

International Languages in Schools in Wales Languages Matter – Talking Points

July 2025

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Executive summary

This thematic report examines the teaching and learning of international languages in primary, secondary and all-age schools in Wales. It evaluates the progress made in implementing international languages within the Curriculum for Wales. It considers the quality of teaching and its impact on learning, and how leaders influence provision for international languages in their schools. The review also considers how schools promote language learning, pupils' attitudes toward international languages, and the challenges that persist in encouraging pupils to study international languages at The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and beyond.

The report highlights examples of how primary schools have successfully developed international languages in the curriculum. There are examples of good quality teaching and learning in the primary, secondary and all-age schools we visited. However, in general, curriculum design and the quality of teaching remains inconsistent. As a result, the experiences and opportunities available to pupils in international languages are too variable. Transition arrangements between the primary and secondary phases are often weak and uptake at GCSE and A Level is low. Taking these issues into account, the future of international language education in Wales remains challenging.

This report evaluates four key areas:

- **International languages in the primary phase:** Since international languages became integrated into the Curriculum for Wales in the primary phase in September 2022, many of the primary and all-age schools we visited had made positive strides in embedding international language learning. Most of the schools focused appropriately on developing pupils' listening and speaking skills and broadening pupils' cultural understanding. However, overall, curriculum development remains inconsistent. A few schools struggled due to a lack of staff confidence, their perceptions of limited curriculum time and insufficient professional learning opportunities. In the most effective schools, language learning was embedded across the curriculum. In these schools, pupils were exposed to languages from an early age, fostering a multilingual ethos.
- **International languages in the secondary phase:** While most secondary schools in our sample provided suitable opportunities for international language learning in Years 7-9, uptake at Key Stage 4 and post-16 remains low. Curriculum time constraints, the perception that languages are difficult and the pressures of the options process contributed to the decline. Where language provision was strong, teachers used authentic and creative resources, useful technology, and highly engaging teaching strategies to progress pupils' knowledge and skills. However, in some cases, over-reliance on teacher support prevented pupils from developing as independent learners of languages. Schools with effective teaching and a rich curriculum had stronger pupil engagement, particularly at GCSE and GCE Advanced Levels (A levels).

Pupil attitudes and engagement: Many pupils in the schools we visited enjoyed learning international languages and recognised the benefits for travel, communication, and employment. However, as they progressed through school, their enthusiasm often declined due to a lack of perceived relevance of language learning and confidence in their ability to succeed. Some pupils believed that learning Welsh was sufficient, while others saw languages learning as challenging compared to other curriculum subjects. Parents and carers who responded to our survey generally valued language learning, but our survey identified a need for improved communication with parents and carers about its long-term benefits.

- **Leadership and support for international languages:** It was clear from our evidence that strong leadership plays a crucial role in sustaining international language provision. In schools where leaders prioritised language learning, pupils had better access to high-quality teaching, clear progression routes, and enrichment opportunities. However, in many schools, senior leaders did not consider international languages as a strategic priority, often resulting in inconsistent or weaker provision. Collaboration between primary and secondary schools was often poor, affecting how well pupils made progress from the primary into the secondary phase. Those schools who engaged with school improvement services and external organisations told us that they valued their support, but access to professional learning and resources varied widely across Wales. Teacher recruitment for international languages remains a significant challenge, with declining numbers of student teachers entering the profession
- **The role of wider system support:** While programmes, such as Global Futures, and support from local and regional school improvement services have influenced language provision positively, school leaders were concerned about long-term sustainability. Further education colleges offer limited international language pathways, and language provision within vocational programmes is too variable. Initial teacher education providers face recruitment difficulties, with low numbers of international language student teachers.

This report makes recommendations for schools, local authorities and school improvement services, and the Welsh Government. These recommendations focus primarily on improving teaching and learning, developing stronger curriculum arrangements at transition points to ensure progress and continuity in pupils' learning, and supporting schools to maintain and improve provision for GCSE and A level international languages courses.

Introduction

This report has been prepared in response to a request from the Welsh Government, as outlined in Estyn's annual remit for 2025-2026. It focuses on the teaching and learning of international languages in the primary and secondary phases in Wales. The aim of the report is to provide an insight into the strengths and areas for improvement in how schools plan, teach and promote the importance of international languages. It considers pupils' attitudes towards language learning and the progress they make. It also highlights examples of effective practice in the schools we visited and provides support for teachers and leaders to evaluate their schools' provision for international languages as part of Curriculum for Wales. The review explores four key areas:

- **International languages in the primary phase:** the different ways in which primary schools plan and deliver international languages, and how the teaching and learning of international languages develops across the primary phase.
- **International languages in the secondary phase:** how teachers and leaders in the secondary phase organise their curriculum for international languages and ensure that teaching builds on pupils' learning in the primary phase, and the quality of teaching and learning in international languages classrooms.
- **Promoting and understanding the importance of learning languages:** exploring pupils' attitudes to learning international languages, and how schools and other organisations promote the importance of language learning.
- **Leading and improving international languages:** how leaders in the primary and secondary phases support and improve provision for international languages, including the quality of teaching, and how partners contribute to its development. How leaders across both phases support transition.

This report was informed through a variety of evidence gathering activities, including:

- **national surveys:** We conducted three national surveys – one for primary headteachers, one for secondary teachers and leaders, and a survey for parents and carers.
- **visits to schools:** We visited 13 primary schools, 14 secondary schools and 3 all-age schools. During our visits we interviewed leaders, teachers and pupils, and we observed the teaching of international languages. A few schools were selected based on information about their languages curriculum.
- **meetings with other stakeholders:** We met with a variety of stakeholders, including representatives from local authorities and regional consortia, further education (FE) colleges, initial teacher education (ITE) providers and other organisations who support provision for international languages.

More detailed information about the evidence base for this report can be found in the methodology section in the appendices. This report is intended for the Welsh Government, local authorities, school improvement services, teachers and leaders in schools and other organisations support the learning of international languages in Wales.

Background

The Estyn report Modern Foreign Languages in Wales (July 2016) highlighted significant challenges and opportunities for international languages. It noted a steady decline in the uptake of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4 and post-16, despite efforts to improve teaching quality and pupil engagement. The report examined trends in pupil attainment, teaching standards, and curriculum design, while also addressing concerns regarding the availability of language teachers. While it was clear from the report that some progress was being made, longstanding issues persisted, including limited curriculum time, inconsistent teaching quality, and a lack of collaboration and support for international languages.

Key findings from the 2016 Estyn report

- **Declining Participation:** A decreasing number of pupils opted for modern foreign languages at GCSE and A level, with boys particularly underrepresented.
- **Teaching Quality Variability:** While some schools demonstrated effective teaching practices, others struggled with outdated methods and over-reliance on written preparation for oral tasks.
- **Limited Fluency Development:** Many learners lacked confidence in speaking, often memorising written paragraphs rather than developing spontaneous communication skills.
- **Curriculum Constraints:** A lack of curriculum time and limited option choices frequently restricted access to modern foreign languages, leading to low participation rates at Key Stage 4.
- **Parental and Student Perceptions:** Many parents valued language learning for career prospects, but pupils often lacked awareness of its practical applications.
- **Teacher Recruitment Issues:** There were ongoing challenges in attracting and retaining modern foreign language teachers, particularly in Welsh-medium and rural schools.

In 2009 Estyn published a thematic report on international languages, Improving modern foreign languages in secondary schools in Wales. In this report, Estyn made a recommendation that secondary schools should ‘provide two hours a week of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3’ (Estyn, 2009, page 4). The rationale behind this recommendation being that pupils need sufficient time in Years 7-9 to make suitable progress.

As Wales continues its reform of curriculum and assessment, this report on international languages will evaluate its progress over the past decade. It examines how policy changes, pedagogical strategies, and broader educational reforms have influenced the teaching and learning of international languages in schools.

Policy development

At the time of our last report on international languages, the [Welsh Government Global Futures strategy](#) was in its infancy, having been established in 2015. The strategy was refreshed in November 2020, and in 2022 with the launch of a three-year strategic plan for international languages in Wales. The plan includes three strategic aims:

- **Strategic aim 1:** support the development and delivery of meaningful international language provision in Wales
- **Strategic aim 2:** provide practitioners with the skills, knowledge and experiences to plan and deliver international languages
- **Strategic aim 3:** challenge the misconceptions around language learning

[Welsh Government's Curriculum for Wales: Annual Report](#) 2024 states that:

In the face of a number of challenges for international languages in our schools, the Global Futures programme 2022 to 2025 asserts our ambition for increased language learning (Welsh Government, 2024, p. 21).

While this report is not an evaluation of the Global Futures strategy, our findings will inform the Welsh Government and the Global Futures partners of the current successes and challenges in relation to international languages in schools across Wales.

Curriculum reform

Since our last report in 2016, there have been significant changes to the curriculum in Wales. The Curriculum for Wales introduced the term international languages in its curriculum legislation and guidance; this incorporates modern foreign languages, community languages, classical languages and British Sign Language (BSL).

The introduction of Curriculum for Wales formally linked international languages with English and Welsh in the Languages, Literacy and Communication (LLC) Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE). This positioning of international languages, alongside English and Welsh, aims to develop a more multilingual and plurilingual approach to language learning. Multilingualism is the ability of a society or individual to use more than one language. Plurilingualism is an individual's ability to switch between and use multiple languages in different contexts.

Welsh Government guidance, [The Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience](#) (Welsh Government, 2021) states:

This multilingual and plurilingual approach is intended to ignite learners' curiosity and enthusiasm and provide them with a firm foundation for a lifelong interest in the languages of Wales and the languages of the world.

The Institute of Education, University College London's [Supporting teachers to adopt](#)

[plurilingual approaches in languages education in Wales](#) (Arfon, 2024) concludes that a variety of factors are hindering the delivery of the Curriculum for Wales' plurilingual vision:

...the main obstacle for teachers in not being able to carry out fully curriculum-driven plurilingualism is the intersection between teachers' confusion around plurilingualism as a term, the absence of clear guidance and professional learning for using plurilingual approaches in teaching, and the role of examinations (p, 3).

Another important change over recent years has been the introduction of international languages in the primary phase, as part of Curriculum for Wales.

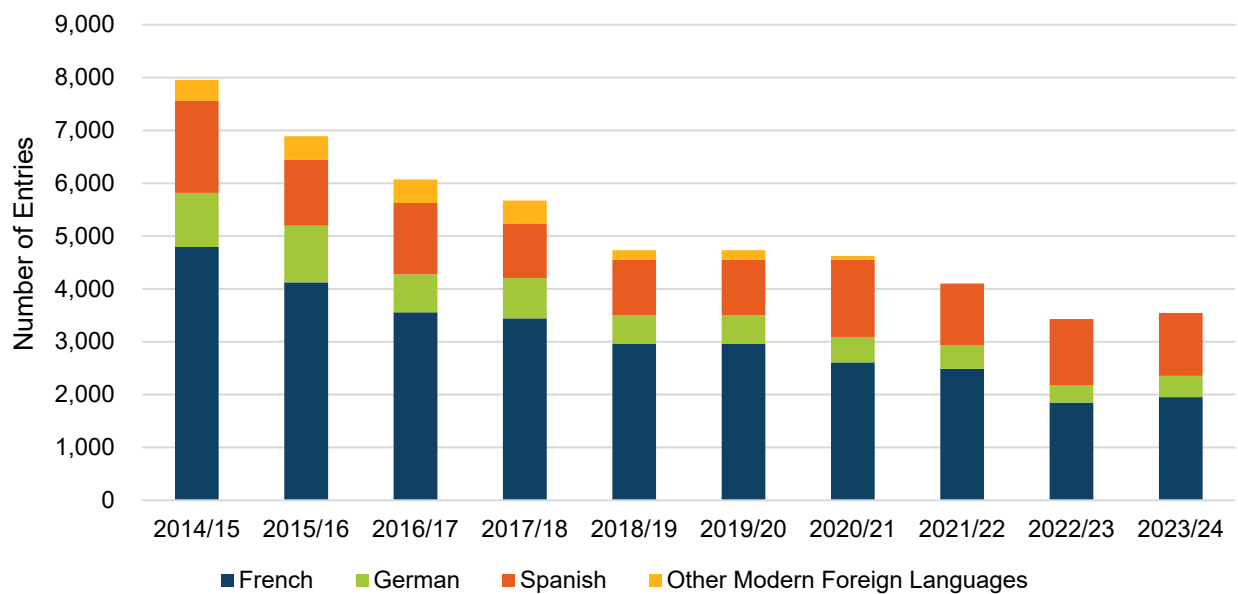
The British Council's [Languages Trends Wales 2023](#) report states that primary schools in Wales are making good progress in embedding international languages in their classrooms:

72 per cent of responding primary schools reported that they taught an International Language within curriculum time in the 2022/23 school year, compared to 41 per cent in the 2021/22 school year (p. 4).

This thematic report considers the quality of provision for international languages at the primary phase and how well primary and secondary schools are working together to plan for pupil progress across both phases.

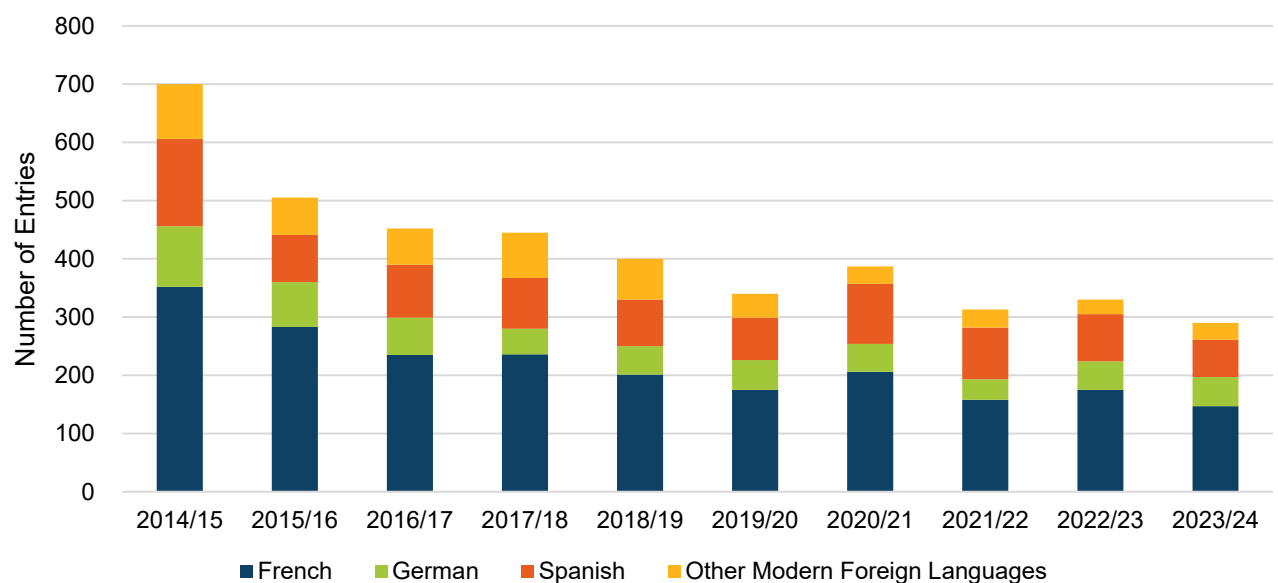
Pupil participation

In a recent research article, Stollhans (2024) stated that in 2024 more young people in Wales opted to study an international language than in the previous year. However, as Chart 1, below, shows, over the last 10 years, there has been an overall decline in the number of pupils studying an international language at GCSE level. French and German have seen the sharpest drops, while Spanish shows relative stability. Despite efforts to promote language learning, total entries have decreased by over 50 per cent over the 10-year period.

Chart 1: GCSE International Languages Entries 2014-2024

Source: Welsh Government - Examination results

A Level entries have also continued to decline over the past decade (see Chart 2, below). French, the most popular language for study, has seen a sharp drop in entries, while German has remained consistently low. Spanish and other modern foreign languages have fluctuated but have also declined overall. The total number of entries has fallen by 59 per cent, reflecting a worrying trend in post-16 language study.

Chart 2: A Level International Languages Entries

Source: Welsh Government - Examination results

Recommendations

Schools should:

- R1 Strengthen teaching to improve pupils' knowledge and skills, and their confidence to use the target language spontaneously and independently
- R2 Improve curriculum planning and transition arrangements to ensure that pupils build on prior learning when moving from the primary phase to the secondary phase
- R3 Review curriculum planning and timetabling to ensure sufficient time is allocated to international languages, to support pupils to make effective progress and achieve their potential

Local authorities and school improvement services should:

- R4 Strengthen professional learning to ensure that teachers and, where appropriate, support staff, develop confidence and expertise in delivering international languages, particularly in the primary phase
- R5 Work with schools to ensure that all pupils have access to international languages qualifications, particularly where opportunities in individual schools at GCSE and A Level are limited

The Welsh Government, and where relevant Medr, should:

- R6 Strengthen the guidance available to schools and other stakeholders, to support pupils and their families to understand the value of learning international languages at GCSE and A Level
- R7 Strengthen curriculum support for international languages to help schools plan more effectively for progression and continuity of learning, particularly as pupils move from the primary to the secondary phase
- R8 Develop a national approach to support school improvement services, schools, colleges and ITE partnerships to ensure the long-term sustainability of international languages teaching and learning in Wales

International languages in the primary phase

Curriculum planning and delivery in the primary phase

International languages were introduced as part of Curriculum for Wales, for pupils in the primary phase from September 2022. Under this curriculum, international languages (formerly known as modern foreign languages) became a statutory part of the LLC AoLE. This means that pupils are expected to experience and learn at least one international language during the primary phase of their education.

Within the curriculum, progression steps provide five key milestones, which relate to how pupils' learning is structured and assessed. At Progression Step 2 (ages 5-8), curriculum expectations focus primarily on exposure to international languages, for example:

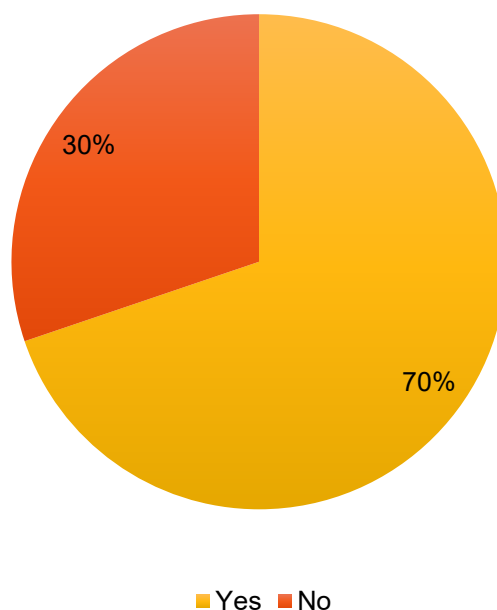
- recognising and responding to simple words and phrases
- participating in songs and rhymes
- making links between languages
- engaging in simple activities that encourage curiosity about languages.

At Progression Step 3 (ages 8-11), however, there is an expectation that pupils begin to move beyond recognition and produce simple spoken and written language. Compared to their earlier experiences, they should now make progress to:

- develop greater spoken communication skills
- improve their pronunciation and fluency in basic conversations
- expand their vocabulary, recognising a wider range of words and phrases
- form simple sentences, using familiar grammatical structures
- develop a cultural awareness of the languages they are learning.

In all of the primary and all-age schools we visited, leaders had introduced international languages by Years 5 and 6. However, in our survey of primary headteachers, around 30 per cent of respondents said that they had not introduced international languages in their schools.

Chart 3: Whether international languages have been introduced as part of the Curriculum for Wales – headteacher responses



Percentages are based on data from 53 respondents

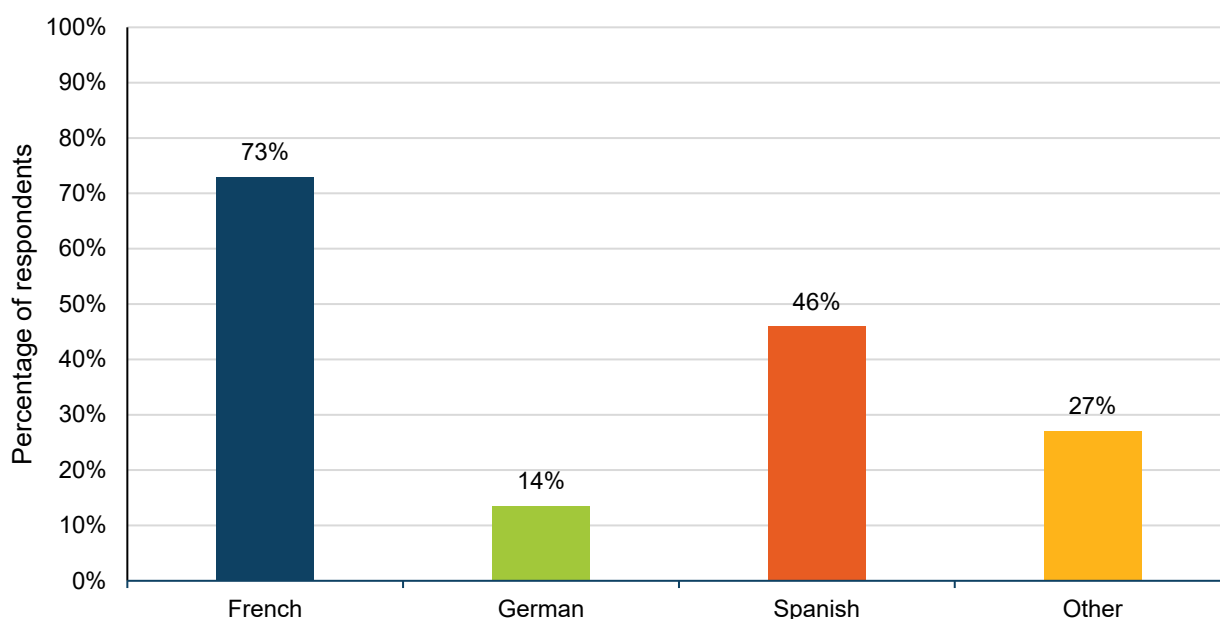
Of those respondents who said they had not introduced international languages, five stated that they had future plans to do so. The other negative respondents cited a variety of barriers to introducing international languages in the primary phase, including:

- the need to prioritise Welsh as a second language
- the lack of subject expertise in international languages
- the time pressures they perceive are present in the primary curriculum
- the need to focus on developing pupils' communication skills in English and Welsh
- a lack of professional learning and funding to release staff.

In the schools we visited, leaders often told us that it is difficult to allocate sufficient time to international languages within the primary curriculum. In a few schools, leaders expressed their concerns about a potential impact on pupils' learning and progress in Welsh, where this is a whole-school priority for improvement.

Language choices

In our national survey of primary headteachers we asked which languages are taught in their schools.

Chart 4: Languages taught in primary schools – headteacher responses

Percentages are based on data from 37 respondents

Both in the schools we visited, and in those schools who responded to our survey, French was the most popular language taught in the primary phase. This was followed by Spanish and then German. Around 27% of respondents to our survey selected “other” as the language taught, with many of those referring to British Sign Language (BSL).

In a few schools we visited, a multilingual ethos was promoted successfully, where pupils are exposed to multiple languages through greetings, displays, and cross-curricular learning. A few schools adopted a highly inclusive approach by incorporating languages spoken by their pupils at home, reflecting the diversity of their school communities. This focus on multilingualism fostered a culture of respect for different languages and encouraged pupils to see the value in learning international languages from an early age.

Celebrating linguistic diversity

Pentip VA Church in Wales Primary School, Carmarthenshire, embraces linguistic diversity by embedding translanguaging opportunities across its curriculum. With 14 home languages, pupils naturally make connections between languages through multilingual greetings, school assemblies, and classroom activities. For example, teachers highlight vocabulary links between English, Polish, and French, while pupils explore different languages through registration routines and multilingual posters. Survival language lanyards support English as additional language (EAL) pupils, and Makaton is used to aid communication for all pupils. Parents enhance this approach through their participation in events like a Cantonese morning, fostering cultural appreciation. As a result of the school’s inclusive approach towards different cultures

and languages, pupils develop strong, positive attitudes towards languages, recognising their role in inclusion and communication.

Curriculum Design

In many of the primary and all-age schools we visited, international language learning was increasingly becoming an integral part of the primary curriculum. In the schools we visited, leaders shared how they had developed a strategic plan to introduce an international languages curriculum. In these schools, leaders and teachers had successfully incorporated international language learning within wider curriculum themes. However, in a few schools there was a more ad-hoc and incidental approach, where teachers and leaders did not consider carefully enough what they wanted pupils to learn in international languages.

Where successful, a thematic approach to language learning secured high levels of pupil engagement, bringing languages to life through meaningful use in real-world contexts. For example, in some schools teachers linked language learning to geography, history or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) projects, while in other schools we visited, language learning has been incorporated into more creative aspects of the curriculum, such as the expressive arts. In a few particularly effective schools, even the youngest pupils enjoyed being introduced to international languages through songs and other cultural experiences, and there was a strong focus on developing the international dimension of the curriculum and broadening pupils' horizons.

Bringing the world to Bargoed

St. Gwladys Primary School, Caerphilly, has adopted a strategy to 'Bring the World to St. Gwladys', a whole-school approach to implementing international languages and cultures across the curriculum. The school deliberately links language learning to wider curriculum themes and rich cultural activities, ensuring that languages are not taught in isolation but as part of meaningful, real-world learning experiences. Multilingual displays in classrooms and shared areas reinforce learning.

The school's creative approach to language learning is deliberately and purposefully linked to class texts and topics to ensure authentic learning across all AoLEs. The school uses the opportunities provided by key global events, such as the Olympics, to ensure that children regularly encounter diverse cultures and languages. It also involves parents, carers and the local community well. For example, while studying Tutankhamun, pupils learned Arabic greetings with support from a Syrian family. Through these rich cultural experiences, pupils develop an appreciation for different traditions and a strong enthusiasm for language learning.

In many schools we visited, these cross-curricular approaches were supplemented beneficially with more formal learning experiences as pupils move into Years 5 and 6, allowing for more focused and dedicated time to develop language learning skills. Where most successful, these sessions ensured that pupils developed their skills systematically.

These lessons worked well alongside thematic learning experiences, creating a balanced and effective approach to learning languages in the primary setting. In the best examples seen, lessons were planned carefully to consider pupils' progress and deeper language development. Leaders and teachers planned effectively, outlining what they expected pupils to achieve aligned to the descriptions of learning, set out in curriculum guidance. These approaches helped pupils to make consistent progress and build on their language skills coherently.

Planning for progression

Mountain Lane C.P. School, Flintshire, has implemented a strategic, progressive model for international languages, ensuring pupils develop linguistic confidence from early years to Year 6. This structured pathway introduces BSL in Reception to Year 2, Spanish in Years 3 and 4, and French in Years 5 and 6, aligning with secondary school provision. A strong focus on phonics and plurilingualism enables pupils to compare linguistic patterns, such as cognates (words that look and / or sound similar), between English, Welsh, French, and Spanish. Teachers use retrieval practice (a learning strategy that involves recalling information to strengthen memory and understanding), reinforcing prior learning through questioning, vocabulary drilling, and cross-curricular applications, for example integrating French language into history lessons. The school works closely with local secondary schools, ensuring that progress is considered as pupils move to secondary school. This clear, well-sequenced approach ensures that pupils progress confidently in international languages, preparing them for the next phase of learning.

In a few schools we visited, there was effective use of technology to support and enhance the planning and delivery of international languages within the primary curriculum. Several schools used online planning tools to help them ensure that language teaching was progressive and sufficiently challenging. In a few schools, pupils accessed regular virtual language lessons with other schools in their cluster, with technology complementing more traditional teacher-led, classroom-based activities. Other schools in the primary phase accessed national online language learning.

Learning German with the Goethe-Institut and e-sgol

Rhayader Church in Wales Primary School, Powys, has successfully embedded German language learning into its curriculum, using e-sgol, a Welsh Government funded online platform, in partnership with the Goethe-Institut to provide high-quality authentic learning experiences. The structured and interactive lessons engage pupils through songs, online quizzes, and live sessions, making learning fun and accessible. Pupils have developed a strong interest in Germany and language learning, with discussions about how languages support future careers and travel. A key feature is the benefit for teachers, who learn alongside pupils, increasing their confidence in delivering international languages. This flexible model of language learning ensures

broad accessibility, with e-sgol reporting¹ that nearly 3,000 primary pupils across Wales were involved. While at an early stage of development, teachers and leaders at Rhayader see this as a sustainable, impactful way to embed international languages in the school curriculum.

In summary

- Schools were at different stages of implementing international languages in the primary curriculum, with some integrating them meaningfully into curriculum themes, while others take a more ad hoc approach.
- Curriculum time was perceived as a common barrier, with some leaders struggling to allocate time for international languages alongside priorities such as Welsh and English literacy.
- Successful schools often used a thematic and cross-curricular approach, embedding language learning in other subject areas such as the humanities, expressive arts, or STEM to make it more meaningful and engaging.
- French is the most commonly taught language, followed by Spanish and German, with a few schools also introducing British Sign Language (BSL) or incorporating community languages to reflect pupil diversity.
- Progression models are emerging, with some schools using structured planning and cluster-based approaches to develop language skills from early years through to Year 6.

Learning and teaching international languages in the primary phase

Most primary-aged pupils in the schools we visited displayed overwhelmingly positive attitudes towards learning international languages. This view was shared by the primary headteachers who responded to our survey. These positive attitudes to learning languages are a notable strength to build on. In general, primary pupils understood the practical benefits of learning a language and many were aware of how learning languages is useful for future jobs and careers. Pupils mentioned that knowing another language helps with travel and international communication, and that learning languages can lead to enriching opportunities, such as meeting new people and making friends from other countries.

In many schools, pupils particularly enjoyed games, songs and other interactive ways of learning a language. They liked activities that made learning a language fun, dynamic and authentic. For example, many pupils enjoyed tasting food from different countries and learning about different traditions. Many viewed language learning as challenging but enjoyable and were confident in speaking without a fear of making mistakes. They participated with enthusiasm in role-play, drilling of vocabulary and language patterns, and responded well to their teachers, who in most cases were good language role models. A few pupils also recognised connections between languages, for example

¹ According to e-sgol's internal unpublished data

identifying words that are similar in the target language and English or Welsh, and were comfortable using terms such as ‘cognates’ in discussions with their peers.

Plurilingualism

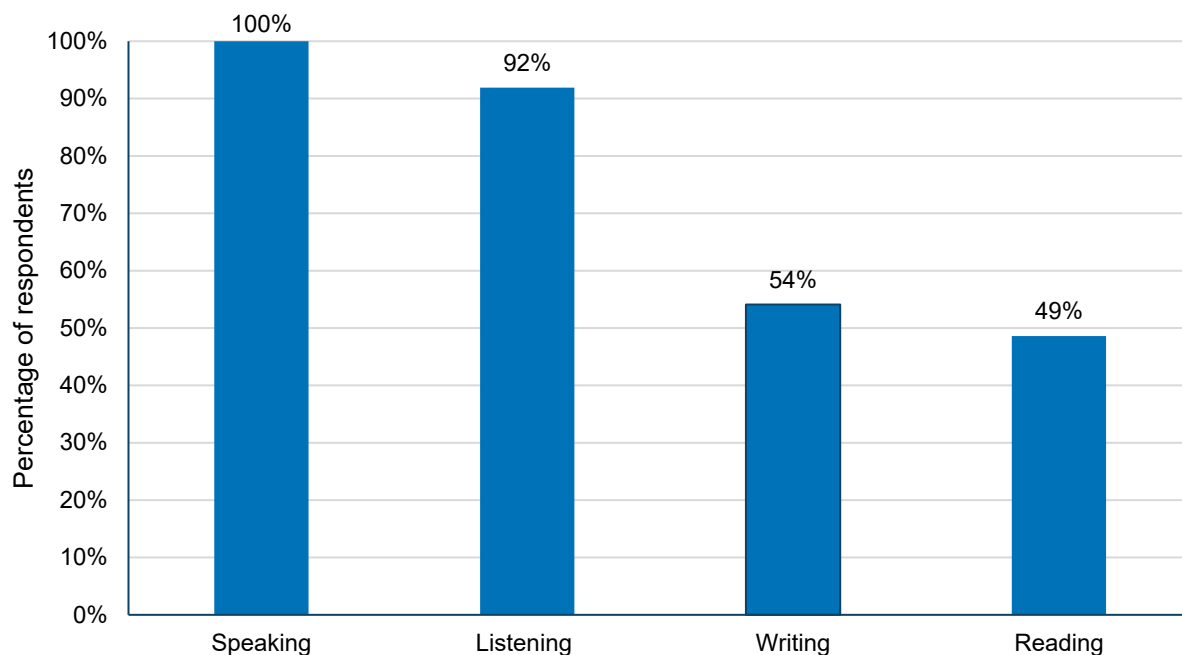
In a few primary schools we visited, there was a purposeful whole-school culture of plurilingualism. In these schools, language learning was embedded into everyday classroom routines, with pupils encouraged to use international languages alongside English and Welsh throughout the day. In around half of the schools in our sample, making comparisons between languages was an integral part of learning. This approach supported pupils to develop a deeper understanding of linguistic patterns in multiple languages. In a few schools, teachers showed how words in different languages are connected by explaining their origin (etymology). For example, they encourage pupils to discuss similarities between words, such as ‘J’habite’ and ‘habitat’, demonstrating how understanding word origins supports vocabulary retention and comprehension.

Translanguaging in practice

Ysgol Bodhyfryd, Wrexham, has embedded translanguaging as a natural and effective approach to language learning, enabling pupils to use multiple languages in tandem. Pupils navigate between Welsh, English, and international languages confidently, demonstrating strong multilingual literacy. From an early age, pupils transfer skills across languages, recognising linguistic similarities and applying knowledge across subjects. For example, pupils read a Chinese legend in English, then rewrite and illustrate it in Welsh and Mandarin. More able pupils create bilingual posters and acrostic poems independently, using Welsh and Mandarin. Pupils work independently and in groups to analyse, create, and present work across multiple languages with ease. This dynamic translanguaging approach fosters linguistic agility and confidence, helping pupils to see connections between languages and to view language learning as a creative process.

Developing pupils’ oracy skills

In nearly all of the schools visited, teachers prioritised pupils’ oracy, helping them to develop confidence in listening and in speaking in the target language. In the survey of primary headteachers, nearly all respondents said they focus on developing listening and speaking skills, compared with around half who also focus on reading and writing.

Chart 5: Skills pupils are developing in primary language lessons

Percentages are based on data from 37 respondents.

Many teachers we observed during our visits to primary classrooms were good language role models. They used the target language confidently in lessons and modelled accurate pronunciation. In a few schools, teachers often played online sound clips from first language speakers, which helped pupils to hear authentic language being used. In a few schools, teachers used phonics-based approaches, such as breaking words into individual sounds (segmenting) and syllables to support pronunciation and combining individual sounds to form words (blending) to support pupils' reading skills. However, in a few instances, teachers lacked confidence in the target language and pronounced words incorrectly. While it is important that primary teachers feel comfortable to take risks and learn alongside pupils, in a few cases pupils were picking up mistakes that would need to be corrected later. In a few schools, pupils struggled to retain previously learned vocabulary due to a lack of structured and regular opportunities for them to practise the language and commit this to memory.

Examples of successful strategies we observed during our primary visits to develop pupils' listening and speaking skills were:

- **repetition and drilling** – Pupils participating in repetition and structured drilling to help develop accurate pronunciation and fluency in the language.
- **songs, rhymes and chants** – Singing and rhythm-based activities reinforcing accurate pronunciation and helped pupils to retain key vocabulary.
- **sentence building and scaffolding** – Teachers providing useful sentence structures and scaffolded prompts to support pupils in forming and extending their verbal responses. Scaffolding is a technique where teachers support pupils as they develop new skills and understanding of concepts. This helps pupils to

achieve tasks that they cannot currently complete independently.

- **games and interactive activities** – Teachers using games to build vocabulary, and question-and-answer sessions and group challenges to develop pupils' confidence when speaking.
- **encouraging risk-taking** – Teachers encouraging pupils to speak without fear of making mistakes, which developed their resilience and confidence in using the target language.
- **use of first language speaker recordings** – Teachers using recordings of first language speaker conversations, so pupils hear authentic pronunciation and intonation.
- **peer conversations and group work** – Teachers supporting pupils to engage in small-group and paired discussions to practise speaking in a relaxed and supportive environment.
- **questioning and verbal response activities** – Teachers asking open-ended questions, prompting pupils to extend their answers and practise speaking spontaneously.

Developing pupils' reading and writing skills

While most primary schools focused beneficially on developing pupils' oracy skills as a priority, in a few instances schools also provided well-chosen opportunities to develop pupils' reading and writing. Where they were most effective, these experiences enhanced pupils' abilities to speak confidently in the target language.

In a few schools we visited, pupils engaged in purposeful, short written tasks, for example to write about themselves. Teachers provided them with helpful scaffolding and prompts. A few more able pupils wrote independently, extending their sentences beyond basic structures by using connectives and adjectives. However, in a few schools, pupils completed writing activities that did not help them to develop and extend their knowledge and understanding of the target language. Where teaching was less effective, activities often involved copying and very low-level activities, which did not focus closely enough on progressing pupils' skills. This often had an adverse impact on pupils' enthusiasm for learning languages.

In a few schools, teachers had started to develop pupils' reading skills. For example, pupils read and identified errors in written texts, recognising correct spelling and sentence structures. In a very few examples, we observed pupils reading literature and watching films in the target language. This helped to develop their understanding of texts in another language where they recalled information and inferred meaning successfully, as well as inspiring an interest in the culture and languages of other countries.

Using film, art and literature to bring languages to life

Mountain Lane C.P. School, Flintshire, uses literature, film, and art to bring language learning to life, ensuring that pupils engage with language and culture in meaningful ways. The principle of, 'Literature fires imagination and inspires creativity', from

Curriculum for Wales, is central to the school's approach to international languages. Pupils explore authentic texts, such as 'Le Petit Nicolas' and 'Asterix', developing vocabulary, comprehension and cultural awareness. Film and music enhance listening skills and pronunciation, while artistic projects, such as studying Spanish artists like Picasso or building models of the Eiffel Tower, help to develop cultural connections. Through learning about festivals and storytelling, pupils immerse themselves in the cultures of the French and Spanish speaking worlds, gaining a real-life appreciation of language learning. By integrating cultural elements alongside language learning, the school aims to ensure that pupils develop enthusiasm, creativity, and curiosity for international languages.

Developing pupils' confidence and independent learning skills

In a few primary schools in the sample, we saw effective approaches to fostering independent learning in international languages.

Examples of effective strategies to develop independent learning in the primary classrooms we visited are:

- **encouraging pupil autonomy** – In a few schools, pupils took responsibility for their own learning through creating their own personal vocabulary books, using digital tools independently to verify and extend their learning, and finding patterns and similarities between languages to deepen their own understanding.
- **collaborating with their peers** – In several schools, pupils took part in group-based learning activities, such as games and role-play exercises, helping pupils to learn from each other.
- **self and peer assessment** – In a few schools, teachers supported pupils to reflect on their own progress using self-assessment tools, such as tracking their own progress against success criteria. These tools also supported them to engage in purposeful peer assessment, for example identifying errors in spelling and grammar in each other's work.
- **developing resilience** – Teachers encouraged pupils to speak without over-relying on verbal, visual or written scaffolding, helping them to become more confident and fluent. In a few schools, teachers challenged their most able pupils to experiment with new language structures and vocabulary independently.

However, in a majority of schools we visited, developing independent learning was not embedded consistently, with pupils often relying heavily on teacher-led instruction and activities.

Building pupils' confidence and independence

Ysgol Pencae, Cardiff, has successfully developed pupil confidence and independence in language learning through the use of engaging teaching strategies and promoting pupil independence. Pupils confidently use French and German phrases independently, applying their learning in games, dialogues, and creative tasks without over-reliance on

teacher support. They record their conversations, create videos, and engage in digital learning platforms, reinforcing their language skills through active participation. Teachers prioritise spoken language, using songs, rhymes, and repetition to support fluency. Pupils are encouraged to experiment with language, make connections across Welsh, English, and international languages, and embrace mistakes as part of learning. This progressive, confidence-building approach ensures that pupils develop a positive mindset and resilience, preparing them for further language learning.

Many primary teachers assessed pupils' progress in learning languages effectively during the sessions we visited. Often, they used questioning and other formative assessment strategies well to monitor pupils' progress and help them to improve. In a few schools, useful planning had been developed providing teachers with an overview of what pupils should learn over a given period, aligned to the relevant progression steps and descriptions of learning. However, in nearly all instances, schools have not yet considered how to ensure that subsequent teachers understand the specific learning that has already taken place in international languages and use this to ensure that each learner is challenged and supported appropriately in their next steps. In nearly all schools, there was no structured approach to reviewing and recognising pupils' progress. This made it difficult for schools to monitor the impact of provision, including the quality of teaching on pupils' learning and progress in international languages.

Secondary schools often received little or no information about pupils' prior language learning at the transition point from primary to secondary, making it difficult to ensure continuity. In addition, the inconsistencies in approaches to teaching and learning international languages in primary schools across clusters made effective transition particularly challenging.

In summary

- In general pupils enjoyed learning languages, especially through interactive methods like songs, games, role-play, and cultural activities, which help them build confidence and engagement.
- Teachers prioritised oracy, focusing on speaking and listening through structured repetition and vocabulary drilling.
- Many teachers were positive language role models, using the target language confidently and encouraging risk-taking, though a few lacked subject knowledge, leading to inaccuracies in pronunciation.
- Plurilingual approaches were developing, with pupils making connections between English, Welsh, and international languages, enhancing their understanding of grammar and vocabulary patterns.
- Opportunities for independent learning varied, with a few schools encouraging autonomy but many pupils remained over-reliant on teacher support.
- Primary schools did not routinely share details about pupils' international language learning with secondary schools and this makes transition particularly challenging.

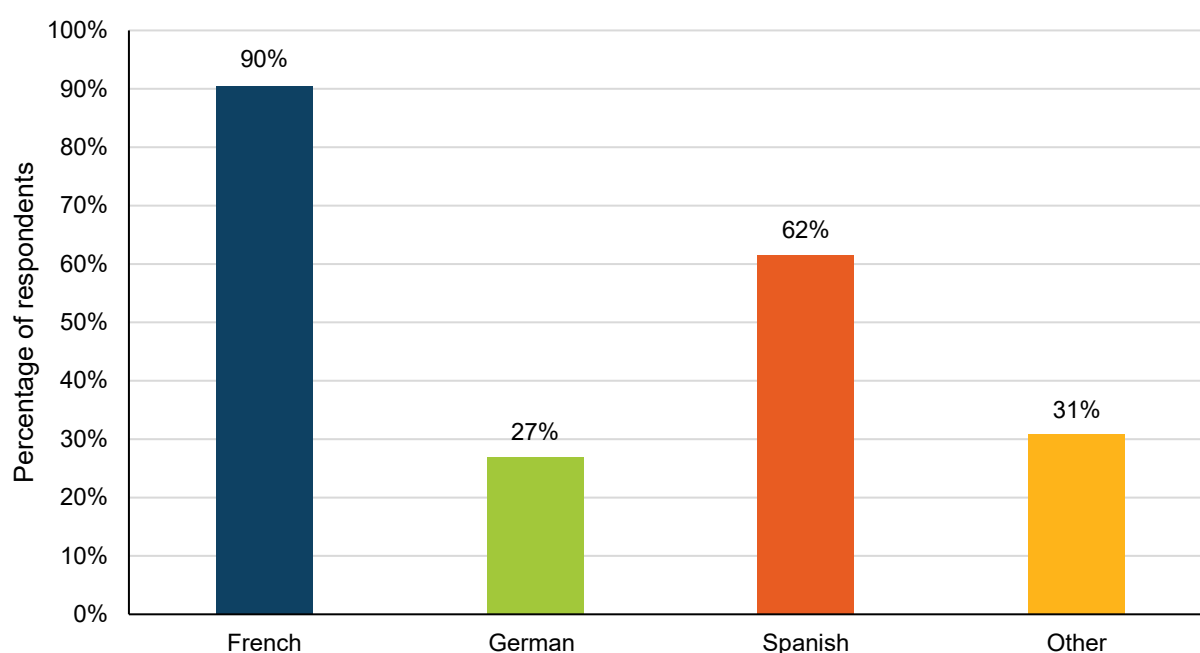
International languages in the secondary phase

Curriculum planning and delivery in the secondary phase

Language Choices

It was clear from our discussions in the schools we visited, and by analysing our survey of secondary phase leaders and teachers, that nearly all schools have a structured curriculum model that ensures pupils have access to at least one international language in Years 7-9.

Chart 6: Languages taught in secondary schools



Percentages are based on data from 52 respondents.

Over 90% of secondary leaders and teachers who responded to our survey said that French was taught in their schools. The next most popular choice was Spanish at 61.5% and then German at 26.9%. Broadly, these numbers were similar in the schools we visited, and in many cases, pupils were also able to sit qualifications in other community languages, which helps to enhance inclusivity and wider cultural engagement.

Celebrating linguistic diversity

The pupil population of **Bishop Gore School, Swansea** is culturally and linguistically diverse. The school's aim is to provide a personalised approach to learners' needs that enables all learners to thrive as individuals and as members of a united school community. The headteacher and her senior team place a strong focus on enabling

learners to develop their linguistic skills, whether it be through making provision for small groups to continue learning a language in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form or by providing support and tuition for learners wishing to gain qualifications in their heritage or home languages. As a result, in 2024, a total of 30 pupils attained GCSEs in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese and Spanish. Extra-curricular activities, such as a popular multilingual club, a 'poetry jam' where learners can present their poems written in one or more languages, a world chess tournament and days to celebrate the cultures represented in the school, help learners develop as 'global citizens', able to appreciate and celebrate differences and similarities across the different cultures represented in the school.

Around 30% of schools who responded to our survey taught languages other than French, German or Spanish. These included opportunities for pupils to learn Italian, Latin and Mandarin, often through extra-curricular activities.

Teaching Latin to develop linguistic understanding

Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr, Swansea, has successfully integrated Latin as a valuable tool to enhance pupils' understanding of international languages, fostering grammatical awareness, vocabulary development, plurilingualism and linguistic confidence. Offered as an extracurricular subject, Latin is available to all interested pupils, with Year 8 pupils following a level 1 qualification and Year 9 pupils progressing to GCSE Latin. Sixth-form students also have the option to study A Level Latin, ensuring continuity and challenge for more advanced linguists. Teachers have observed how learning Latin supports modern language acquisition by reinforcing grammatical structures and etymology, helping pupils make connections between Latin-derived languages like French, Spanish, and Italian. Many students who engage with Latin continue studying international languages at GCSE and beyond, demonstrating the school's longer-term impact on multilingual proficiency and enthusiasm for language learning.

Of the secondary schools in our sample, a few offered pupils the opportunity to learn more than one international language, such as French and German in Years 7-9 and beyond. These schools encouraged dual linguists through a variety of innovative pathways and curriculum models, with varying degrees of success. A few schools had chosen to teach both languages within their Years 7-9 curriculum, while others offered extra-curricular taster sessions in a bid to introduce formal teaching at Key Stage 4. However, schools also faced challenges to sustain their provision for dual linguists due to time constraints, which resulted in pupils making variable progress and limited uptake at Key Stages 4 and 5. In several schools, the curriculum for dual linguists was targeted specifically at more able pupils. The most successful curriculum models for dual linguists provided exposure to both languages as early as possible and there was sufficient time allocated to both languages. Schools who focused on planning for progression helped pupils who study more than one language at in Years 7-9 to continue both effectively at GCSE and beyond.

Supporting the development of dual linguists

Cowbridge School, Vale of Glamorgan, has developed an effective model for supporting triple linguists, enabling pupils to study two international languages and Welsh with confidence and success. This is achieved through strategic curriculum planning, rapid progression pathways, and extensive enrichment opportunities. Carefully structured curriculum planning ensures that pupils build on prior language-learning skills when they begin their second international language in Year 8. Teachers deliberately plan for accelerated progress by ensuring that pupils develop as independent learners. Pupils decipher pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures independently. Practical application is central, with teachers encouraging spontaneous speech and guiding pupils from simple structures to more complex sentences by the end of their first year of study in their second international language. An extensive programme of enrichment activities aims to enhance pupils' linguistic and cultural understanding. These include language film clubs, international competitions such as the GCHQ challenge, careers roadshows, and educational trips to France and Germany. This approach ensures that pupils not only develop fluency in two international languages but also gain cultural awareness.

Curriculum time

Most of the schools we visited allocated too little curriculum time to international languages, especially in Years 7-9. In these schools, teachers told us how limited curriculum time can impact on pupil progress and GCSE examination uptake. Around half of teachers and leaders who responded to our survey said that their school did not allocate enough curriculum time to international languages.

In the majority of schools we visited, there were only three hours per fortnight of international languages lessons. However, in a few schools, pupils received as little as 50 to 60 minutes per week, which severely limited pupils' ability to make sufficient progress. In a few cases, there was a structured increase in time allocation in Year 9 to help prepare pupils for GCSE examinations. In a very few schools, dual linguists received a split model in Year 8 or 9, with each language receiving half of the curriculum time available. However, this led to limited progress in both languages and weak uptake for GCSE. In a very few schools in our sample, pupils who were studying international languages at GCSE were only allocated three hours per fortnight. Teachers in these schools said that pupils were not making as good progress as they could, particularly in speaking and writing, due to such little exposure to the target language. In the schools we visited, it was clear that, where leaders allocated appropriate time to international languages within their curriculum, in general pupils made greater progress.

Plurilingualism

The inclusion of international languages as part of the LLC AoLE provides schools with a vehicle to encourage plurilingualism, cross-language connections, and the development of common approaches in how individual subjects support the development of pupils'

language and literacy skills. In several schools we visited, there was strong collaboration between international languages, Welsh and English departments. In these schools, we saw:

- co-ordinated planning between international languages, Welsh and English departments to support consistent teaching approaches and shared terminology for teaching grammar across the LLC AoLE
- a deliberate focus on developing plurilingualism and cross-linguistic links, which helped pupils to draw connections between languages and appreciate differing levels of language proficiency
- a common AoLE approach to developing pupils' oracy skills; for example, a few schools incorporated a strong focus on oracy as a foundation for language learning, ensuring alignment with the AoLE's emphasis on developing verbal communication skills
- examples of teachers planning shared approaches to the development of pupils' reading skills, reinforcing common language-learning skills and strategies across LLC

Common approaches across LLC to developing pupils' literacy skills

Ysgol Aberconwy, Conwy, has developed a collaborative approach to teaching and learning within the LLC AoLE, ensuring that pupils experience consistent skill development across subjects. Teachers work closely across the AoLE to plan shared learning journeys, aligning teaching methods and terminology to support pupils' oracy, reading and writing skills. A common approach to teaching reading strategies and a shared teaching sequence for writing have been embedded across the AoLE, enabling pupils to apply their literacy skills with greater confidence and independence. The school has also embedded common strategies to enhance oracy, ensuring that pupils develop as articulate and reflective speakers. This structured and joined-up approach has had a notable impact on pupils' achievement in international languages.

Despite the implementation of Curriculum for Wales, in many of the schools we visited, international languages remained relatively isolated in relation to wider LLC curriculum planning. Many schools lacked common approaches to language learning, leading to inconsistencies in how pupils developed their knowledge and understanding across English, Welsh and international languages. While some schools attempted to build links between languages, often these were on an ad-hoc basis rather than through structured curriculum planning.

Planning for progression

Our visits to schools also highlighted the importance of effective planning for progression in learning. A few schools had developed well-structured models of progression that, alongside effective teaching, contributed strongly to ensuring that pupils developed their skills, knowledge and understanding systematically. For example, in several schools

teachers focused on developing pupils' oracy in Year 7 and then introduced more reading and writing development incrementally in Years 8 and 9. In our discussions with teachers and pupils, it was clear that a focus on building confidence in oracy before developing independence in writing was beneficial. A few schools structured their Year 7-9 curriculum to support transition into GCSE, ensuring pupils were well prepared for Key Stage 4 expectations.

Planning for progress

Leaders at **Heolddu Comprehensive School, Caerphilly** have developed a clear and structured learning journey for international languages, ensuring that pupils build on their primary phase experiences and progress successfully to post-16 study. This roadmap outlines key skills, knowledge, and understanding expected at each stage, creating a cohesive progression model from Year 7 to Year 13.

A spiral curriculum approach enables pupils to revisit and expand vocabulary and grammar, reinforcing prior learning while also increasing the level of challenge. The curriculum is enriched through real-world experiences, including pen-pal exchanges, cultural visits, and partnerships with university mentor programmes, where pupils practise and apply their skills. Assessment is developmental, with progress checks and verbal feedback ensuring pupils understand their progress over time. This strategic approach to planning has led to increased proficiency and motivation, equipping pupils for future language learning.

Where planning for progression was less successful, inconsistent planning for progress in Years 7-9 led to gaps in learning and disjointed skill development. Limited curriculum time in several schools significantly hindered pupils' progress, making it difficult for pupils to develop fluency and the confidence to carry on with language learning in Years 10 and 11.

In summary

- Nearly all secondary schools offered opportunities for pupils to study an international language in Years 7-9, but curriculum time was often limited, which hindered pupil progress.
- French remained the most commonly taught language, followed by Spanish and German, with a minority of schools offering additional languages like Latin, Italian, or Mandarin, often through extracurricular pathways.
- Provision for dual linguists was limited, often targeted at more able pupils, with few schools offering sustained opportunities to study two languages due to time constraints and curriculum pressures.
- There was growing collaboration across the LLC AoLE in some schools, where teachers planned shared approaches to oracy, grammar, and literacy skills across English, Welsh, and international languages.

- Planning for progression was inconsistent, and there was a lack continuity and building on prior learning from the primary phase.

Learning and teaching international languages in the secondary phase

In the schools we visited, pupils made strong progress in international languages when the curriculum was well-structured, and the teaching was consistently effective. Most schools we visited benefited from having subject specialist teachers in their international languages departments. This is broadly reflected in records held by the Education Workforce Council, which states that in 2024, 88% of international languages teachers in Wales had trained in their subject.

Subject knowledge and resources

Many teachers we observed had strong subject knowledge and an understanding of effective pedagogy for teaching languages. Around half of schools used highly interactive teaching methods, making international language lessons lively and engaging. In these lessons, teachers used a variety of activities, such as games, songs, group work and role-play scenarios, which encouraged interaction and reinforced spontaneous use of the target language. This reflects the most effective practice we also observed in the primary phase and reinforces the importance of high-quality teaching on pupil outcomes.

In a few schools, technology was used effectively to enhance learning and engage pupils. Examples of effective use of technology included:

- the use of online interactive quizzes, which supported vocabulary retention and recall
- the use of multimedia resources, such as videos, podcasts and online exercises, to reinforce key concepts and expose pupils to real-life cultural experiences in target language countries
- teachers starting to experiment with artificial intelligence (AI)-generated content, which created personalised learning resources, helping pupils to engage with materials relevant to their progress level.

Technology was used in the majority of schools we visited, but the impact of digital tools on learning was inconsistent. In a few schools, activities using technology meant that pupils were too passive. In addition, a few schools lacked investment in digital resources to support international languages, meaning that pupils relied mainly on textbooks rather than having access to diverse multimedia tools.

In a few schools, authentic resources were embedded into the curriculum, helping pupils to engage with real-world language use. For instance, in several schools we visited, teachers used current news articles, literature extracts, and cultural resources, exposing pupils to a range of texts and real-world contexts. In these schools, pupils were encouraged to engage with music, film, and television content in the target language, increasing their exposure to natural speech patterns and idiomatic expressions. In the schools where this was not the case, pupils told us that international languages lessons

focused mainly on artificial textbook dialogues, rather than providing realistic examples of conversational language.

Developing pupils' oracy skills

In the most successful international languages classrooms, teachers focused on developing pupils' language learning skills effectively. In these lessons, teachers promoted the importance of literacy skills explicitly. This helped pupils to make meaningful connections with other subjects and understand how learning an international language helped them to improve their oracy, reading and writing skills.

Oracy skills are essential for fluency, confidence, and spontaneous language use in international languages. In several schools we visited, pupils were confident in their speaking skills and were starting to speak independently and with a fair degree of fluency, especially in Key Stage 4. These pupils built well on prior learning, demonstrating strong recall and the ability to use and manipulate language independently.

In a few schools, teachers consistently used the target language throughout their lessons, creating an immersive learning environment. In these schools:

- teachers provided structured, regular exposure to the target language, meaning that pupils become accustomed to hearing and processing authentic speech
- teachers used the target language for explanations and instructions, that enhanced pupils' listening skills and supported their ability to respond spontaneously
- teachers integrated the target language into daily classroom routines, encouraging pupils to interact naturally and gain confidence in their own use of the target language
- teachers modelled pronunciation, and used repetition and feedback to help pupils to improve their understanding of the phonological patterns, where appropriate, in the target language

In the majority of schools we visited, the target language was used inconsistently, limiting pupils' exposure to spoken language. In these schools, teachers often modelled the target language well but would revert too quickly to English or Welsh for explanations and feedback, reducing opportunities for pupils to develop their listening and thinking skills. Similarly, we observed teachers who encouraged pupils to respond in the target language, but this was not enforced consistently, leading to pupils defaulting to English or Welsh too quickly. In a few schools, the target language was rarely used in lessons, significantly hindering pupils' listening and speaking skills. These schools focused too heavily on written accuracy at the expense of developing pupils' oracy, meaning that pupils developed reading and writing skills but lacked confidence and struggled with verbal communication.

In a few schools, teachers provided structured and progressive speaking tasks, ensuring that pupils developed their speaking skills over time. These teachers scaffolded oracy

tasks effectively, moving from structured conversations to more independent speech, supporting progression towards spontaneous use of the target language.

Developing spontaneous speaking

Cowbridge School, Vale of Glamorgan, has placed a strong emphasis on developing pupils' ability to speak spontaneously, moving away from over-reliance on scaffolding and pre-learnt extended texts. Speaking tasks are embedded in every lesson, with pupils encouraged to use previously learnt vocabulary to enhance their responses. Teachers introduce structured questioning, starting with closed questions to build confidence before progressing to longer, open-ended responses. Pupils are taught to connect language structures independently, using phrases like 'on doit' (you must) or 'man kann' (you can) to form original sentences. From Year 7, pupils develop online dictionary skills, enabling them to personalise their language use. A supportive classroom environment ensures that pupils feel confident to take risks. Teachers use praise and correction effectively, reinforcing that mistakes are a natural part of learning. This well-structured and encouraging approach is building confidence, fostering spontaneity, and equipping pupils with the skills to communicate naturally in the target language.

Another successful approach we observed was the use of 'communication gap' activities, where pupils had to exchange information using only the target language, promoting engagement and problem-solving. In our observations and discussions, it was these kinds of activities that led to pupils having greater levels of confidence and competence in speaking. In these schools, teachers prioritised confidence, then focused on refining accuracy. This encouraged pupils to take risks in speaking activities and not worry too much about making mistakes.

In a majority of the schools we visited, speaking tasks were included in lessons but pupils were often over-reliant on scaffolds and pre-learnt speech. Teachers were too accepting of this and often made little attempt to remove any support. As a result, many pupils struggled to interact naturally. In a few schools, planning for pupils' speaking skills was not sufficiently developed, and pupils had limited opportunities to practise. In these schools, pupils felt underprepared for speaking assessments.

Developing pupils' reading and writing skills

Reading is another important skill in international language learning, supporting vocabulary development, comprehension and grammatical accuracy. In around half of schools we visited, pupils demonstrated appropriate reading comprehension skills, for example to find and locate information in target language texts. In a few cases, pupils engaged with texts of increasing complexity. When challenged, pupils used their advanced reading skills well, including summarising, inference and deduction, particularly in GCSE and A Level classes. In these schools, teachers taught reading strategies explicitly, such as skimming, scanning and inference, which ensured that pupils engaged more effectively with texts.

In several schools, reading comprehension tasks were used regularly but they were not always sufficiently challenging. In some cases, pupils had limited exposure to different text types, restricting their ability to develop strategies for tackling more complex or unfamiliar texts. In these schools, teachers did not systematically teach reading strategies and quickly offered translation into English or Welsh, rather than encouraging pupils to use a range of strategies to work out the meaning of words and phrases, when reading target language texts.

Writing requires pupils to apply grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures accurately and independently. In many of the schools we visited, we observed pupils who were developing secure writing skills and who could construct independent, extended responses. In these schools, teachers provided regular opportunities for pupils to produce extended writing tasks that required them to apply the grammatical structures they had learnt independently. The most skilful teachers removed scaffolds gradually, ensuring that pupils developed confidence in independent writing without an over-reliance on models. In a few cases, teachers encouraged pupils to take risks in their writing, allowing them to experiment with different tenses and structures before then refining accuracy.

In a few schools, pupils applied grammar with a high level of accuracy, showing understanding and control over different tenses and sentence structures. A few schools integrated grammar teaching into purposeful writing tasks, meaning that pupils developed a strong understanding of verb conjugations and syntax. By learning and then practising different sentence constructions independently in their speaking and writing, they understood how a knowledge of grammar can enrich their own use of the target language.

Teaching grammar in context

Dŵr-Y-Felin Comprehensive School, Neath Port Talbot, has developed an effective and purposeful approach to the teaching of grammar, ensuring that pupils apply grammatical structures naturally and in context, rather than learning them in isolation. Teachers integrate grammar teaching within meaningful language use, focusing on patterns and problem-solving. Pupils are encouraged to identify grammatical structures within authentic sentences, reinforcing verb conjugations through regular modelling and practice. This enables pupils to transition confidently between tenses. Grammar is introduced when it arises naturally, rather than as a separate topic, ensuring that pupils see its relevance in oracy, reading, and writing tasks. By embedding grammar in real communication alongside a purposeful focus on oracy, pupils develop a strong linguistic foundation, applying their knowledge with accuracy and fluency.

In a majority of the schools we visited, pupils developed grammatical understanding but struggled to apply rules consistently. In several schools, teachers provided useful scaffolds to support grammatical accuracy, but, on occasions, this prevented pupils from experimenting with new structures independently. In a few schools, pupils did not

develop a clear understanding of sentence structures. Often, they relied too much on memorised phrases, meaning that their writing lacked flexibility and the ability to use language in different contexts.

A common issue, in both speaking and writing, was the over-reliance on scaffolding and the limited opportunities to speak and write independently. Where this was the case, there was too much dependence on tools designed to help pupils build formulaic sentences. While these tools can be useful for language learning, teachers did not always consider closely enough how and when to wean pupils off this support.

Assessment

During a majority of our visits to secondary and all-age schools, we observed examples of formative assessment being used effectively. In a few schools, teachers used a range of assessment strategies well. For example, self and peer assessments and whole-class response activities through using mini whiteboards helped to ensure that teachers and pupils understood what they needed to improve. These teachers used retrieval practice strategies, ensuring that pupils recalled and applied key grammatical structures and vocabulary over time. In these schools, teachers often provided helpful formative feedback, enabling pupils to reflect on their progress and take greater ownership of their learning.

Where assessment strategies were less successful, we saw:

- teachers' feedback lacking any clear next steps for improvement
- an over-reliance on whole-class marking that did not provide pupils with precise individual feedback
- very little feedback on pupils' oracy skills
- inconsistent feedback that led to gaps in pupils' knowledge going unnoticed by teachers

In general, the schools we visited used formal assessment effectively to help pupils prepare for GCSE and A Level examinations. Outcomes at both GCSE and A Level nationally remain above the average of other subjects.

In summary

- Teaching quality varied, but in the most effective schools teachers used engaging, interactive strategies—such as games, role-play, and authentic materials—to build pupils' confidence and enjoyment in learning.
- Oracy was prioritised in many schools, but pupils were often over-reliant on scaffolds and memorised speech, limiting their ability to speak spontaneously and fluently in the target language.
- Reading and writing skills were developed less consistently, with some schools successfully integrating grammar and extended writing tasks, while others focused too heavily on activities that lack sufficient challenge.

- Assessment for learning was strong in a few schools, where teachers used questioning, feedback, and retrieval practice effectively to support progression.

Promoting and understanding the importance of learning languages

From our discussions with pupils, teacher and leaders, it is clear that promoting international languages effectively is crucial in encouraging pupils to continue to study languages at GCSE and beyond. Schools that promote international languages successfully foster positive attitudes towards language learning. They ensure that pupils understand the benefits of being multilingual, provide clear careers guidance, and offer enrichment opportunities that enhance the curriculum and improve pupils' motivation and confidence.

Attitudes towards language learning

In the schools we visited, positive pupil attitudes and engagement in learning were important indicators of the success of their international languages' provision. In our discussions with pupils, it was clear that, in schools where pupils enjoy lessons and see the relevance of learning languages, uptake at GCSE and A Level study tends to be higher.

In the lessons we observed, many pupils displayed positive attitudes towards learning languages. Most of the pupils we talked to recognised the importance of language learning for communication and employability. In general, these pupils enjoyed their lessons and recognised the cultural and social benefits of speaking another language. In a few schools, pupil enthusiasm was particularly strong due to teachers' engaging approaches and the use of a varied range of resources. These pupils valued the subject highly and told us how they enjoyed using the languages they are learning in real-life situations, such as when travelling abroad or on social media. In a few schools, being bilingual in Welsh and English positively influenced pupils' attitudes towards learning additional international languages.

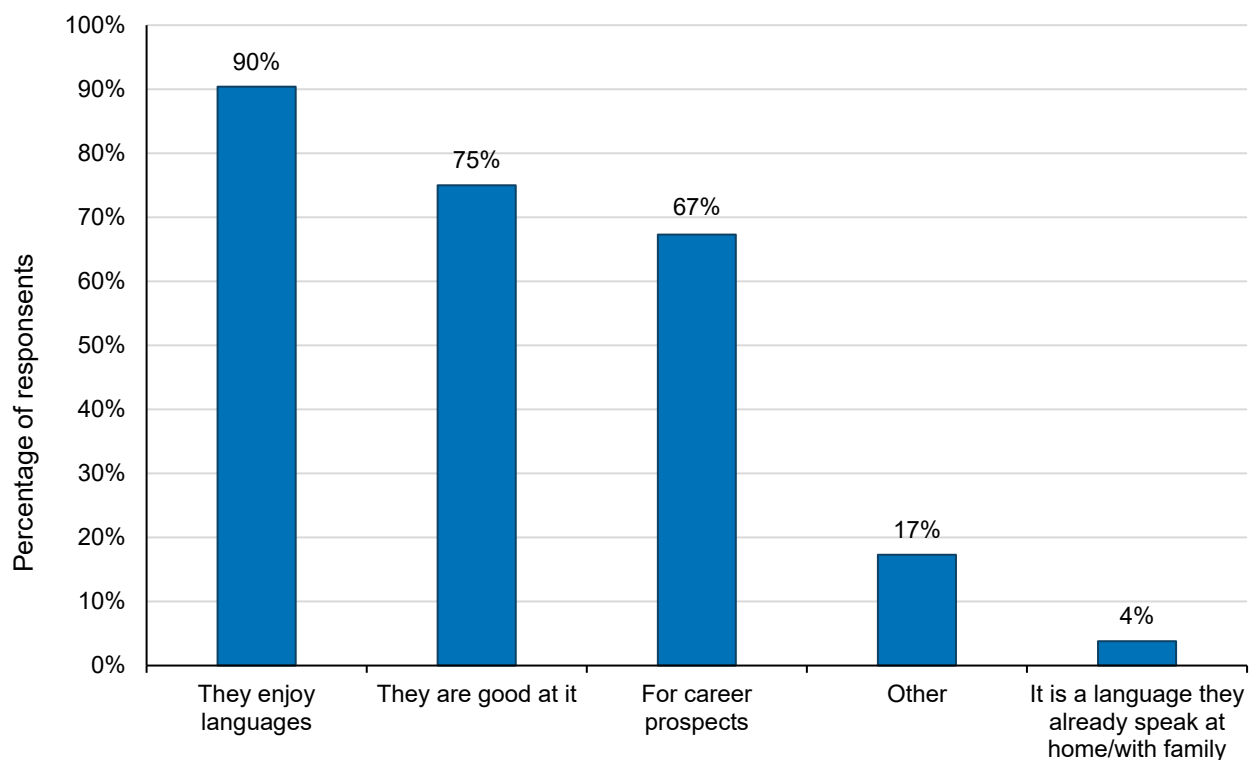
In most of schools we visited, we also met pupils who told us that while they enjoyed learning languages, there were barriers that discouraged them from doing so as they grew older. These barriers included:

- in many cases, pupils perceived international languages as less relevant to their career aspirations, with some believing that language skills are only useful for a narrow choice of careers
- in a majority of schools, pupils did not fully understand how language learning develops transferable skills, such as problem solving and critical thinking, to support employability and global career opportunities
- in many schools, pupils felt that international languages were difficult subjects,

- particularly at Key Stage 4, where they perceived a steep learning curve at GCSE
- a few pupils felt having to study Welsh reduced their willingness to study another language, as they believed they had already committed to learning a language
- a few pupils thinking everyone speaks English anyway

We also sought the views of secondary phase teachers and leaders on why they think pupils choose to study international languages at GCSE and beyond, through our national survey.

Chart 7: Main reasons pupils choose to study languages at GCSE and beyond



Percentages are based on data from 52 respondents

The secondary teachers and leaders of international languages who responded to our survey stated that they think that one of the main reasons pupils choose to study international languages is because they enjoy the subject. This was a view echoed by the pupils that we spoke to during our visits and reinforces the importance of ensuring that international languages lessons remain engaging throughout all phases of education. The second highest response was about career prospects, which again reflects the views of pupils who we interviewed.

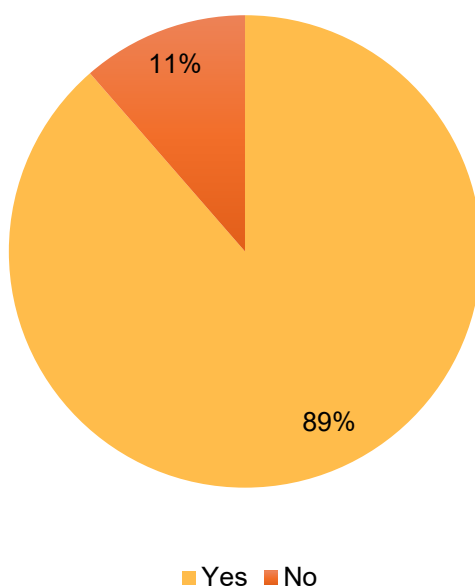
We also asked secondary phase teachers and leaders what they thought were the main reasons why pupils do not choose to study international languages at GCSE and beyond:

- Over 40% of respondents mentioned the perception that international languages are too difficult. Several linked this observation to the lack of time in Years 7-9 to

- build pupils' knowledge, understanding and confidence levels.
- Around 30% of respondents said that the current GCSE and A Level examinations themselves are too difficult. They mention specifically their view that there is too much content and that the learning curve expected as pupils progress to GCSE and beyond is too steep
- About a third of respondents cited the perceived limitations of the options system, especially the reduced number of options pupils can now choose due to an increase in compulsory elements and the large number of subjects available to choose from.
- A minority of responses mentioned that international languages are not seen as important or valued, or that pupils think they are unlikely to need to speak it in their future.
- A few say that pupils choose not to study an international language because they have to study Welsh at GCSE. This then results in pupils being reluctant to use one of their small number of option choices on an additional language.

A few secondary phase teachers and leaders said that parents' and carers' negative attitudes towards learning international languages was a factor to consider. This view was not shared by the parent and carers who responded to our survey. However, it is important to note that the responses to our survey were from a self-selecting sample².

Chart 8: Parent and carer views on whether children learning international languages is important



Percentages are based on data from 719 respondents

Of the 719 parents and carers who responded to this question, 88.6% said that they considered it was important for their children to learn international languages. Some of

² See Methods and evidence base section.

the most common reasons why parents thought it important included:

- the cognitive benefits of language learning
- developing an appreciation of other cultures
- improved employment opportunities
- developing effective communication skills
- opportunities for international travel

Of the few parents and carers who thought learning an international language was not important, several said that they considered it unnecessary as English was so widely spoken. Another common response was that their children did not need to study an international language as they were already studying Welsh. Additionally, a few parents mentioned that they would like to see a wider choice of international languages offered in schools, as well as an improvement in the quality of teaching.

In the schools we visited, most pupils who had chosen to continue studying a language at GCSE and beyond were confident in their language skills, particularly in speaking and writing. In a few schools, pupils understood how learning a language helped them to develop problem-solving, critical thinking and resilience.

A few schools told us how they had seen a significant growth in the number of pupils choosing to study international language at GCSE, following a strategic focus to improve language teaching and learning.

Increasing GCSE uptake

Leaders at **Whitchurch High School, Cardiff**, were determined to turn around the steady decline in the number of pupils choosing to continue to study French at GCSE. They carried out a comprehensive review of teaching, learning and engagement in language lessons to identify why pupils chose not to study international languages. This review led to a significant change in how international languages were taught across the department, resulting in a stronger focus on oracy and improving pupils' retention and recall of vocabulary. Leaders also introduced a wide range of enrichment activities, such as taster sessions in other languages and re-introducing trips to France, to boost pupils' motivation and engagement. The school has also maintained a foreign language assistant in the department to support pupils' oral fluency. This work has successfully increased pupils' engagement in international language learning. It has had a positive impact on the number of pupils opting to study French at GCSE, with two classes running this academic year.

Raising the profile of international languages

In our discussions with pupils and school staff, it was clear that engagement with extra-curricular and enrichment activities plays a key role in fostering enthusiasm for international languages. In the schools we visited, raising the profile of international languages helped in encouraging GCSE uptake, enhancing real-world application, and

making language learning more relevant and enjoyable. Successful schools that we engaged with provided a variety of cultural and linguistic experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, to strengthen pupils' motivation and long-term interest in language learning.

In a majority of schools in our sample, international languages clubs and pupil-led initiatives helped to raise the profile of languages across the school.

Language Ambassadors at Ysgol Uwchradd Bro Gwaun (LW)

Ysgol Uwchradd Bro Gwaun, Pembrokeshire, has established a pupil-led Language Ambassadors scheme to promote language awareness and cultural appreciation across the school. This initiative is designed to inspire the next generation of linguists and make language learning engaging and accessible to all pupils. Language Ambassadors play a pivotal role in the development of international languages, leading initiatives, such as:

- French breakfast club, 'Croissants and Conversations', where pupils practise speaking in an informal setting
- international-themed canteen menus, with key language phrases displayed
- an international news board, showcasing global events
- video resources for primary cluster schools, strengthening transition and early language learning
- foreign movie afternoons, reinforcing cultural understanding

This proactive approach has had a positive ripple effect, with older pupils requesting to join the programme. The scheme is successfully fostering confidence, curiosity, and a whole-school appreciation for international languages.

Several schools we visited provided additional opportunities specifically for pupils with advanced skills. A popular choice was participation in the annual National Language Competition run by the UK Government Communications Headquarters, GCHQ. In one school, over 70 pupils were participating in the competition in their free time, showing a high level of enthusiasm for language learning beyond the classroom. However, in a few schools, there were no informal opportunities for pupils to engage with international language learning, and pupil engagement was limited to formal lessons.

International trips and partnerships, where available, provided valuable real-life exposure to international languages. In several schools we visited, pupils benefited from the opportunity to take part in regular international trips and online discussions with partner schools. These activities allowed pupils to practise their language skills in authentic settings and develop a deeper understanding of different cultures and ways of life.

In a few schools, teachers and leaders told us that in recent years international visits have become less frequent due to financial constraints and time pressures. In one

school, leaders had committed to funding one overseas trip for every pupil eligible for free school meals. A few teachers told us that cutting overseas visits had contributed to a decline in the number of pupils choosing to study international languages at GCSE and beyond, as pupils lack direct experience of using languages abroad.

A few schools had accessed financial support from the 'Taith' programme to support their commitment to international visits and partnerships. Taith is a Welsh Government-funded international learning exchange programme that aims to support pupil mobility, global partnerships, and language learning enrichment. Taith funded projects must ensure that at 25% of pupils are from underrepresented groups, which includes pupils who are eligible for free school meals. Schools that had engaged with Taith provided valuable international experiences that enhanced pupil engagement, cultural awareness, and real-life application of international languages.

Develop language skills for the world of work

Ysgol Aberconwy, Conwy, has successfully integrated language learning with real-world work experience through a Taith partnership project. All sixth form pupils were invited to take part in work experience Spain, gaining hands-on experience in varied workplaces such as pet rescue centres, architect offices, law firms and schools. To prepare, pupils completed 28 hours of Spanish lessons, covering greetings, public transport, and workplace communication. Living in a non-tourist area, they immersed themselves in Spanish culture and language, fostering independence, resilience, and problem-solving. This experience enhanced pupils' employability skills, improved their cultural awareness, and built confidence in real-world language use, benefiting them, regardless of whether they were studying A Level Spanish or not.

From our discussions with leaders, it was clear that some international languages departments were unaware of the funding and support available through external organisations, resulting in missed opportunities for international learning experiences.

In a few schools we visited, leaders had forged strong partnerships with universities and external agencies, to help support the promotion of international languages. In these schools, effective collaboration with universities and other partners had increased pupil engagement, supported post-16 progression in languages and highlighted the career benefits of studying languages.

In one of the schools we visited in the South Wales valleys, around 40 pupils in Year 9 receive direct mentoring support through the Cardiff University-led Modern Foreign Languages Mentoring Scheme. The school has used this targeted support in Year 9 to help increase the numbers of pupils choosing to study international languages at GCSE. Over the past 10 years, approximately 950 university students have been placed in schools as language mentors through the scheme, and they have worked with around 20,000 pupils. In another school, university students from Lancaster University run workshops for Year 8 and 9 pupils to discuss the benefits of learning an international

language. We also visited a school in Swansea that has forged a close relationship with Swansea University, where lecturers visit regularly to discuss career pathways and the importance of international languages in the world of work.

In a few schools, leaders had not engaged with university mentoring, or if they had, it had only a very few pupils took part. A very few leaders told us that they felt mentoring sessions can be short-term and lack follow-up activities, limiting their long-term influence on the uptake of international languages.

Guidance and support

Providing effective guidance and support is critical to ensuring that pupils make informed choices about studying international languages, understand its relevance for future careers, and feel supported throughout their learning journey. From our discussion with providers and stakeholders, we saw that, with strong careers advice, options guidance, and targeted support from Careers Wales and other organisations, pupils are more likely to choose to study international languages at GCSE and thereafter.

In nearly all schools we visited, careers advice about international languages was not strong enough. In a majority of schools, pupils were unaware of how language skills can be used in a wide range of careers, beyond traditional teaching and translation roles. They told us that they do not receive enough information about how international languages are beneficial for wider career pathways. Pupils often felt that other subjects were prioritised in the options process, making it less likely for them to choose a language.

In nearly all schools we visited, subject choice guidance was provided through options evenings and booklets. In a few schools, this was supplemented by taster lessons and more structured one-to-one support for pupils to inform their decision-making. In these schools, subject leaders worked hard to maximise the numbers of pupils choosing to continue with their languages at GCSE. However, in several schools, pupils told us that subject guidance and support for international languages is weaker than for STEM subjects, reducing their confidence in choosing an international language for GCSE. In many schools, there was little engagement with parents and carers to highlight the importance of language learning.

In a few schools, leaders worked effectively with Careers Wales to provide valuable guidance, reinforcing the benefits of language learning for employability. However, the impact of this work varied across schools, with some benefiting from structured Careers Wales support, while others reported gaps in specific careers advice for international languages, or a lack of knowledge of what support is available.

In a few of the schools in the sample, Careers Wales had facilitated links between them and employers that use international languages, as part of its wider strategy to connect schools with businesses. However, the focus of this project was more often on general employability skills rather than international languages-specific job opportunities. In many schools we visited, international languages did not receive the same prominence

in guidance and support as STEM subjects, reducing pupils' awareness of the value of international languages in the world of work. In addition, international languages teachers were not always aware of the Careers Wales resources available to support careers education. In many schools, pupils did not see international languages as a valuable career skill due to the lack of targeted subject guidance.

In summary

- Many pupils enjoyed learning international languages and understood their benefits for communication, travel, and employment, but enthusiasm often declined amongst older pupils due to perceived difficulty and lack of relevance.
- Pupil choice can be influenced by misconceptions, including the belief that learning Welsh is sufficient or that everyone speaks English, and a lack of understanding of how international language skills support broader career pathways.
- Careers advice and guidance about international languages in schools was variable, with limited information about their value in the workplace or links to employability and global opportunities.
- Extra-curricular activities experiences, such as language clubs and cultural events, helped raise the profile of languages and boost engagement, although in some schools there were limited enrichment opportunities.
- Parental engagement varied, with many parents valuing language learning, but schools rarely communicated effectively with families about its long-term benefits or available language pathways.

Leading and Improving International Languages

Leading and improving international languages in the primary phase

From our discussions with primary headteachers, and analysing the responses to our survey, it is clear that the implementation of international languages in primary schools is developing but remains too variable. Overall, primary headteachers shared mixed views on the success of the introduction of international languages in their schools.

Strategic leadership and vision

In a few schools, headteachers reported that the introduction of international languages had been successful, particularly where there was worthwhile external support and strong professional learning. A majority of headteachers showed a clear commitment and said that, while sound progress had been made, challenges remain. They recognised that broadly staff and pupils were enthusiastic, but they perceived that a lack of staff confidence, time constraints, and curriculum pressures were hindering progress. A few headteachers saw the introduction of international languages as an additional burden, struggling against competing priorities, such as improving Welsh and English literacy skills.

In a majority of the primary schools that we visited, leaders had developed a strategic vision for international languages within the curriculum. In these schools, leaders ensured that language learning was prioritised and that languages were embedded across the curriculum, providing pupils with opportunities to experience language learning in real-life contexts from an early age. In a few schools, leaders were highly proactive in promoting international languages and had secured external partnerships, funding, and professional learning opportunities to support the development of high-quality provision. We also saw beneficial examples of effective pupil leadership of international languages and how they have been involved in this aspect of their schools' work.

Pupil language ambassadors

The Language Ambassadors pupil voice group at **St. Gwladys Primary School, Caerphilly**, was established to promote a whole-school love of International Languages. Language Ambassadors perform many roles, including helping to plan International Language themed days, suggesting ideas or creative language activities. During fortnightly meetings, Ambassadors share ideas and initiatives to promote languages. This includes selecting and sharing a 'phrase de la semaine' (sentence of the week), with Ambassadors acting as role models. Ambassadors have created certificates and award reward points for children who demonstrate enthusiasm and resilience in learning a language. Languages and cultures are celebrated through presentations created by the pupil voice group and delivered during assemblies. The role of the

languages ambassadors has helped to raise the profile of international languages across the school.

Partnership working and support

In several schools we visited, effective collaboration was not limited to working with other schools. The most effective primary schools had forged strong links with regional improvement services, the Global Futures project, and international organisations, providing training and real-world language experiences for staff and pupils.

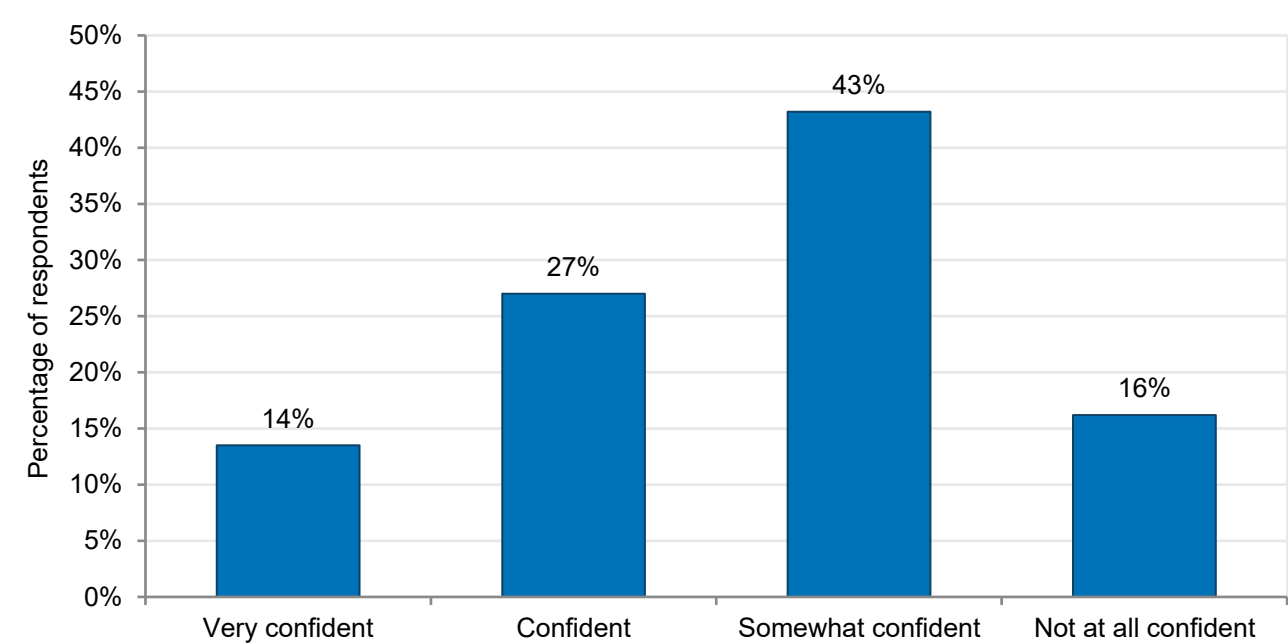
- In a few schools, leaders worked closely with their regional school improvement service to develop and implement international languages strategies. They received professional learning and support from a variety of external providers including, in effective pedagogy, for teaching languages to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- One school had benefited from the support of a local authority international languages lead, who had provided one-to-one support, professional learning, and lesson planning guidance, which had helped develop teachers' confidence.
- Several schools had benefited from their engagement with the Global Futures project, such as securing funding from Taith to develop links with schools overseas, leading to letter exchanges, video calls and even visits abroad to strengthen language and cultural awareness.
- One school used Taith funding to send a teacher on a language immersion course in Spain, supporting them to improve their language skills and confidence in teaching international languages.
- In a few schools, partnerships had been developed with international organisations and language institutes, such as Institut Français and the Goethe Institut, to provide staff training and pupil learning experiences.
- Other schools we visited had forged international links to support the cultural and international dimension of the primary curriculum.

International links bring languages to life

Northop Hall CP School, Flintshire, has successfully embedded international links to bring language learning to life, fostering pupils' appreciation of French culture while also enhancing their French language skills. A partnership with a school in Normandy, supported by a Taith grant, enabled pupils to engage in a bilingual rugby-themed project, promoting Welsh, French, and English. Year 6 pupils exchanged letters with French pen pals, discovering cultural similarities and differences. Video calls allowed pupils to hear and use French in a real-world context, increasing their confidence to speak the language. The project culminated with exchange visits. This authentic experience helped pupils to develop a positive attitude towards language learning, where they appreciated linguistic and cultural diversity. Ongoing links with a new partner school in St Malo are now extending the experience to younger pupils, reinforcing the school's commitment to immersive, real-world language learning.

In a majority of schools, there was limited engagement with external agencies, meaning that teachers lacked specialist support for international languages. In a few schools, leaders were concerned about the uncertainty around regional support and how this had made long-term planning for improvement difficult. This was a particular concern in relation to the availability of professional learning to support international languages in the primary phase.

Chart 9: Primary headteacher confidence in teachers’ ability to teach international languages



Percentages are based on data from 37 respondents

Leaders in several schools we visited expressed their concern about a lack of confidence amongst teachers in delivering international languages due to limited professional learning opportunities. In our survey of primary headteachers 16.2% of respondents said they were not at all confident in their teachers’ ability to teach international languages. A minority (around 40%) of headteachers were either confident or very confident in their teachers’ ability to teach international languages. Despite this lack of confidence, many respondents to our national survey told us that professional learning opportunities to help teachers overcome this were limited.

In a few of the schools we visited, leaders had provided useful opportunities for parents and carers to engage with international languages, for example by attending multilingual concerts and international days, and providing pupils with language-themed homework tasks. Some schools involved parents and carers alongside the wider community, inviting parents to lead activities to help celebrate cultural and linguistic diversity within the school community.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning

In nearly all of the schools we visited, leaders did not include international languages in

their quality assurance and self-evaluation processes and, as a result, there was no formal evaluation of the quality of teaching or pupil progress. While leaders referred to informal ‘drop-ins’ to observe languages sessions, there were missed opportunities to review the impact of international language provision, for example through learning walks, book looks and pupil voice activities. A minority of primary leaders told us that they felt they did not have the subject knowledge needed to monitor and evaluate the quality of language teaching effectively. Self-evaluation and quality assurance activities were underdeveloped in most schools, meaning that leaders lacked a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for improvement in language learning in their schools.

In summary

- Primary leaders’ commitment to international languages was variable – some leaders saw it as an opportunity to enrich the curriculum, while others viewed it as an added burden amid competing priorities.
- Where leadership was strong, schools developed a clear strategic vision, integrated languages across the curriculum, and built meaningful partnerships.
- Many leaders lacked subject-specific expertise, which they perceived limited their ability to effectively evaluate teaching quality and pupil progress in international languages.
- Formal self-evaluation and quality assurance processes were often limited, meaning schools rarely tracked the impact of language teaching or used pupil progress data to inform improvement.
- Access to professional learning was variable, leaving many teachers without the confidence or training needed to deliver high-quality language teaching.

Leading and improving to support transition

Discussions with primary and secondary phase leaders confirmed the importance of successful collaboration between primary and secondary schools to support pupil transition. In a few schools, leaders had established strong working relationships, ensuring that at transition from the primary phase into Year 7, pupils’ prior language learning was recognised.

In these schools, leaders:

- had a clear understanding of what they wanted pupils to know and be able to do at transition, using the progression steps and descriptions of learning to support their curriculum plans
- developed consistent approaches to teaching and learning across the cluster schools to ensure equity and continuity of experience at transition to secondary school
- shared effective practice and developed high-quality resources with other cluster schools
- accessed subject expertise in languages in the secondary schools and used this to

improve the quality of teaching and learning for primary-aged pupils

In a few schools we visited, leaders supported secondary teachers to visit the primary school regularly to teach languages to pupils in Years 5 and 6. While not possible in all clusters, this collaborative approach helped ensure that pupils built foundational knowledge before their transition to Year 7. In other schools, secondary subject leaders provided tailored support to primary teachers, developing lessons and resources that they can tailor to their pupils' needs, supporting them to develop their understanding of effective pedagogy. In one school, secondary subject leaders used pupil voice and assessment tools to review pupils' progress in languages before Year 7, to help them understand pupils' prior knowledge and skills.

A cluster-wide approach to curriculum planning

Crickhowell CP School, Powys, has developed a well-structured approach to provision for international languages, embedding Spanish across multiple year groups as part of a collaborative cluster model with Crickhowell High School. Younger learners are exposed to Spanish early, through language-themed assemblies and cross-curricular teaching. The cluster partnership supports high-quality provision, offering professional learning, support for planning, and shared resources across the feeder primary schools, with the support of the secondary school. This integrated and collaborative approach means that language learning is valued across the cluster and supports progression in pupils' language skills in their respective schools. As a result, many pupils are starting to use the target language with increasing confidence.

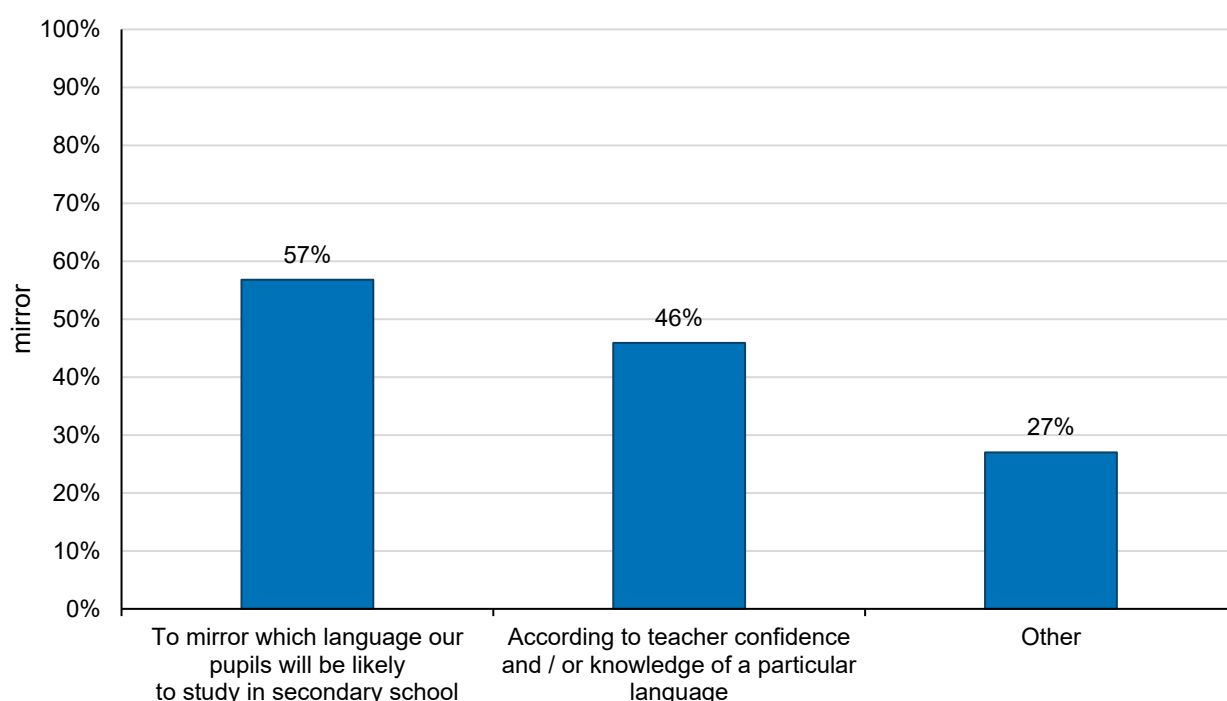
The most effective primary and secondary partnerships involved regular collaboration, shared curriculum planning, and structured approaches to pupil transition between primary and secondary phases. In addition, joint professional learning opportunities helped to ensure consistency in pedagogy and subject knowledge.

Effective transition planning

Heolddu Comprehensive School, Caerphilly, has developed a strong cluster-wide approach to international languages, supporting transition from primary to secondary school. Since 2019, the school has collaborated with cluster primaries to develop shared planning, including a cross-phase project based on 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'. Primary staff receive training and resources, while pupil language ambassadors take part in a French training day at Heolddu. During the pandemic, Heolddu introduced virtual French transition lessons, which have continued annually. In the spring term, a French teacher live-streams into primary classes, delivering structured lessons supported by booklets and resources. As a result, when pupils enter Year 7, they are keen to continue with French and build upon their prior learning. A multilingual project at the start of Year 7 enhances pupils' existing linguistic knowledge and raises awareness of pupils' home languages. This approach fosters enthusiasm for languages and supports continuity in learning.

In a majority of the schools we visited, however, there was limited collaboration between primary and secondary schools, with transition activities lacking sufficient focus on pupils' progress in learning languages. In general, secondary schools did not request or receive enough information about pupils' prior language learning, leading to repetition and gaps in their knowledge in Year 7. Leaders across both phases had not yet established a shared approach to teaching international languages, leading to inconsistencies in what and how pupils learn.

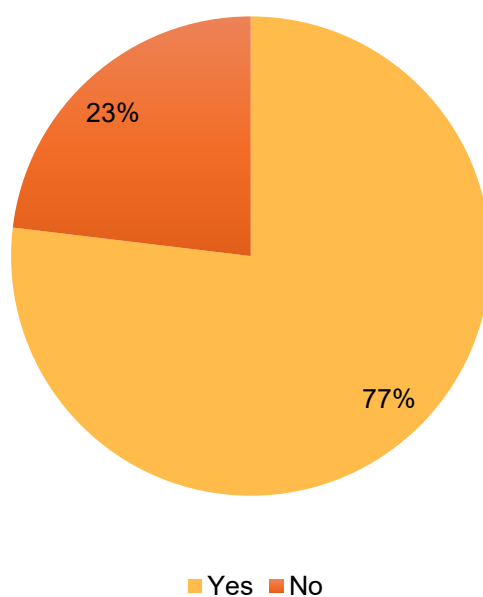
Chart 10: How primary teachers chose languages for the curriculum – headteacher responses



Percentages are based on data from 37 respondents

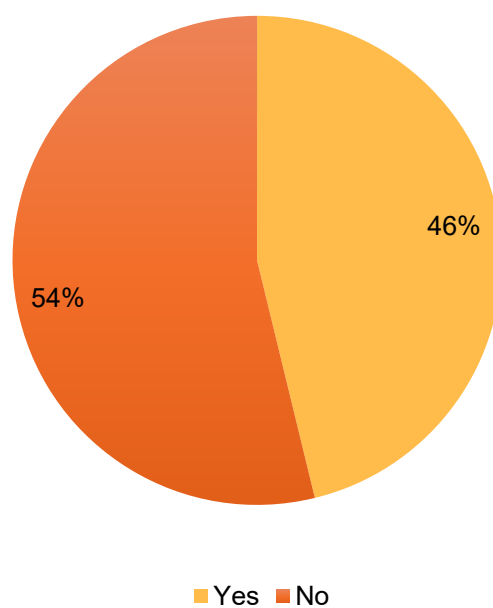
In our survey of primary headteachers, we asked them how they decided which language to include in their curriculum. They could select either or both responses, and they were also able to select 'other' and explain their response. A total of 57 per cent of respondents stated that they mirrored potential secondary school language, whilst 46 per cent considered their staff's knowledge or confidence in a particular language. Other reasons given for not choosing the same language as their local secondary school included, choosing languages related to topics that pupils encounter and the decision to focus primarily on delivering British Sign Language (BSL) in the place of a traditional international language. Some schools offered learning experiences in multiple international languages but this approach risks lacking depth, preventing pupils from mastering any one language effectively.

Chart 11: Whether secondary schools have changed language teaching following introduction of international languages in primary schools



Percentages are based on data from 52 respondents

Chart 12: Whether secondary schools have worked with primary colleagues in their cluster to plan the international languages curriculum as part of Curriculum for Wales implementation



Percentages are based on data from 52 respondents

Over half of the secondary teachers and leaders who responded to our survey had not worked together with their primary colleagues to plan a coherent cluster of schools approach to their international languages curriculum. Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents said they had not changed what they teach following the introduction of international languages in the primary phase. This suggests that secondary teachers are often unaware of what pupils have learned at primary level and that pupils' progress in international languages is not considered well enough at transition. The potential impact of this weak transition planning is the risk of:

- repetition and wasted learning time in Year 7, as pupils revisit basic topics instead of progressing their knowledge and skills
- a lack of engagement in international languages, especially if pupils have already learned a different language in primary school and then are unable to develop that particular language further
- low uptake at GCSE study, as weak planning for progression in learning reduces confidence and motivation

Estyn's recent thematic report [Transition and Pupil Progression](#) (September 2024) recommends that schools should work more closely to develop common approaches to teaching and the curriculum. In our discussions with schools, it was clear that effective partnerships between primary and secondary schools provided continuity in learning, access to some specialist teaching, consistency in teaching approaches across clusters, and better assessment of pupils' progress. However, limited collaboration, staffing challenges, and a lack of shared planning approaches in many schools, limited the effectiveness of transition in language learning.

In the all-age schools we visited, leaders had taken a more strategic approach to cross-phase planning to support pupil progression, and there was more purposeful collaboration between staff.

Progress across phases in an all-age school

St. Brigid's School, Denbighshire, has developed a coherent, whole-school approach to planning for progression in Spanish, supporting continuity from nursery to sixth form. Leaders have established a clear curriculum vision, underpinned by collaborative planning between primary and secondary teachers, using the LLC descriptions of learning and their own learner profiles to support pupils' linguistic development. A key strength of the school's approach is the alignment of teaching strategies across phases. In the primary phase, language exposure begins in nursery, with pupils engaging in daily routines, songs and topic-based learning. Secondary teachers work closely with primary colleagues to ensure that pedagogy is appropriate for pupils' stages of development and supports a progressive continuum of learning. The school has prioritised professional learning for staff, including peer mentoring approaches, and effective partnership working. This means that all teachers, regardless of the phase they teach in, have the confidence and expertise to deliver high-quality language sessions. This results in

strong pupil engagement and achievement. The number of pupils choosing to study Spanish at GCSE continues to grow, and examination outcomes are strong.

In general, while the introduction of international languages at the primary phase has been broadly positive, leaders across both the primary and secondary sectors agreed that more effective transition arrangements and collaboration are needed.

In summary

- Transition between primary and secondary phases was often limited, with little sharing of information about pupils' prior language learning, leading to repetition and a fragmented learning experience in Year 7.
- Only a few clusters demonstrated effective collaboration, where primary and secondary schools co-plan curricula, share resources, and ensure continuity in teaching approaches and expectations.
- Most secondary schools had not adapted their curriculum in response to the introduction of international languages in primary schools, with many reporting no changes to their curriculum plans.
- Strong examples of transition included joint projects, language ambassador programmes, and some lessons delivered with secondary teachers to primary pupils, which helped sustain momentum and interest in languages.
- All-age schools and collaborative clusters showed that strategic, cross-phase planning leads to better progression, improved pupil confidence, and greater engagement in language learning.

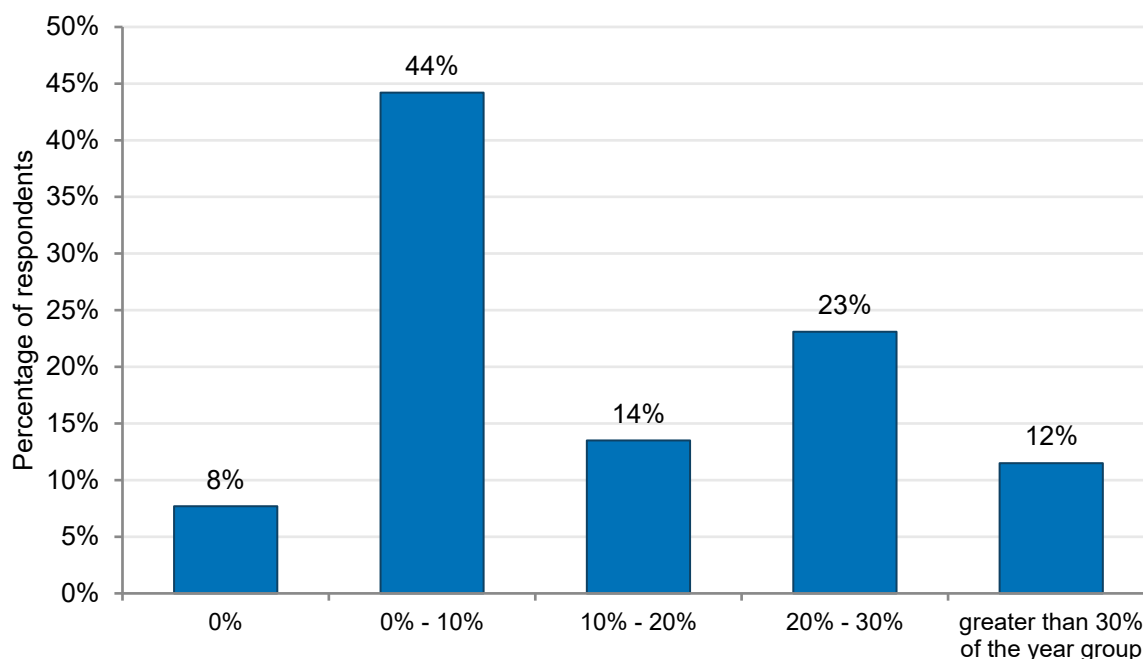
Leading and improving international languages in the secondary phase

Strategic leadership and vision

Effective leadership at all levels in the secondary phase is critical in sustaining and improving international languages provision. Where there was a clear vision for international languages and robust evaluation processes in the schools we visited, they provided better teaching and learning experiences and encouraged pupils to continue their learning after Year 9. However, where leaders were less committed to developing international languages, this impacted on both on the quality of teaching and learning, and the uptake for GCSE examinations and higher-level study.

In a few schools, senior leaders showed a strong commitment to international languages and made strategic decisions to support their growth. These senior leaders ensured that international languages and the global dimension of the curriculum were integrated within the wider school ethos.

Chart 13: Headteacher estimates of the percentage of current Year 11 students studying international languages for GCSE



Percentages are based on data from 52 respondents

In our survey of secondary school teachers and leaders we asked what percentage of their Year 11 pupils were currently studying an international language. In around half of the responses, less than 10% of pupils in the year group had opted to study an international language. In nearly all schools, uptake at GCSE and A Level study remains low, despite efforts to promote language learning. Even with these small numbers, in a few of the schools we visited, senior leaders had made the strategic choice to protect international languages courses at GCSE and A Level. In these schools, senior leaders and governors recognised the value of international languages and were determined to maintain a university and career pathway in international languages for pupils. In a few cases, senior leaders sought additional financial support from their local authority and found innovative ways to maintain provision by collaborating with other local schools. While in some cases A Level pupils benefited from face-to-face collaborative courses, the use of technology was also supporting collaboration between schools. E-sgol course registrations show that there are currently around 50³ pupils studying French or Spanish A level courses via e-sgol across Wales.

Collaborative A Level provision

Monmouthshire local authority has successfully secured and expanded A level provision for international languages through e-sgol, ensuring equitable access to international languages across the county's four secondary schools. Due to

³ According to e-sgol internal unpublished data

geographical challenges and low subject uptake, the local authority developed a collaborative model allowing students to study Spanish via e-sgol, while being taught by experienced Monmouthshire-based teachers. The hybrid learning model combines live online lessons with face-to-face sessions once per half term. The local authority conducts regular quality assurance activities, using learner feedback and attainment information to refine provision. Teachers collaborate across schools, sharing lesson delivery and engaging in regular professional learning to enhance the e-sgol pedagogy. By embedding e-sgol within a county-wide strategic network, Monmouthshire has broadened curriculum options, ensured course viability, and maintained local language teaching. This learner-centred approach has strengthened A Level provision and enhanced long-term opportunities for language learners. The model has allowed pupils to study international languages at A Level, where otherwise this option would not have been available.

In the majority of schools we visited, leaders said that international languages at GCSE and A Level are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. Headteachers are becoming less willing to run classes with small numbers, often due to financial pressures. In a few schools, headteachers told us that they cannot afford to run an A Level class with fewer than 10 or 12 pupils. This has resulted in some local authorities currently having little or no A Level provision for international languages. As a result, there is increasing inequity in the provision that pupils are able to access across Wales.

Middle leadership

In many schools we visited, heads of department were enthusiastic and had introduced well-considered pedagogical approaches to teaching languages. In a majority of schools, middle leaders were subject specialists with degree-level qualifications, often in multiple languages, displaying high standards of subject knowledge. In a few schools we visited, Heads of Departments were particularly strong leaders who had high expectations for pupils' learning. Middle leaders in strong departments provided clear direction, collaborated effectively with other middle leaders, and implemented worthwhile self-evaluation processes.

In a few schools, leadership was less effective with teachers in charge of international languages not always having sufficient subject expertise. Issues included middle leaders:

- lacking autonomy, not being well supported by line managers and feeling they have little influence over curriculum decisions
- not playing an active role in self-evaluation and improvement planning
- not being able to access useful professional learning and networks to help them develop subject-specific leadership skills

Professional learning

In the schools we visited, and in the analysis of responses to our national survey, it was clear that effective professional learning plays a crucial role in supporting the effective teaching of international languages. Around two-thirds of respondents to our survey of

secondary teachers and leaders said that they had been able to access relevant professional learning. In a few schools we visited, teachers had accessed high-quality, subject-specific training which they believed had led to better outcomes for their learners. In a few schools, middle leaders and teachers collaborated and shared effective practice with teachers of Welsh. However, challenges such as time constraints and inconsistent access to professional learning affected the extent to which schools improved teaching and provision for international languages

In a few schools, professional learning was having significant impact on how teachers teach international languages. For example, some teachers told us how adopting specific approaches that focused on high-frequency language exposure and structured repetition had helped to develop fluency and confidence amongst pupils. In a few schools, leaders and teachers had benefited from specific professional learning on how to encourage spontaneous and meaningful communication in the target language. Teachers told us that engaging in this type of high-quality professional learning had transformed how they taught, which, in turn, had led to improved pupil engagement and outcomes.

Self-evaluation and improvement planning

In a few schools, leaders at all levels were involved in purposeful quality assurance activities in international languages. They ensured that self-evaluation processes were well-established and informed strategic improvement planning. Where practice was strong, these heads of department implemented well-conceived self-evaluation activities, using lesson observations, peer reviews and student voice activities to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning. In these schools, leaders assessed pupil progress effectively and used a range of information to refine teaching and curriculum planning, leading to improved outcomes for pupils. In many of the schools we visited, leaders aligned departmental improvement planning with whole-school priorities, helping departments to secure resources, embed professional learning, and maintain longer-term sustainability in the subject. In the best examples, leaders supported teachers well, providing targeted professional learning and collaborative opportunities, linked to whole-school and departmental improvement priorities.

In a majority of schools in our sample, quality assurance processes in international languages were less consistent and too often lacked a sufficient subject-specific focus. As a result, this limited their effectiveness in driving departmental improvements. In many cases, lesson observations and learning walks were in place, but did not consistently evaluate the impact of languages-specific pedagogical approaches. In a few schools, middle leaders did not take part in any formal self-evaluation activities, resulting in a lack of structured departmental improvement planning. In these schools, there was little analysis of pupil progress or trends in pupil engagement, meaning that issues such as declining uptake at GCSE and A Level study limited pupil progress, and inconsistent teaching approaches were not identified early enough. A very few schools had no formal strategy for improving provision for international languages. Where leadership was weaker, international languages departments operated in isolation, with limited collaboration within or outside the school.

In summary

- Effective leadership at senior and middle levels was crucial in sustaining international language provision—schools with strong leadership saw better teaching quality, pupil engagement, and uptake at GCSE and A Level.
- Strategic decisions by senior leaders, such as protecting small class sizes or securing collaborative provision, helped maintain access to international languages.
- Strong middle leaders drove improvement through clear curriculum planning, high expectations, and subject-specific professional learning—but in some schools, middle leaders lacked autonomy or access to support networks.
- Self-evaluation and departmental improvement planning were inconsistent, with many schools failing to track pupil progress or identify key areas for improvement.
- Access to high-quality professional learning varied, and while some schools benefited from external support, time and funding constraints can limit access.

Wider system support and challenges

In our meetings with representatives from school improvement services responsible for international languages, they told us how they had worked hard to develop strong relationships with headteachers, heads of departments and international languages teachers. A majority of the schools we engaged with had benefited from professional learning and collaboration opportunities facilitated by Global Futures partners. In most areas of Wales, regional consortia and school improvement services have prioritised cluster-based approaches, supporting primary to secondary transition. Some school improvement services have introduced innovative uses of technology, particularly to support the primary phase, equipping teachers with useful online resources. They have also facilitated access to national and international professional learning, including Welsh Government funded training through The Open University and external language institutes, such as Institut Français and Goethe Institut. The Global Futures programme has played a valuable role in supporting these professional learning activities. Leaders shared their concerns about the risk of losing valuable subject-specific support, as the school improvement system in Wales evolves.

In most further education (FE) colleges we engaged with, international languages are primarily delivered through their full time GCSE and A Level courses but, as in secondary schools, the number of pupils studying for these examinations is small. In a very few FE colleges, international languages units were successfully embedded within vocational courses, providing learners with practical language skills linked to specific career pathways. In these colleges, students can study language units within business, tourism, or hospitality courses, ensuring that they see the direct relevance of international languages in the workplace. A few FE colleges offered international languages, mostly French and Spanish, through their adult learning in the community programmes.

In a majority of FE colleges, vocational provision for international languages provision was minimal, inconsistent or had been removed entirely, limiting pathways for post-16 learners. Many colleges reported low demand for international languages courses,

reflecting the lack of language learning in schools at secondary level, where fewer students choose international languages at GCSE and A Level. From our discussions it was clear that FE colleges have not been involved in Global Futures discussions or national or international languages initiatives, reducing the prominence of international languages pathways across the whole post-16 sector.

All initial teacher education (ITE) providers we met shared serious concerns regarding recruitment to international languages programmes, with very low numbers of students currently training as international languages teachers across Wales. In the 2024-2025 academic year, there was an intake allocation of sixty-nine students across the four partnerships who offer international languages programmes. Despite national intake allocations increasing, actual enrolment figures remained critically low, with only 11 student teachers completing a PGCE secondary programme in international languages in Wales in the past year. Education Workforce Council (EWC) and Stats Wales data tells us that there has been a substantial reduction in the number of student teachers studying for a PGCE secondary in international languages over the last decade.

In addition, those students who are accepted for training often offer only one international language, which reduces the flexibility of their deployment as teachers in schools. A few partnerships have taken proactive steps to audit primary student teachers' language backgrounds, helping to identify potential bilingual or multilingual teachers who could support international languages provision in the future. The Cardiff Partnership for ITE has been involved in a teacher recruitment initiative for Canadian graduates to train in the United Kingdom, which had helped to sustain French teacher numbers in recent years. However, in most cases, these student teachers returned to teach in Canada.

Despite ongoing challenges, ITE providers in Wales have implemented positive initiatives to support international languages. In general, partnerships have co-designed courses with lead partner schools, ensuring that student teachers receive structured school experiences and subject-specific mentors. In the best cases, partnerships have ensured that languages pedagogy remains a core part of the secondary programme, offering exposure to varied effective teaching approaches. However, in general international languages receive minimal attention in primary ITE programmes, often due to the increasing demands on limited time in the taught programme. Partnerships provide as little as one hour of programme content on teaching international languages on primary programmes, limiting opportunities to develop future expertise in the primary sector.

Overall, the struggle to recruit student teachers is having an impact on workforce planning for international languages teaching. ITE leaders report that recruitment challenges are exacerbated by higher bursary incentives in England. Additionally, they say that the recruitment of international students on to ITE programmes has declined. Partnerships also highlighted barriers to placing student teachers in schools, particularly for those specialising in German or aiming to gain A Level teaching experience, due to limited provision for international languages in secondary schools.

In summary

- School improvement services and Global Futures partners provide valuable professional learning and support, but schools reported inconsistencies in access and concerns about the long-term sustainability of this support.
- Further education colleges offered limited international languages provision, particularly in vocational pathways, and are not engaged with national strategies like Global Futures.
- Initial teacher education faces serious recruitment challenges, with very low numbers of student teachers on international languages programmes, risking the future viability of language provision in schools across Wales.

Methods and evidence base

To inform this report, during the spring term of 2025, inspectors visited a sample of schools across Wales. We visited 13 primary schools, 14 secondary schools and three all-age schools. The schools we visited were selected to ensure that our sample reflected the socio-economic and linguistic diversity of Wales. Eight out of the 30 schools visited were selected, following discussions with local authorities and regional consortia, as schools with potential effective practice. During our school visits we:

- carried out lesson observations and learning walks
- interviewed senior and middle leaders
- interviewed groups of pupils across the primary and secondary phases
- reviewed documentation and relevant resources

In addition to our school visits, we also met with other stakeholders, including:

- local authorities and regional consortia (three regional consortia and two local authorities)
- further education colleges (7)
- initial teacher education partnerships (3)
- Cardiff University
- e-sgol
- Careers Wales

To widen our evidence base we also sought the views of primary headteachers (55 responses), secondary leaders and teachers of international languages (57 responses) and parents and carers (730 responses) through three national surveys. These surveys were publicised through Estyn’s social media channels and shared with schools directly through the support of Global Futures partners. It is important to note that the responses to the surveys were from a self-selecting sample. They are not representative of their populations. This means that there are inherent biases in the responses to the survey. Copies of the questionnaires we used for this thematic review can be found on the publication page on the Estyn website.

Additionally, we conducted a desktop review to gather relevant documentation related to the review's focus. This included an analysis of recent publications and resources, including previously published Estyn thematic reports.

Estyn would like to thank all those involved in this thematic review.

Organisation	Sector	Local Authority
Bassaleg School	Secondary	Newport City Council
Bishop Gore School	Secondary	City and County of Swansea
Corpus Christi Catholic High School	Secondary	Cardiff Council
Cowbridge School	All-age	Vale of Glamorgan Council

Crickhowell C.P. School	Primary	Powys County Council
Dwr-Y-Felin Comprehensive School	Secondary	Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Heolddu Comprehensive School	Secondary	Caerphilly County Borough Council
Llanidloes High School	Secondary	Powys County Council
Maesteg School	Secondary	Bridgend County Borough Council
Mountain Lane C.P. School	Primary	Flintshire County Council
Northop Hall CP School	Primary	Flintshire County Council
Pentip VA Church in Wales PS	Primary	Carmarthenshire County Council
Penygawsi Primary School	Primary	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Ponthir Church in Wales School	Primary	Torfaen County Borough Council
Pontygwaith Primary School	Primary	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Porthcawl Primary School	Primary	Bridgend County Borough Council
St Gwladys Primary School	Primary	Caerphilly County Borough Council
St. Brigid's School	All-age	Denbighshire (all-age)
Whitchurch High School	Secondary	Cardiff Council
Ysgol Aberconwy	Secondary	Conwy County Borough Council
Ysgol Bodhyfryd	Primary	Wrexham County Borough Council
Ysgol Bro Gwaun	Secondary	Pembrokeshire County Council
Ysgol Bro Gwydir	Primary	Conwy County Borough Council
Ysgol Bro Taf	All-age	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Ysgol Dyffryn Taf	Secondary	Carmarthenshire County Council
Ysgol Gyfun Gwyr	Secondary	City and County of Swansea
Ysgol Morgan Llwyd	Secondary	Wrexham County Borough Council
Ysgol Pencae	Primary	Cardiff Council
Ysgol Uwchradd Tywyn	Secondary	Gwynedd County Borough Council
Ysgol Y Dderi	Primary	Ceredigion County Council
Central South Consortium, Education Achievement Service, GWE		
Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire		
Coleg Cambria, Coleg Cymoedd, Coleg Llandrillo (Meirion Dwyfor), Coleg Pembrokeshire, Coleg Sir Gar, Merthyr College, Neath Port Talbot College Group		
University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Cardiff Metropolitan University, University of Swansea		

e-sgol

Careers Wales

Glossary

Blending	Combining individual sounds or syllables to form a word
Cognate	A word that shares a common origin with a word in another language, often with similar meaning and form
Etymology	The study of the origin and history of words
Intonation	The rise and fall of voice pitch in speech, affecting meaning and communication
Multilingualism	The ability of a society or individual to use multiple languages
Oracy	The ability to express oneself fluently and understand spoken language
Phonics	A method of teaching reading and writing by linking sounds with letters or groups of letters
Plurilingualism	An individual's ability to switch between and use multiple languages in different contexts
Retrieval Practice	A learning strategy that involves recalling information to strengthen memory and understanding
Scaffolding	Support provided by a teacher or more proficient speaker to help a pupil build sentences
Segmenting	Breaking a word down into individual sounds or syllables to aid in reading and pronunciation
Syntax	The set of rules that govern the structure of sentences in a language
Target Language	The language that a learner is trying to acquire or use in communication
Translanguaging	The flexible use of multiple languages to support learning and communication

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

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