCL languages during the school day	8
No support provided	21
Other (please specify)	35

Table 23: Support offered by independent schools to pupils to take examinations in home, heritage and community languages (HHCL). Respondents ticked all that applied.

Key Stage 4 language examinations in independent schools

As in 2025, only two independent schools indicated that no Year 10 pupils were studying a language for GCSE/iGCSE or another Level 2 qualification. Among almost half of independent schools, 90 per cent or more of the Year 10 cohort were studying a language, including 21 schools reporting that all Year 10 pupils did so (up from 16 in 2025).

Most schools use GCSE qualifications (44), with eleven using the iGCSE qualification and twelve a combination of the two.

Thirty-one independent schools reported that languages are still compulsory for pupils at Key Stage 4 in their school, up from 22 in 2025 (see Table 24). Only two respondents perceived that more pupils now take a language, compared with 20 reporting fewer pupils taking a language at Key Stage 4.

How has the proportion of pupils studying a language in Key Stage 4 changed?	No. of schools
Languages are still compulsory for all pupils	31
More pupils now take a language	2
Fewer pupils now take a language	20
Similar numbers to before	12
No clear trend: numbers fluctuate from year to year	7
Other (please specify)	4

Table 24: Independent school teachers' perceptions of language uptake at Key Stage 4

Sixteen said they have policies strongly recommending all pupils take a language, and seven reported that this is strongly encouraged for the most academically able pupils. Nineteen schools reported that some pupils may be advised by senior leaders not to take a language, and seven indicated that lower-attaining pupils are discouraged from choosing a language. In twelve independent schools, classes do not run if there are insufficient pupils, and six reported that timetabling constraints prevent all pupils from taking a language.

Teachers were asked about the impact of the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish on uptake (see Table 25). In 2026, as in 2025, the largest group of schools reported no expected impact (34 schools), followed by those uncertain (13 schools). A further nine schools expected a large positive impact, while ten anticipated either a small or large negative impact. This contrasts with 2025, when no schools reported expecting a negative impact and a larger number reported a small positive impact (11 schools).

	No. of schools
I do not expect any impact, positive or negative	34
I don't know	13
Large negative impact (numbers will go down significantly)	8
Large positive impact (numbers will go up significantly)	9
Not applicable to my school	0
Small negative impact (numbers will go down slightly)	2
Small positive impact (numbers will go up slightly)	0
Unanswered	1

Table 25: Independent school teachers' responses to the question 'To what extent do you think the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish that is now underway with Year 10 pupils will have a positive or negative impact on uptake at GCSE?'

Post-16 language provision in independent schools

Sixty-three independent schools reported offering post-16 language provision, all delivered wholly within the school. The distribution of post-16 language cohort sizes is broadly similar to 2025, although there was an increase in schools with very small cohorts of five or fewer pupils. Unlike state secondary schools, independent schools continue to report a sizeable proportion of larger cohorts: around a quarter reported more than 20 post-16 language students, while very few reported no post-16 language students (see Table 26).

Independent schools also appear better able to sustain smaller post-16 language cohorts. Among the 18 independent schools reporting a minimum cohort size for classes to run, all but one reported a threshold of just two or three pupils, compared with a median threshold of five pupils in state secondary schools. They were also considerably more likely to report that classes run regardless of numbers (almost two-thirds compared with 26 per cent), while only around a fifth reported that classes do not run when minimum numbers are not met, compared with 43 per cent of state secondary schools.

No. of post-16 pupils	Year 12	Year 13
5 or fewer	20	24
6–10	3	6
11–15	8	10
15–20	9	5
More than 20	15	15
None	8	3

Table 26: Number of post-16 pupils in the 2025/26 school year studying one or more languages in responding independent schools

A further 18 schools reported that classes run on a reduced timetable where cohort sizes are small.

Teachers' perceptions of post-16 take-up are broadly similar to 2025, with few schools reporting increased uptake (see Table 27). Most responses indicate stable or declining uptake; Mandarin and Russian continue to be the least widely offered at post-16, while overall patterns for French, German, Spanish and Latin remain broadly consistent. However, the number of schools reporting that German has been discontinued in the past three years has risen to six, up from two in 2025.

	Introduced as a new A-level	Take- up has increased	Take-up stable	Take-up has decreased	Subject discontinued during past three years	Not taught in my school in past three years
French	0	7	28	29	0	0
German	0	9	19	24	6	7
Latin	0	2	27	16	4	10
Mandarin	0	0	11	4	2	42
Russian	0	1	4	5	1	48
Spanish	0	8	33	21	0	1

Table 27: Independent teachers' perceptions of changes in take-up and provision for languages post-16 in their school

International dimension in independent schools

International engagement is broadly stable overall between 2025 and 2026. As in state secondary schools, participation in trips abroad remains consistently high, and engagement with combined school trips has increased; unlike in state secondary schools, engagement with partner schools and cultural institutes has increased in independent schools over the period. The use of language assistants has declined in both state and independent sectors (see Table 28).

	No. of schools
Pupils go on trips abroad	67
We employ language assistants	44
We engage with cultural institutes (e.g. Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Gael Linn, Consejería de Educación)	36
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	34
The school has combined school trips abroad with other departments	31
Pupils can do work experience abroad	17
Other (please specify)	7
British Council international opportunities e.g. Mandarin Speaking Competition, Schools Think Arabic	5

Table 28: Opportunities for pupils and/or teachers to gain international experience in independent secondary schools (respondents ticked all that applied)

Engagement with cultural institutes was proportionally higher than in state secondary schools across all organisations, with relatively high numbers of schools reporting collaboration with the Goethe-Institut (31 schools), the Institut Français (26), the Consejería de Educación (15), the UK-German Connection (11), and the Confucius Institute (10).

Compared with state secondary, independent schools report substantially higher proportions of schools employing language assistants across all language categories, particularly for Mandarin and less commonly taught languages, where provision remains very limited in the state sector (see Table 29).

	No. of schools
French speaking language assistant	46
German speaking language assistant	39
Mandarin speaking language assistant	12
Spanish speaking language assistant	44
Language assistant for other language (Arabic, Cantonese, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin, Russian, Sinhala)	14

Table 29: Language assistants employed in independent schools

As with state secondary, just over half of independent schools were aware of the Turing scheme, though only two had applied.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in the independent languages classroom

As in 2025, most independent schools reported using AI in teaching (see Figure 27). However, the proportion reporting regular use has increased; last year, most schools reported only occasional use, suggesting growing confidence in the use and application of AI. Levels of use are higher than in state secondary schools, where only around a quarter of respondents reported regular use and just under a fifth reported no use.

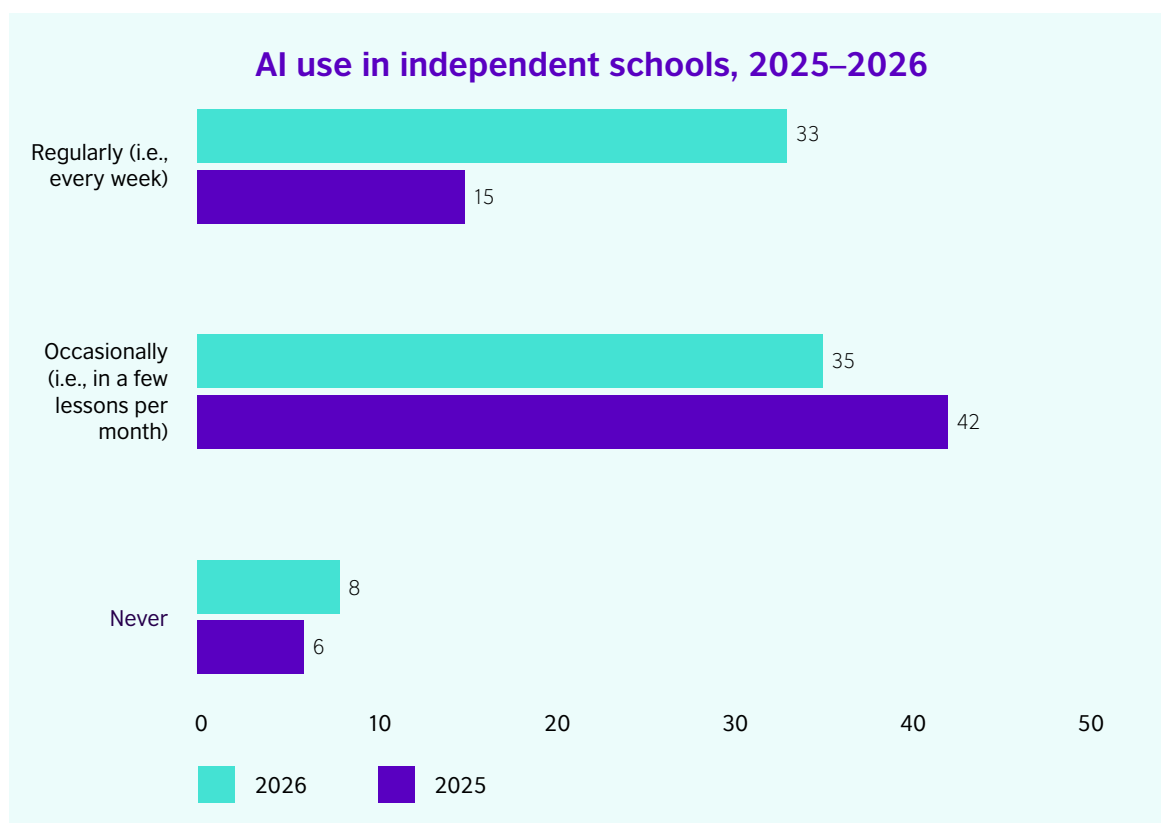


Figure 27: Frequency in the use of AI technology in language teaching in independent schools

Learners are allowed to use AI technology to support their language learning in approximately half of independent schools.

Challenges to language learning in independent schools

When asked what they saw as challenges to providing high-quality language learning experiences, an overall pattern of assessment and curriculum constraints alongside wider contextual factors dominates responses among independent schools, as with state secondary schools (see Figure 28). The most frequently cited challenges were “the way external exams are marked and graded” and “insufficient curriculum time”, concerns about exam content, global English, and Brexit; the first four of these also accounted for the most frequently cited main challenges. Concerns about the perceived value and status of languages were again prominent, with system-level factors, i.e. lack of promotion as a careers option and prioritisation by senior leadership, together accounting for a substantial share of responses.

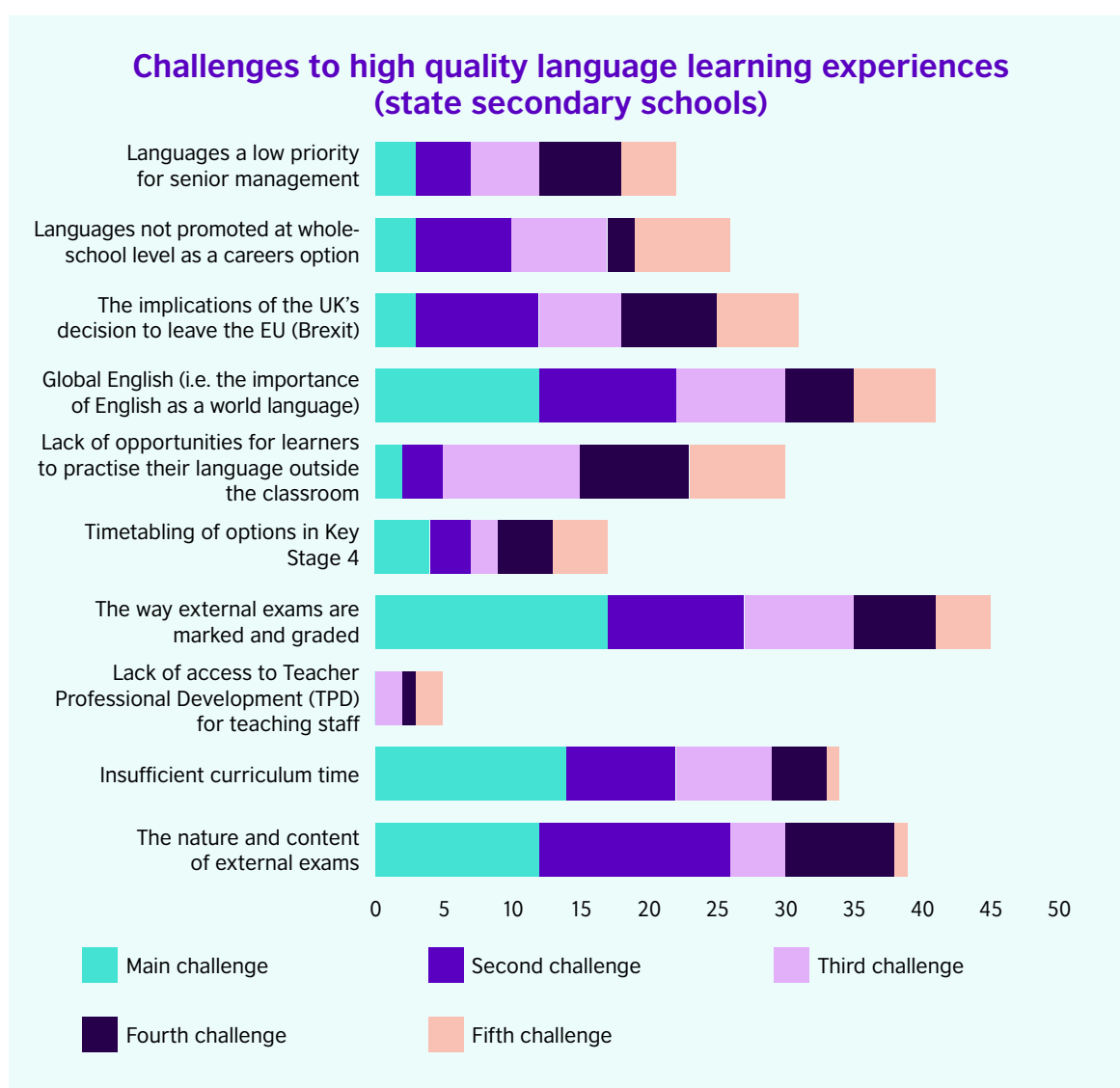


Figure 28: Answers from teachers in independent schools to ‘Which of the following, if any, do you see as challenges to providing high quality language learning experiences for pupils in your school?’

Just over half of independent schools reported recruitment of qualified language teachers as an issue (see Figure 29), similar to both last year's figure and the proportion reported by state secondary schools. When asked to comment further, respondents most commonly cited concerns about candidate quality, particularly subject knowledge and language ability, and small applicant pools (30 out of 76 schools). These were compounded by financial pressures, difficulties covering short-term staffing needs such as maternity and sickness absence, and visa and sponsorship constraints in the case of language assistants.

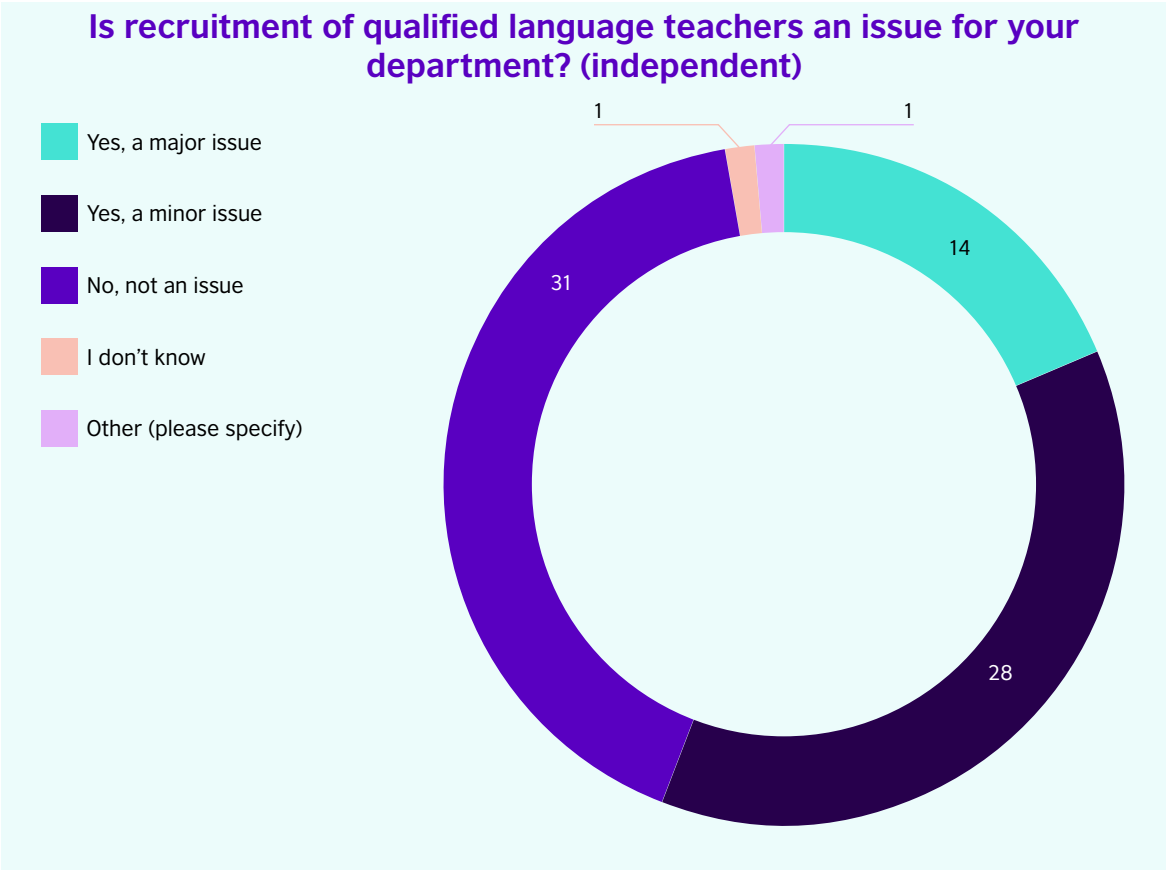
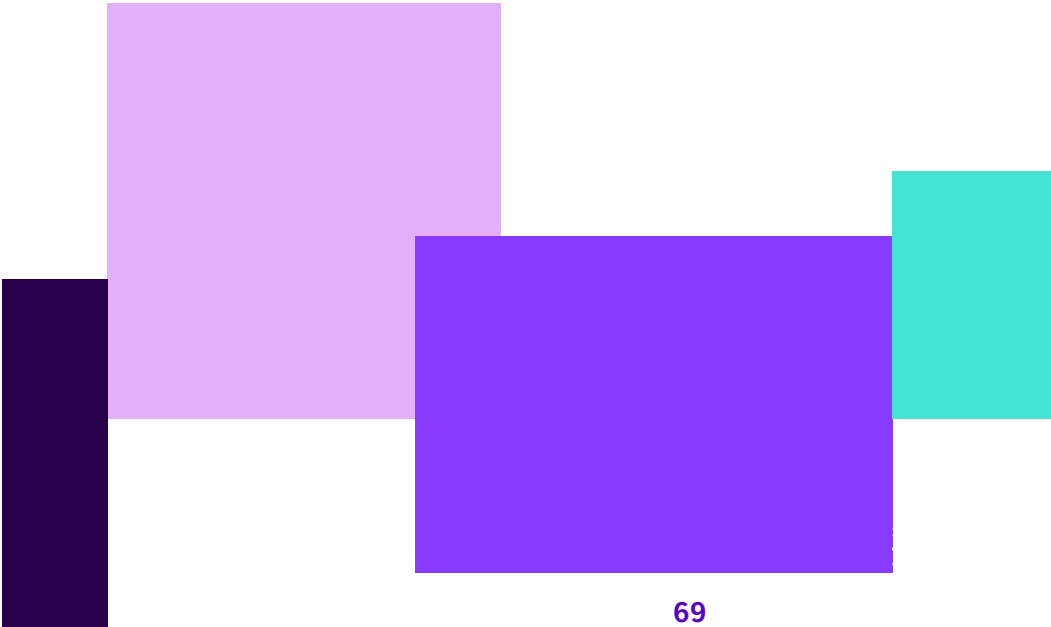


Figure 29: Answers from independent schools to 'Is recruitment of qualified teachers an issue for your department?'



Conclusion

Language Trends 2026 shows a lot is going in the right direction and represents a broad church of schools in England. Primary teachers are becoming more adept at using Artificial Intelligence to support language learning, as well as a commitment to delivering this area of the curriculum despite having bespoke expertise in many cases. The Curriculum and Assessment Review has had a mixed reception from teachers, with some concerned about the future direction of travel for languages. The perennial issue of transition to Key Stage 3 shows little sign of improving over time, despite various efforts to assure a seamless language learning journey.

At secondary, teachers are now more likely to tell us that fewer pupils are taking a language to GCSE and school-level language policies are invariably against mandation. Most schools take a broad approach to the National Curriculum when planning for Key Stage 3, with 60 per cent considering the full 7–14 range and 33 per cent focusing on Key Stage 3. Provision is generally even across school quintiles, but German is less commonly offered – especially in quintile 5 and in London – while it is more prevalent in the South-East and East of England. Schools are for the first time reporting planned or expected changes to options structures and curriculum time ahead of the first post-EBacc cohorts, which are likely to affect uptake.

Independent schools are not immune to nation-wide issues but compared with state secondary schools, they show a more extensive and exam-focused pattern of provision for lesser-taught languages, with notably higher levels of Key Stage 4 and post-16 examination provision across most languages. Latin and Ancient Greek are widely offered, with Mandarin and Italian particularly prominent among other curricular modern languages.

If the UK is to maintain its international relevance and engage effectively with global partners, it makes sense to support language learning as a core part of the education system. International examples such as Ireland demonstrate how a clear, sustained languages strategy can strengthen global connections and equip young people to participate confidently in an interconnected world (PPLI/Languages Connect, 2025).

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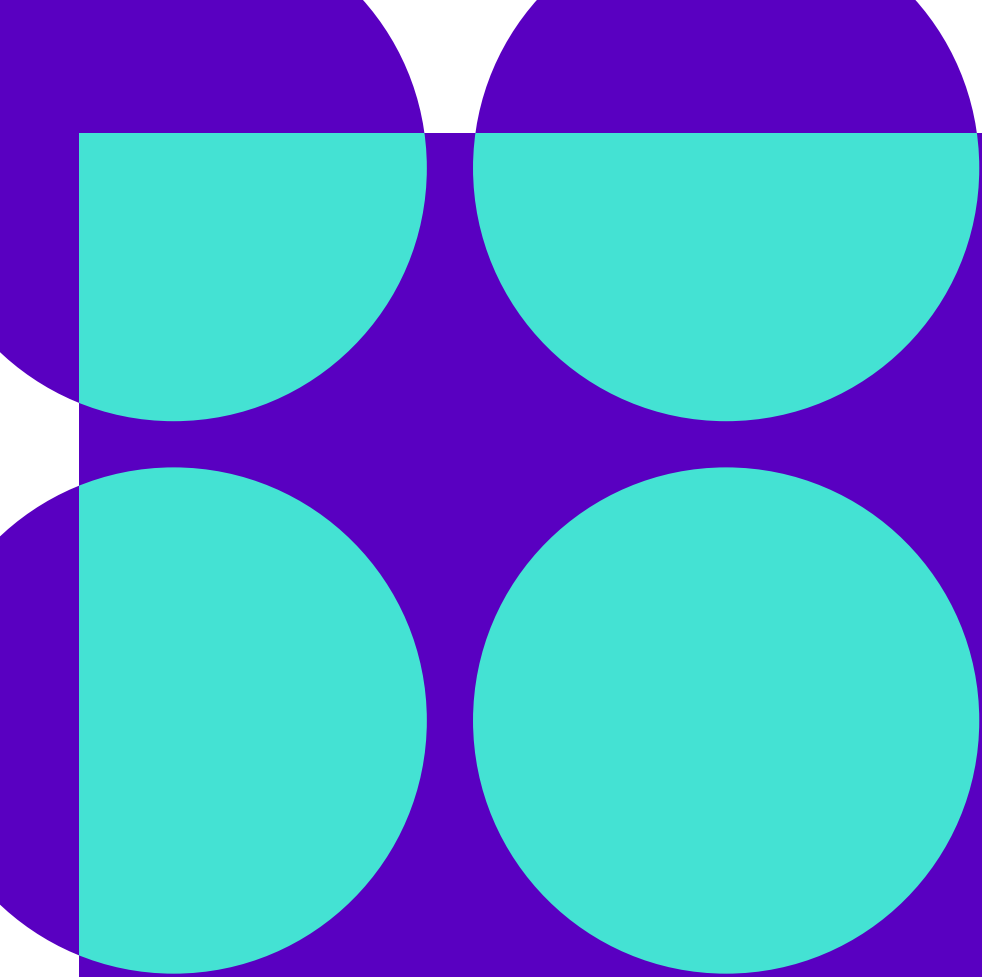
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