

# Review of Current Primary Languages in Northern Ireland

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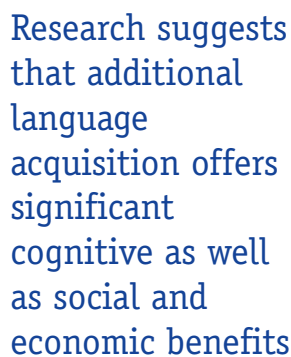
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**A**s Northern Ireland builds on welcome recent years of peace, seeking to grow its economy and export base, and as its population as a region becomes increasingly diverse culturally and linguistically, the question of languages in education has perhaps never been so relevant. Moreover, we live in a globalized, digital age, which although enriching, highlights the need for understanding and mutual respect between cultures and language groups. Arguably this is particularly true with reference to our children and young people.

Research suggests that additional language acquisition offers significant cognitive as well as social and economic benefits, and that young learners have a particular capacity to learn a new language successfully. Although in Scotland and in England learning an additional language is a statutory part of the curriculum in primary schools, in Northern Ireland this is not yet the case. Indeed, the Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP) established in 2007 and offered in approximately half of our primary schools, came to an end in 2015.

It is in this context that the current study was conducted. Its principal objectives were to gather information on the PMLP, evaluating possible improvements, and secondly, to map the extent of primary languages provision in schools outside the PMLP, making recommendations for future development.

The study adopted a mixed methods approach and sought the views of school principals, classroom teachers and pupils through questionnaire surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. A detailed account of the research methods is included in Chapter 2. Key findings emerging from analysis of the data presented in Chapter 3 and discussed in Chapter 4 of this report are summarised below.

## The importance of additional language learning in primary schools

- The majority of school principals and teachers participating in this study, from both PMLP and non-PMLP schools, agreed that additional language learning was important, valuable and enjoyable for pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland.
- The majority of the school principals and teachers involved in the study believed that additional language learning should be included in the statutory curriculum in our primary schools in Northern Ireland.
- Principals and teachers believed that offering additional language learning raised the profile of their school in the community.
- The questionnaire survey response rate may suggest that not all school principals and teachers see additional language learning as a key priority, given its absence as a statutory element of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, the emphasis on improvement in literacy and numeracy, and the end of the PMLP. Therefore the opportunities additional language learning affords are not open to all pupils. This highlights a lack of equity in provision for children in Northern Ireland's primary schools.

## Current provision

- Various languages are being taught in primary schools of all types across Northern Ireland. In PMLP schools the most frequently mentioned language was Spanish. In non-PMLP schools the most frequently mentioned language was French. German and Mandarin are also offered. There is variation in provision in both PMLP and non-PMLP schools in terms of language choice.
- There is variation of provision in terms of the qualifications of language teachers; the majority of tutors in the PMLP schools in this study did not have a teaching qualification. This was not the case in the non-PMLP schools in the study.
- There is a lack of consistency regarding the Key Stages at which schools offer additional language learning, with the majority of PMLP schools in this study focussing on Foundation Stage and Key Stage One, and the majority of non-PMLP schools in the study focussing on Key Stage Two.

The questionnaire survey response rate may suggest that not all school principals and teachers see additional language learning as a key priority





- The majority of both the PMLP and non-PMLP schools in this study reported that no assessment of additional language learning had taken place. Furthermore, the modes of assessment implemented in the remainder of the participating schools varied in nature and regularity.

- Schools that participated in this study have developed a range of partnerships with external stakeholders to provide opportunities in additional language learning for their pupils, but these vary from school to school. Some schools find the application processes required to establish such partnerships off-putting.

- There is a lack of consistency in terms of time allocated to additional language learning in the schools participating in this study.

### Benefits and challenges of the PMLP

- Benefits of the PMLP highlighted in this study include the advantages of an early start in additional language learning, high levels of pupil motivation, and the pedagogical approach adopted by tutors.

- The principals and teachers in the PMLP schools pointed to variation in the effectiveness of the relationship between classroom teachers and visiting tutors, and in the quality of planning for learning. In some cases, ineffective relationships and poor planning had a negative effect on children's learning.

- Some PMLP schools highlighted dependence on the visiting tutor as a drawback to the programme.

- In some PMLP schools additional language learning was viewed as difficult to timetable due to the constraints of the peripatetic tutorial system.

### Benefits and challenges of provision outside the PMLP

- The lack of inclusion of additional language learning in the Northern Ireland curriculum was seen as a key challenge by principals and teachers in non-PMLP schools.

- A preference was expressed in non-PMLP schools for additional language learning delivered by the classroom teacher due to greater flexibility, teacher knowledge of developmentally appropriate methodologies, and an enhanced understanding of differentiation and inclusion in the primary classroom.

- Non-PMLP schools pointed out that as additional language learning was not assessed or measured it was not prioritised in schools.

- The non-PMLP principals valued the freedom to choose and to control their provision in additional language learning and their budget.

### Future Development

- Inclusion of additional language learning as a statutory part of the curriculum was deemed essential to the prioritisation of additional languages provision in schools.

- Principals and teachers highlighted the need to build capacity in terms of the pedagogical and linguistic expertise of class teachers

- Principals and teachers expressed concerns that there should be continuity and progression in learning across Key Stages and phases and believed this to be currently lacking.

- Specialist provision in ITE and in teacher CPD together with more careful area planning were suggested as key ways to develop future provision.

### The views of pupils

- The majority of pupils involved in the study viewed additional language learning at primary school as enjoyable, challenging and useful.

- The opinion of the majority of the pupils participating in the study was that all pupils in all primary schools should have the opportunity to undertake additional language learning.

- The majority of the pupils involved in the study expressed a desire to continue their own additional language learning in the future.

- Most of the pupils involved in this study stated a preference to learn French or Spanish in the future, but they demonstrated an interest in a wide range of European and non-European languages including German and Mandarin.

Most of the pupils involved in this study stated a preference to learn French or Spanish in the future, but they demonstrated an interest in a wide range of European and non-European languages including German and Mandarin.



A preference was expressed in non-PMLP schools for additional language learning delivered by the classroom teacher due to greater flexibility



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## Chapter 1 Introduction

This evaluative review of provision for additional language learning in primary schools in Northern Ireland was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Languages Council, established with the support of and funded by the Department of Education to work towards achieving the outcomes of Languages for the Future: The Northern Ireland Languages Strategy published in 2012. The aim of the Northern Ireland Languages Council is to support, promote, research and extend the range of language learning, and increase language use and capability in support of the goals of excellence in Education (at all levels: Languages for Life), Business (Languages for Prosperity) and Social Cohesion (Languages for Understanding). The work of the Council is underpinned by the belief that the development of language skills in Northern Ireland is vital for economic prosperity, social cohesion, and the acceptance of diverse cultural identities. Languages for the Future Northern Ireland Languages Strategy (2012) made clear recommendations for the development of provision in primary schools.

The impact of research, according to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE, 2015, p. 13), can be defined as: ‘any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’. It is hoped that the findings of this study may encourage policy makers, business and educational providers to support the revision and improvement of current curriculum provision in additional language learning in primary schools in Northern Ireland, thus addressing the deficit in language and language related skills that are conducive to economic growth, and that can enhance the lives and future employability of children and young people. The focus of this study is of particular current relevance to policy makers in education within Northern Ireland, ahead of any possible future review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, given the importance of developing language and language related skills in the workforce for the strengthening of the economy (Foreman-Peck and Wang, 2013).

The findings of this project are relevant to curriculum development in additional language learning and teaching in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Northern Ireland, across undergraduate, postgraduate and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes, in response to the regional and global context, specifically immigration trends and related issues. According to the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2014, p. 7), ‘the use of research-based knowledge, theoretical insights and involvement in research processes all feature strongly in the evidence about professional development and in the selection and use of tools to aid teachers’ learning’. Curriculum development in ITE should benefit not only current and future generations of teachers, but all stakeholders in the wider education community in Northern Ireland, by supporting development in primary schools with relation to provision for additional language learning and factors such as the development of enhanced intercultural awareness in children of primary school age.

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## 1.1 Context

In the UK there is a deficit in modern language skills and the transferable skills associated with language learning that is detrimental to the economy (Foreman-Peck and Wang, 2013; British Academy, 2016). Recent concerns about this deficit have been expressed in Northern Ireland. In 2014, a Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce report, *Exporting: The Challenge*, stated that Northern Ireland's future economic growth is closely linked to the growth of its export base and that achieving this growth will require linguistic expertise:

***Language skills also act as a barrier. Almost half of businesses claim that language barriers influence whether, when and where to enter international markets. The BCC survey highlights that the extent of the language deficit in the UK is truly serious: up to 96% of businesses had no foreign language ability for the markets they serve. The largest language deficits are for the fastest-developing markets.***

(Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, 2014, p. 11)

Developing modern languages skills in current and future generations would appear to be a priority; as the British Council cautions, 'monolingual English speakers, unable to tap into the multilingual environments enjoyed by others, would face a bleak future' (Graddol, 2006 in British Council, 2013, p. 4).

Research suggests that starting to learn additional languages in childhood may be the most effective route. The Critical Period Hypothesis argues that younger children acquire language more readily (Lenneberg, 1967). In primary school years in particular, children's brains appear to be characterised by a notable degree of plasticity. As Jones and Coffey put it, 'While teachers sometimes talk of children parroting words and phrases - a natural part of the early stages of language learning - children have the cognitive flexibility and physiological apparatus to become competent and creative language users' (Jones and Coffey, 2006, p. 2). Furthermore, according to Hawkins (1974, 1999), language awareness training achieved through learning an additional language in childhood prepares pupils for future language learning experiences. Importantly, an early start in language learning appears to increase self-esteem and foster enthusiasm for, confidence in and positive attitudes towards later language learning (Sharpe, 2001; DfES, 2002; Jones and Coffey, 2013). Briggs (2013) contends that starting at pre-school age is even better. Essentially, if the length of time spent on language learning is directly proportional to levels of proficiency and the potential for increased attainment, then an early start is clearly advantageous (Driscoll et al, 2004; Kirsch, 2008). Language learning in primary school can lend itself well to inclusion; as Muijs et al. (2005) argue, all pupils can experience success, including those with Special Educational Needs. Moreover, learning an additional language has been found to reap cognitive benefits, to have a facilitative influence on developing first language literacy skills, and to strengthen phonological awareness (Bialystok et al, 2009; Cheater and Farren, 2001; Murphy et al., 2015).

The Critical Period Hypothesis argues that younger children acquire language more readily

The rapid change in Northern Ireland's demographic over recent years is reflected very clearly in a new multilingual and multicultural reality in the region's primary schools (Kernaghan, 2015). Immigrant school populations have been associated with an achievement gap. In an OECD review, Stanat and Christensen (2006) reported that although immigrant students are motivated, with strong learning dispositions, they often perform at levels significantly lower than their native peers. Attitudes to learning vary between ethnic groups (Flynn, 2013), and concerns about attendance patterns among newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland have been expressed (Kernaghan, 2015). The Key Inequalities in Education Draft Statement (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, October 2015) highlights educational underachievement that remains to be addressed in Northern Ireland. In this report, newcomer pupils, those who do not share the language of instruction or who do not have sufficient English language skills to access the curriculum, are highlighted as a group at risk. Interestingly, however, research suggests that language learning is one area in which newcomer children can excel. There is evidence, for example, of a positive correlation between immigrant bilingualism and achievement in additional language learning (Maluch et al., 2015). Importantly, in children, language learning cultivates an enhanced sense of cultural awareness. As Northern Ireland's demographic evolves, intercultural education is becoming increasingly relevant (Richardson and Gallagher, 2011; Purdy and Ferguson, 2012; Jones, 2015). Modern language learning amongst young children in school offers one way of addressing racial prejudice early.

In the European Union, according to the Eurostat press release 164/2015 (24 September 2015), more than 80% of primary pupils were learning an additional language in 2013. In England since 2014, all pupils aged 7-11 have been required to reach a high standard of written and spoken communication in any modern or ancient language. According to the Department for Education (2013), as outlined in the statutory guidance for foreign languages at Key Stages 2 and modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3:

***Learning a language is liberation from insularity and provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world. The teaching should enable pupils to express their ideas and thoughts in another language and to understand and respond to its speakers, both in speech and in writing. It should also provide opportunities for them to communicate for practical purposes, learn new ways of thinking and read great literature in the original language. Language teaching should provide the foundation for learning further languages, equipping pupils to study and work in other countries.***

In Scotland it is hoped that the Language Learning in Scotland: a 1+2 Approach will be fully implemented across the country by 2020, aiming to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn a modern language from Primary 1 onwards, and a second modern language from Primary 5 (Scottish Government, 2012). On the other hand, the British

Importantly, in children, language learning cultivates an enhanced sense of cultural awareness.





Languages other than English and Welsh are not part of the primary curriculum in Wales

Council (2015) reports that in Wales modern languages are increasingly marginalised; the BBC (2015) reports that 'Languages other than English and Welsh are not part of the primary curriculum in Wales, making Wales, along with Northern Ireland, the countries with the shortest period of compulsory foreign language learning in Europe.' In Ireland, business leaders and educators share concerns around the language skills deficit and its economic impact (Scally, 2016).

In Northern Ireland, second language learning is not a statutory part of the curriculum in primary schools (Purdy, Siberry and Beale, 2010). In 2007, the Minister of Education established the regional Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP), following a positive evaluation of a Foundation Stage primary languages pilot (CCEA, 2007). The initial aim of the PMLP was to support primary schools wishing to teach Spanish and Irish. Polish was subsequently introduced as a third option in 2009. According to SEELB (2015), the central aims of the PMLP were to:

*offer an enjoyable experience of languages for young pupils (Foundation/ Key Stage 1), with a view to encouraging more to continue with languages at post-primary level and beyond; develop pupils' language skills, particularly listening and speaking skills; to support the development of communication skills and associated areas of the revised curriculum; and enable primary teachers to develop interest and confidence in teaching modern languages.*

The PMLP was based on a specialist peripatetic teaching model and included, as outlined in its aims, an expectation of the development of generalist staff (qualified primary classroom teachers). The peripatetic specialist model of teaching additional languages in the primary school, as opposed to the generalist, qualified classroom teacher model, is not without its critics. Sweeney (2007), for example, explores both, and argues that the generalist method is more effective. The implication of this, as highlighted by Sweeney, is that generalist primary classroom teachers should receive language instruction during their ITE phase. Furthermore, the PMLP was limited to Spanish, Irish and to a lesser extent Polish, to the exclusion of European business languages such as German, and also the languages of emerging markets such as Chinese, Hindi and Arabic.

As reported by the BBC (2015), some 413 schools participated in the PMLP and some 86 teachers were employed, on a peripatetic model, to facilitate its delivery in schools. The number of participating schools according to the (then) South Eastern Education and Library Board, now part of the Education Authority, is 456 schools or 54% of the total number of primary schools in Northern Ireland. In an evaluation of the PMLP (ETI, 2009), strengths highlighted included the enthusiasm in evidence in schools, and high levels of motivation and good progress among the children. Areas for improvement outlined in the report included the need for time for teachers and programme tutors to plan together, and for schools to demonstrate a commitment to capacity building for the development of modern languages provision. The PMLP

came to an end in 2015 due to budgetary constraints within the Department of Education (BBC, 2015).

It is against this policy and research context that the present study was commissioned. The purpose of the study was twofold: firstly, to gather information on the Primary Languages Programme (PMLP) in Northern Ireland, and to evaluate possible improvements, and secondly, to map the extent of primary languages provision that exists outside the PMLP and make recommendations. The research addressed the following questions:

1. What kind of provision for additional language learning and teaching was developed in schools that participated in the Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP) in Northern Ireland?
2. What kind of provision for additional language learning and teaching was developed in schools that have not participated in the PMLP in Northern Ireland?
3. What are the challenges and opportunities of additional language learning and teaching in schools that participated in the PMLP in Northern Ireland?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities for additional language learning and teaching in schools that have not participated in the PMLP in Northern Ireland?
5. Which recommendations could be made with a view to improving future provision?

Areas for improvement outlined in the report included the need for time for teachers and programme tutors to plan together





## Chapter 2 Methodology

As the research was designed to gain insight into the views of participants in additional language learning in primary schools, and highlight their voices, the study adopted an interpretivist paradigm (Lapan et al., 2012). As Silva et al. (2015, p. 64) explain, 'interpretive social science stands in direct opposition to positivism, aiming to describe meaningful social action that will allow us to understand social reality... Interpretive researchers therefore prefer qualitative designs, especially textual and narrative studies and field studies'. For the purposes of the study a mixed methods approach with a qualitative emphasis and triangulation of data was undertaken in order to gather rich and nuanced data and strengthen the study's findings (Creswell, 2009).

### 2. 1 Research Participants and Research Activity

With a view to being as inclusive as possible, information was sought from all primary schools of all types across all areas in Northern Ireland. A maximum variation sampling approach was adopted in order to capture a range of perspectives from schools, attempting to have a variety of attributes such as Free School Meals, enrolment, and number of newcomer pupils. In order to ascertain the views of school leaders and classroom practitioners, research participants included primary school principals and class teachers. The importance of pupil voice has been emphasized in recent years since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in particular Article 12, which recognises the child as a human being with the capacity to hold views and the right to express these freely (Noyes, 2005; Lundy, 2007). Therefore we sought the views of pupils also.

The activity of the project spanned ten weeks. Once the Northern Ireland Languages Council confirmed funding for the project on 15th January 2016, initial planning meetings, project design and the review of literature commenced. An application for ethical permission was subsequently submitted to Stranmillis University College's Research and Ethics Committee; when this was granted, on 17th February 2016, data collection began (see Appendix). Overall, the research activity encompassed three strands:

#### *Strand 1: Literature Review*

Firstly a thorough desktop analysis was undertaken of the literature, international and national, relating to the importance of primary language learning, as well as possible models of implementation in schools. This provided the foundation for the project, informing all of its investigations.

The importance of pupil voice has been emphasized in recent years since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child





## 1. Online survey of School Principals and Teachers

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Principals of all primary schools across Northern Ireland were contacted by email and invited to take part in this study (see Appendix). Letters of introduction explained the nature and purpose of the study, and requested them to give permission in written form for their schools to participate by completion of an online questionnaire survey (one by the principal and one by a classroom teacher). The letters of introduction included a link to access the online questionnaire survey, and follow up phone calls were made. The electronic questionnaire survey incorporated a range of question types, including multiple choice questions, Likert-type scales and open-ended questions to elicit valuable qualitative data. There was a total number of 101 (11.88%) responses out of some 850 primary schools in Northern Ireland.

## 2. Paper Survey of Key Stage 2 Pupils

The views of Key Stage 2 pupils (from two schools involved in the PMLP and two schools not involved in the PMLP) were sought via a simple child-friendly paper questionnaire survey (see Appendix). Sampling of schools was purposive, as some language provision needed to be in place in order to be evaluated. An effort was made to reflect regional rather than Belfast based views only. Letters of introduction were issued and follow up phone calls were made where necessary. Written consent from school principals was sought by email or in hard copy. Consent return slips were provided (see Appendix). Schools were requested to administer this paper survey in class time and under the supervision of a class teacher. The number of returned surveys was 165.

### *Strand 3: Semi-structured Interviews and Pupil Focus Groups*

Semi-structured, in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with school principals and teachers in a sub sample of eight schools: four schools that participated in the PMLP and four that did not. Sampling of schools was purposive, as some language provision needed to be in place in order to be evaluated. An effort was made to reflect regional rather than Belfast based views only. Letters of introduction were issued and follow up phone calls made where necessary. Written consent from school principals was sought and provided by email or in hard copy. A consent return slip was provided for this.

Focus groups to ascertain pupil views were also conducted. Small groups of three to eight Key Stage 2 Pupils in four schools (total number of pupils n=24) participated in focused discussions about their experiences of and opinions about additional language learning. Sampling of schools for the focus groups was also purposive, as some language provision needed to be in place in order to be evaluated. As with the pupil surveys, an effort was made to reflect regional rather than Belfast based views

only. Principals were requested to provide groups of children that reflect the demography of their school population in terms of gender and ethnicity. Information for parents was distributed via the school and permission held in the school until the focus groups took place; a template for obtaining parental or legal guardian consent was provided (see Appendix).

All interviews with school principals and teachers and the pupil focus groups were digitally recorded.

## 2.2 Data Analysis

Transcription of the qualitative data (semi-structured interviews and pupil focus groups) was carried out in March 2016. A research team of three academic staff and a research assistant commenced the analysis of interview transcripts and the interpretation and reporting of the findings. Analysis of the quantitative data (online survey of school principals and teachers, paper survey of Key Stage 2 Pupils) was completed in May 2016. Qualitative data produced by these surveys was also analysed.

## 2.3 Ethical Considerations

The study conformed to the ethical principles of beneficence, respect and justice (Lapan et al., 2012). Ethical approval was sought from the Research and Ethics Committee of Stranmillis University College. In line with BERA (2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, and the College Code of Ethics (2015), all participants were informed in advance of the purpose of the study, were voluntary participants, and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were made aware of the right to withdraw at any stage of the study. All efforts were made to explain to pupil participants the focus and purpose of the research and the role and requirements of the participants.

Any research involving children should comply with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989). Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity. In this study, pupil participants were facilitated to give their fully informed consent and consent was also obtained from their legal guardian. Legal requirements with regard to working with school children were complied with, and efforts were made to put pupil participants at ease. The potential for physical distress to participants in this study was low, given the non-sensitive nature of the focus of the review. However, a risk assessment was conducted and risks identified alongside associated steps to manage these risks.

Legal requirements with regard to working with school children were complied with, and efforts were made to put pupil participants at ease.







Since the review involved ascertaining the views of children, research personnel when collecting data in schools closely followed all child protection policies and procedures in place in participating schools as well as Stranmillis University College's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

All information was held and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998). Digital and hardcopy data were stored securely on Stranmillis University College systems, and were accessible only to the research team. The names of any teachers, pupils, schools, parents or principals will not be mentioned in publications unless written permission is given. The names of any teachers, schools or principals inadvertently mentioned by participants in the interviews were removed during the transcription stage.





## Chapter 3 Findings

As outlined in the introduction, the focus of the study centred on provision for learning additional languages in Northern Ireland's primary schools, both those involved in the PMLP between 2007 and 2015, and those outside this programme. The purpose of the research was twofold: firstly, to gather information on the Primary Languages Programme (PMLP) in Northern Ireland and to evaluate possible improvements, and secondly, to map the extent of primary languages provision that exists outside the PMLP and make recommendations.

The findings of the study, based on analysis of online and paper survey questionnaire data and thematic content analysis of qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus groups, are presented in the three sections below. Section One relates the views of principals and teachers in schools that participated in the PMLP. Section Two relates the views of principals and teachers in schools outside the PMLP, Section Three reports the views of both PMLP and non-PMLP schools about language learning in general, and Section Four reports the views of pupils in both types of school.

### 3.1 The Views of Principals and Teachers on Additional Language Learning Provision in PMLP Schools

#### *Online Survey Data PMLP*

This section of the report presents a summary of the views expressed by schools involved with the PMLP that participated in the online survey questionnaire. This group made up a majority (77.6%) of the survey participants as a whole. A clear majority of the participating PMLP schools had offered Spanish (84.2%) with 11.8% offering Irish, 2.6% offering Polish and one school offering French. The most popular reason given for language choice was existing expertise within the school, with class teachers, and, less commonly, parents, reported as having suitable levels of linguistic competence and qualifications. Schools offering Spanish pointed to its global prevalence, the number of speakers worldwide and its popularity and usefulness for travel. Other reasons cited included matching primary school provision with the languages offered at local post-primary schools, the presence of newcomer pupils in the school, the school type (Irish Medium), and pupil enjoyment. Some schools stated that the language choice depended on the tutorial provision made available to them. Interestingly, most of the PMLP schools offered language provision at Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1, the majority of lessons being delivered by peripatetic tutors (88.2%). The lessons were considered to be frequent (56.8%) or very frequent (43.2%).

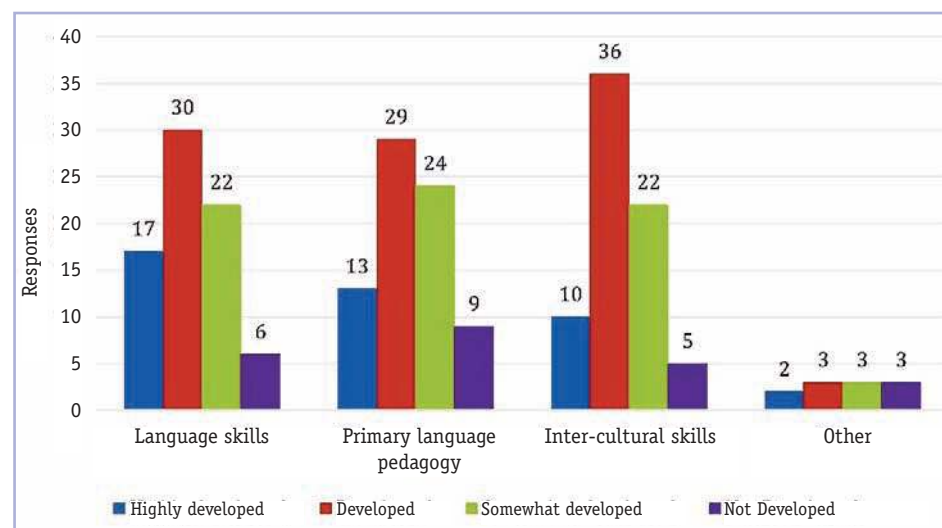
Schools offering Spanish pointed to its global prevalence, the number of speakers worldwide and its popularity and usefulness for travel.



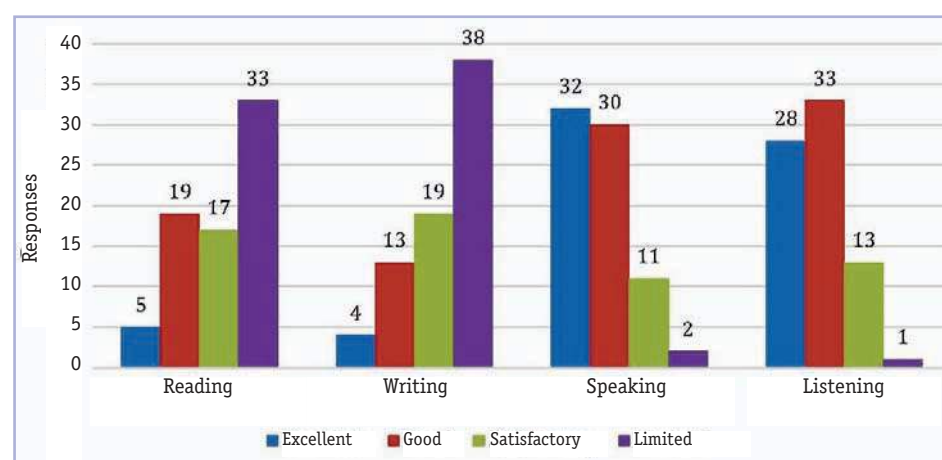


In almost one third (29.3%) of PMLP schools the language lessons were delivered by a native speaking language tutor with no teaching qualification. PMLP schools reported some development of a range of teacher skills including language skills, primary language pedagogy and intercultural skills through the PMLP. One school reported 'limited impact on preparing teachers to deliver the PMLP themselves'.

**Fig. 1:**  
*How would you describe the development of the following skills in teachers during the PMLP?*



**Fig. 2:**  
*How would you describe the progress made by pupils in the following modern language skills? (PMLP)*



PMLP schools reported that language knowledge, communication, literacy skills and tolerance were developed or highly developed in pupils through the programme. When asked to describe the progress of pupils in specific modern language skills, schools reported higher levels of development in speaking and listening, and less development in reading and writing.

When asked if language learning had been assessed as part of the PMLP the majority of schools (70.3%) reported that no assessment of learning had taken place. Of the 29.7% of schools that reported that assessment had occurred, the majority stated that this had been informal rather than formal, largely carried out by the visiting tutors, and based on observation, informal visits by the principal, speaking or games. One school stated that assessment was carried out 'informally by the tutor - emphasis was on fun - didn't want to over test it'. Some schools reported that tutors assessed vocabulary on a termly basis. One school reported that it carried out 'termly assessment devised in partnership between peripatetic tutor and class teacher'.

### Semi-structured Interview Data PMLP

This section of the report presents a summary of the views of principals and teachers gathered in interviews conducted in four primary schools that were involved in the Primary Modern Languages Project (PMLP). In this report these schools are referred to as S2, S3, S5 and S8. One of the schools was from the Maintained sector, two were from the Controlled sector and one was an Integrated primary school. Principals and teachers from these schools participated in semi-structured interviews about their experiences of the PMLP programme. The schedule of questions (See Appendix 1) addressed the benefits and challenges of language learning in general; implementation, benefits and challenges of the PMLP as a programme in their school, including staff development; developmental planning and partnerships to promote language learning; and future directions for language learning in Northern Ireland as a region, including the possibility of its inclusion in the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

### Current Provision

Current provision in the PMLP schools participating in the semi-structured interviews varies. S2 had offered French and German at Key Stage 2 before involvement with the PMLP but this project came to an end. As the principal of S2 explained:

*"Again, really when it came in it was quite exciting but it lost momentum. It did lose momentum because I think at that stage there wasn't the opportunity for the teachers to plan with the tutor who came in".* (Principal, S2)

During the PMLP, S2 offered Spanish. This continues as an after school club for P4 and 5. S2 now offers Mandarin Chinese throughout the school, facilitated by four teachers from the Confucius Institute. S3 had offered Spanish as part of the PMLP but no longer do so due to lack of expertise and financial constraints:

*"...the school couldn't afford to or have the expertise to keep it going. So that was a disadvantage. We did try to run an afterschool club for P5 but then we didn't get the uptake from the pupils. We were surprised. The tutor had come back to do it. But then they had got it free within school and then we were asking the parents to pay her".* (Principal, S3)

S5 offered French prior to involvement with the PMLP. This was facilitated by a link to a post-primary school. They also offered limited Spanish. Spanish provision was developed during the PMLP and continues to be offered from nursery to P4 with a view to developing provision in P5 also. French is offered in P6 and 7. S8 had previously offered French in P5 and as an afterschool club prior to involvement with the PMLP. As part of the PMLP, S8 offered Spanish in all classes on a weekly basis. S8 no longer offers Spanish for financial reasons, as the principal explained:

French is offered in P6 and 7. S8 had previously offered French in P5 and as an afterschool club prior to involvement with the PMLP





The PMLP schools have developed links with a number of groups to promote and develop language learning in their schools.

*"Well we had to stop the Spanish provision because we couldn't afford it. We did try to find money in the budget to pay that person to come in but the problem was that she had been made redundant from her role in the Education Authority and then was looking for other teaching jobs. You are talking, for an experienced teacher, £200 per day".* (Principal, S8)

### Partnerships

The PMLP schools have developed links with a number of groups to promote and develop language learning in their schools. These include parents, specialist EAL teachers, the local council, community groups, Education and Library Boards, the Confucius Institute, the Comenius and Erasmus programmes and the British Council. S5 collaborated with the local post-primary school. However, some concerns were expressed about the difficulties involved in registering for certain programmes. Also, not all partnerships proved successful or sustainable in the long term, as the principal of S3 highlighted:

*"Well it didn't go very far...in terms of language promotion. We tried to do ... twinning and get a contact up and running. Two teachers did go visit a school to try and initiate and there was some contact but it fizzled out. I find it is a brilliant project but there needs to be more support"* (Principal, S3).

### Should children in primary schools learn additional languages?

When asked about the importance of learning an additional language in primary school, the principals and teachers in schools involved in the PMLP unanimously agreed that it was both important and valuable. Reasons given for this include the potential that additional language learning offers for the development in children of communication skills needed in an increasingly globalised world. The Principal from S5 said:

*"...from someone who is not a linguist I do think it is important that people have the opportunity. You just have to look at the market in which they are being brought up in today. It is a world market, a European market. Northern Ireland is particularly backward, Britain is backward. Ireland is backward. One language, and it's important we get the opportunities in terms of future business. I just think it is a good thing and I don't understand why at GCSE they have taken it off the curriculum. In terms of funding for primary school it is just sending out all the wrong signals"* (Principal, S5).

The principal of S8 agreed that an early foundation in additional language learning was important:

*"The Curriculum; the three main aims of the curriculum to prepare children for society ahead, and we feel that our connected curriculum is wide enough that children should be having those experiences. I feel that the earlier you can start to do that the better"* (Principal, S8).

The enthusiasm and apparent aptitude to learn a new language characteristic of children at primary school age emerged as a common theme. The principal in S3 put it like this:

*"I do think they are wee sponges the younger they are...and [they] remember it, and [are] enthusiastic about it. I think, as they get older and go into secondary school it would be seen as added work and they might not take to it as easily...[they are] very receptive the younger they are ...[it's] fun".* (Principal, S3)

Gains in learning across the curriculum associated with additional language learning, particularly in literacy, were another factor. The principal in S2 said:

*"...from my perspective, it is crucial that they have exposure to a second language other than their own...I think the scientific neuroscience behind learning a language is hugely beneficial to children in a whole school setting. That left/right movement that language acquisition in the brain [involves] is going to have huge benefits for children's learning in lots of other areas".* (Principal, S2)

Specifically, the principal in S3 highlighted an understanding of the connections between languages:

*"Well you can see that even in English in terms of grammar, roots of words, the way that English has taken on so many words from other languages so it can help with vocabulary and word meanings".* (Principal, S3)

The value of language learning in effective preparation for transition from primary to post-primary school, and for later life, was expressed. The Principal of S2 said:

*"First of all, from my perspective, it is crucial that they have exposure to a second language other than their own. Not just for the acquisition of the language, and where they can implement that i.e. to prepare them for post-primary provision or later life when they are communicating with people from other areas of the world".* (Principal, S2)

The principal of S8 saw language learning as important in the development of lifelong learning and as an important element in employability:

*"I think long term there is an element of encouraging children to keep up that lifelong learning for a second language which builds their own profile. They can't see ahead to when they are 18 and what they are going to be doing for GCSEs or A-levels or post-primary school, but it means that they have the opportunity to move into different areas of work".* (Principal, S8)

The principal of S8 saw language learning as important in the development of lifelong learning and as an important element in employability







The principal in S3 made a connection between the value of additional language learning and the increase in immigrant communities in Northern Ireland.

The PMLP principals and teachers highlighted a range of benefits associated with additional language learning for pupils in primary school. Perceived benefits included the development of self-esteem, confidence, generally and in communication, creativity, enhanced intercultural awareness and being equipped with the skills required in a globalised world. The principal in S5 noted that additional language learning played to the strengths of some children who may not excel in other areas:

*“There are children that thrive in that ... they might not be good at maths or they might not be good at music, so it gives children who might have an interest in language [an opportunity] to develop that”.* (Principal, S5)

The teachers interviewed stressed the flexibility of additional language learning, in that it can be achieved effectively in a range of areas across the curriculum and throughout the primary school day, week and calendar year.

### ***The Benefits of the Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP)***

The principals and teachers interviewed advocated the value of the early start in additional language learning facilitated by the PMLP. Strengths of the programme included the knowledge of culture, songs, stories and rhymes that native speaker tutors offered, and the resources they could access. Principals and teachers agreed that language learning needed to have a fun factor and they were very supportive of those pedagogical approaches in the PMLP that achieved this. PMLP tutors were also commended for their work in cultural lessons, offering authentic knowledge and experience to the classes. The principal in S8 put it like this:

*“...it was so natural the way it was done and the children got that enthusiasm. They nearly went into Spanish mode when she was there. The way she did it, she always made it very interactive with lots of singing and songs and competitions, quizzes: anything that she could do to try and inspire them”.* (Principal, S8)

In S3 the teamwork between the visiting tutor and the class teacher had proved effective according to the principal:

*“There was good communication from her first session. She would plan with me then plan with the teacher. Talking about the lessons.”* (Principal, S.3)

Strengths of the programme included the knowledge of culture, songs, stories and rhymes that native speaker tutors offered

In the view of the principal in S2, the PMLP helped to break down psychological barriers in terms of teacher commitment to additional language learning in primary schools generally. This principal added that involvement in learning Mandarin subsequent to involvement with the PMLP heightened the school's profile in the community. The principal in S5 agreed that the opportunity of learning a new language that the PMLP brought was regarded as advantageous:

*“For the school it is another feather in your cap and it is something ... I think we all believe it”.* (Principal, S.5)

### ***The Challenges of the Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP)***

The principals and teachers were asked to talk about the challenges the PMLP presented. Although one principal noted good communication between the visiting tutor and classroom teachers, and joint planning, the degree of success with this seemed to vary. Several principals mentioned that poor communication between visiting peripatetic tutors and classroom teachers during the PMLP had hampered pupil progress. In particular, lack of joint planning with the classroom teacher was seen as a drawback to the programme, and in general, they highlighted a lack of progression in learning. As the class teacher in S2 explained:

*“The second thing is if there was some progression. If the children are learning the same thing over again... it needs...Start with vocabulary and then into sentences”.* (Class teacher, S2)

The principal in S2 expanded on this:

*“When they came in in P1 it was to do with the time management. You have 30 minutes in P1 and because it probably wasn't consolidated as proficiently as it could have been, then they had to go back to where they had started in P2. But I think if there had have been, back to [class teacher's] point, if there had have been time built in for planning, consolidation, and an explanation rather than an A4 page with 4 lessons printed on it. You know, “This is what I am doing”. Opening up an honest dialogue between the tutor and the teacher probably would have equated to a much more successful programme”.* (Principal, S2)

The class teacher in S3 also raised a lack of progression and continuity in learning between Key Stages:

*“Though when we had the programme, when we were out at courses and such, the general message was that it wasn't offered to the KS2, which would have probably been more beneficial seeing as they were going on...”* (Class teacher, S3)

The PMLP helped to break down psychological barriers in terms of teacher commitment to additional language learning in primary schools generally.







Principals and teachers also pointed out that teacher confidence in both language and the classroom methodology involved in successful additional language teaching was crucial to success.

In S2 a native speaker tutor used classroom methods drawn from school experience in their home country and this was felt to be too grammar-based.

The principal of S3 highlighted concerns about confusing additional language learning with English:

*“Early on the P1 teacher felt that it wasn’t appropriate because they were just getting a handle on the phonics programme and their own language...the sounds and the letters. So if you are bringing in other words it was a wee bit confusing. So that is why we gave P5 that slot. The P1s just needed that bit of time to get to know what they needed to know”.* (Principal, S3)

Principals and teachers also pointed out that teacher confidence in both language and the classroom methodology involved in successful additional language teaching was crucial to success. They argued that a developmentally appropriate approach was necessary and that qualified primary practitioners understand this best. An inclusive and differentiated approach to learning was viewed as optimal.

In terms of teacher development, principals and teachers highlighted a need for upskilling in both pedagogical and linguistic expertise. As the principal from S3 said:

*“...you do need to build capacity in those teachers before you...you can’t just fire a lesson plan at them and expect them to do it. They need to build capacity or some training”.* (Principal, S3)

The success achieved in terms of teacher development through the PMLP programme seemed to hinge to some extent on the willingness of the class teacher to get involved, as the class teacher in S2 explained:

*“Well...look if you were going to be a teacher who marked at the back, you were going to be a teacher who marked at the back. It just depended on the teacher. If you were enthusiastic, to learn it... If you were taking part the children took part much better but if you were sitting at the back on emails or whatever the children weren’t as enthusiastic”.* (Class teacher, S2)

One barrier to success of the PMLP programme in some schools was the dependence on the tutor that it fostered, as the principal from S3 explained:

*“I think when it is a tutor, then everyone relies on the tutor and when the funding stops that goes. So I do think building capacity within staff is a longer term better option but there needs to be an investment into training initially and ongoing because if a member of staff leaves and another comes in...You need that investment in teacher training and all of that too, but then I would be concerned about timetabling... the tutor is great, but when the tutor stops, everything stops”.* (Principal, S3)

The importance of teacher ‘buy-in’ in terms of understanding of and commitment to additional language teaching and learning was stressed. The same principle applied with respect to school leadership. Negative experiences teachers had of language learning in their own education were thought to stand in the way of progress in promoting languages in schools; it was agreed that teachers need to come to understand the wider benefits of learning an additional language in primary school. Teachers mentioned a number of courses they had attended during the PMLP and were positive about resources they had been provided with. However in S5 the teacher noted that the delivery of some staff development sessions had been in the target language and commented:

*“Yes I got a day out which I think was paid for by the programme ... one day, lots of schools, and I got resources that day. The one thing I will say about that is that lots of the sessions were in the language. Even I...and [other class teacher] who came with me, she had a tiny bit of Spanish but it actually put her off a bit”.* (Class teacher, S5)

Timetabling was highlighted as a potential barrier to success in that a standalone lesson of thirty minutes was deemed to be insufficient. Teachers recognised the need for more regular, repeated sessions throughout the school week. This was not achieved through the PMLP peripatetic model led by visiting tutors on a once weekly basis.

The issues of accountability and measurement were raised as another challenge by the principal in S2. It was perceived that success in literacy and numeracy mattered most in terms of measurement and that this did not favour development of provision in additional language learning:

*“...the push has come from us. One of the biggest issues in schools, primary schools in particular, is accountability. The inspection process monitors schools on literacy and numeracy outcomes. That tends to be the push. I think that is why on a Monday or a Wednesday afternoon primary languages was completely cut, which I think is scandalous”.* (Principal, S2)

In S8 the principal pointed out budgeting for continued provision was not possible once the funding for the PMLP had come to an end. The principal in S3 noted that uptake dropped when families were asked to pay for the classes:

*“They were receptive, but there was a gap there because the school couldn’t afford to or have the expertise to keep it going. So that was a disadvantage. We did try to run an afterschool club for P5 but then we didn’t get the uptake from the pupils. We were surprised. The tutor had come back to do it. But then they had got it free within school and then we were asking the parents to pay her”.* (Principal, S3)

It was agreed that teachers need to come to understand the wider benefits of learning an additional language in primary school.







When asked if additional language learning should be included on the curriculum in Northern Ireland the principals in all of the PMLP schools agreed that it should.

In S3, despite having teacher expertise and resources to hand, Spanish provision came to an end with the discontinuation of the PMLP, due to curriculum constraints, timetabling constraints and teacher workload:

*"...teachers really are snowed under. So where the time comes from to do it is the problem... There are all these new subjects. Nothing has gone out. No content has gone out. ....If we have to bring in a Spanish lesson, what gives? It is not that we are not willing to do it, because I see the value of it, but it is weighing up priorities in the curriculum. Teachers only have a set amount of hours..."*

(Principal, S3)

### Future Development

Participants were asked about school development planning and policies. A number of schools involved in the PMLP had included additional language learning in their school development plan and in action planning and had appointed language coordinators. S2 included Mandarin in their development plan:

*"It is included in the School Development Plan because it is very much...it is very integral... to what we do now. It takes up a substantial amount of time in school so it is linked in there. That is something to look at in the future. [Class teacher] has just been appointed as Language Co-ordinator. When we come to looking at it, it isn't sitting on a priority list this year, or next year, but probably by the third year when we know we are up and running. A lot of his work will be not only developing Spanish, but developing the Confucius hub".* (Principal, S2)

Additional languages did not feature in policies in S3, although lesson plans from the PMLP had been retained. S5 included additional languages in the school development plan but had not drawn up a policy for additional language teaching and learning. S8 did not include languages specifically in a separate policy, but saw it as an element in wider policies for integration and inclusion, and particularly cultural aspects of these.

When asked if additional language learning should be included on the curriculum in Northern Ireland the principals in all of the PMLP schools agreed that it should. The principal in S3 agreed that languages should be included but didn't know how it could be 'fitted in'. The principal in S5 strongly agreed that languages should be included in the curriculum, but expressed concerns around equity:

*"Yes definitely ... through all the sectors, nursery, primary, post-primary, there is no one saying it is a waste of money or it's a waste of time. Everyone is saying yes it is great, but let's have it and do it right rather than having schools who can afford to do it...my only concern is that certain schools can do it because they are getting Extended Schools money or the likes of us, my parents are willing to contribute whereas with some children that might not be the case".*

(Principal, S5)

When asked which languages should be taught in primary schools, the principal and teacher in S2 argued for Spanish followed by Mandarin. As the principal of S2 explained:

*"And the second one is Mandarin because by the time the children go out into the world, 85% of them will link in to someone who speaks Spanish or Mandarin. With due respect, French and German are dead languages ... Not that the language is not important, but there is no point of putting children through French and German because it is not moving them anywhere".* (Principal, S2)

The principal and teacher in S3 preferred Spanish or French. They mentioned an awareness of the popularity of Mandarin Chinese among children but considered this too challenging for staff. The principal in S5 mentioned Mandarin or Arabic as possibilities but was unsure, due to issues around language choice and transition to post-primary school. The class teacher in S5 preferred Spanish to French due to the accessibility of its phonetic structure, although she noted that French was taught in the post-primary school to which many of the pupils will transfer and that some experience of French in primary school would build confidence:

*"I suppose Spanish is...I don't want to say the easiest, but phonetically and coming from what I know I find that it is a language that dyslexic children find easier because French has so many sounds. When you look at Spanish there is only one way to say an 'A' whereas in English we might have 6 different ways so in terms of that. If they...when they are taught phonetics if you look at Spanish it is quite easy to compare".* (Class teacher, S5)

S8 preferred Spanish due to the number of speakers world-wide, Spain's membership of the European Union and its popularity as a travel destination.

When asked to describe needs for moving forward in the development of additional language provision in primary schools, the principal of S2 highlighted the need for direction and leadership from the Department of Education for an early start:

*"It has to come from the top. The Department are going to have to appreciate that this is crucial. If they think it is important to have it in a post-primary then why is it not in a primary? Any research you read will very clearly steer you towards early intervention. Early introduction, early intervention, that is where you get the most success. So it has to come as a Department directive ... It is going to have to be a statutory decision. Where we are sitting at the minute ...if people keep pushing the literacy and numeracy then this is going to not look as important. It is going to look like an additional piece of work that somebody feels obliged to do and not an integral part of a child's learning and there is the perfect opportunity to bring it in under the World Around Us".*

(Principal, S2)

They mentioned an awareness of the popularity of Mandarin Chinese among children but considered this too challenging for staff.







The majority of the non-PMLP schools offered provision in French

The principal in S2 also pointed to the need for resources and capacity building in teaching staff, but also mentioned support for governors and parents:

*“Support for the teachers...support for the teachers. You also need to keep parents in the loop. Parents and governors...they are two very important stakeholders in any school which tend to get left out of equations. If you can keep parents up to speed and enthused, when the child goes home and happens to say something the parents can feed on that. And the governors are pivotal. If they don’t ratify [the Class Teacher]’s position, and don’t believe in it, then we can’t do the bits on the ground which people will focus on”.*

(Principal, S2)

Some ideas for staff development were suggested including a specialist additional language qualification in ITE, team teaching over time and an accreditation model for professional development, as proposed by the principal in S3:

*“Yes and maybe you get an accreditation, for a staff member, so there is a point to them doing that because they have built that capacity... build capacity in one member of staff and make it a possibility that member of staff moves it round all the classes. That’s more...because if you are depending on 7 members of staff all learning to the same level to take the lessons, it is very difficult”.*

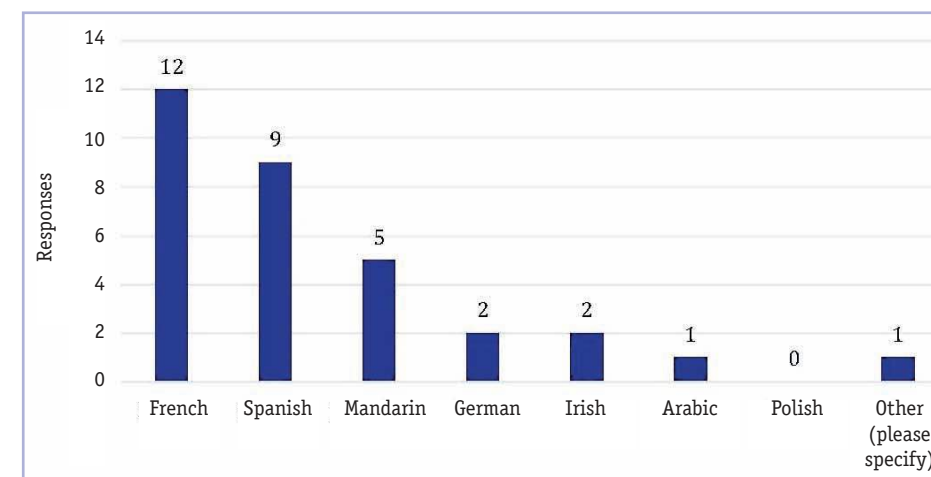
(Principal, S3)

The principal and teacher in S5 pointed to the need to develop staff expertise and the principal mentioned the value of developing links with post-primary schools. The principal in S8 pointed to resources, staff training and fluency in the language being taught. Describing literacy and numeracy as ‘the driving forces of our curriculum’, she argued for more exposure for children in Northern Ireland to cultural elements in learning.

### 3.2. The Views of Principals and Teachers on Additional Language Learning Provision in Non-PMLP Schools

#### Online Survey Data Non-PMLP

This section of the report presents a summary of the views expressed by schools outside the PMLP that participated in the online survey questionnaire. The non-PMLP schools made up 22.4% of the total number of respondents in the survey questionnaire. Of these, some 72.7% had offered some kind of language provision since 2007. The non-PMLP schools offered provision in a range of languages, as shown below. The majority of the non-PMLP schools offered provision in French (70.6%), with 52.9% offering Spanish. One school offered another language, specified as Italian.



**Fig. 3:**  
*Which language(s) are delivered in your school? (Non-PMLP)*

When asked to explain the rationale for the choice of languages delivered, a number of reasons emerged, including a relationship with a post-primary school (6 schools), a link to the Confucius Institute at Ulster University (5 schools) and existing teacher expertise (4 schools). Interestingly, the majority of provision in the non-PMLP schools was at Key Stage 2. The lessons were considered to be occasional (29.4%), frequent (41%) or very frequent (29.4%). In the non-PMLP schools lessons were delivered by class teachers (17.6%), peripatetic tutors (17.6%), a teacher from a post-primary school and a range of ‘other’ providers specified as ‘a specialist language teacher’, modern language assistants, a student from a post-primary school, and a commercial language tutor. In the non-PMLP schools, the majority of the lessons were delivered by qualified teachers, the majority of whom were native speakers. Only 5.9% of lessons were delivered by someone other than a qualified teacher.

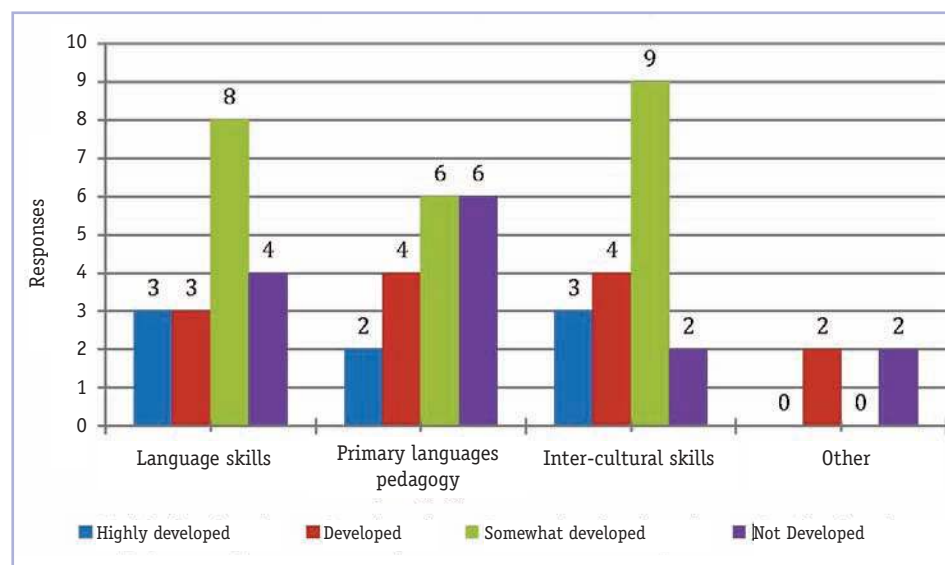
The non-PMLP schools reported that language provision in their schools had contributed to the development of teacher skills including language skills, primary languages pedagogy and intercultural skills. Non-PMLP schools reported lower levels of development of pupil skills than the PMLP schools but one school noted that pupils had gained knowledge in German culture. When asked to describe pupil progress in specific modern language skills, non-PMLP schools reported more progress in speaking and listening but nine schools reported satisfactory, good or excellent progress in writing and in reading. 68.8% of the non-PMLP schools reported that language learning had not been assessed. 31% of participants stated that language learning was assessed. Types of assessment described by these schools included teacher assessment, teacher assessment to inform further planning, vocabulary tests, formal writing or speaking assessments, classroom observations, and monitoring and reviewing by the language coordinator.



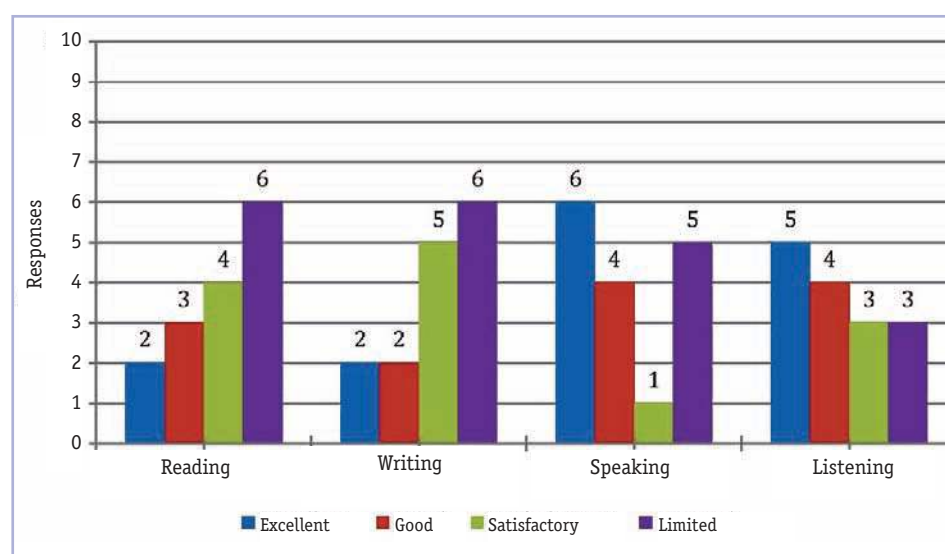
The majority of the lessons were delivered by qualified teachers, the majority of whom were native speakers.



**Fig. 4:**  
How would you describe the development of the following skills in teachers? (Non-PMLP)



**Fig. 5:**  
How would you describe the progress made by pupils in the following modern language skills? (Non-PMLP)



### Semi-structured Interview Data Non-PMLP

This section of the report presents a summary of the views of principals and teachers in four primary schools that were not involved in the Primary Modern Languages Project (PMLP) but who have developed provision outside of this. In this report these schools will be referred to as S1, S4, S6 and S7. One of the schools is from the Maintained sector, two are from the Controlled sector and one is a preparatory department of a voluntary grammar school. Principals and teachers from these schools participated in semi-structured interviews about their experiences of and views about additional language learning in primary school. The schedule of questions (See Appendix 2) addressed the benefits and challenges of language learning in general; evaluation of current language provision in place in their schools; developmental planning and partnerships to promote language learning and related staff development; and future directions for language learning in Northern Ireland as a region, including the possibility of its inclusion in the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

### Current provision

The schools not involved in the PMLP currently offer a range of additional language learning provision. In S1 French is offered as a KS2 after school activity, Spanish throughout the school, German through twinning with a school in Germany, and Irish throughout the school. The school also hopes to develop Mandarin Chinese upon successful application for a Mandarin language assistant. S4 has been participating in a Confucius programme in collaboration with a post-primary school for two years, with weekly 45-minute lessons for pupils in Key Stage 2. S6 has availed of a British Council language assistant and offers French from nursery to P7, with one 30-minute lesson each week. One small group who have made outstanding progress receive booster sessions with a classroom teacher and have progressed to writing sentences and paragraphs. S7 introduces Spanish in P1 and builds on this both through separate lessons and by integrating it through the school day until P7. Key Stage 2 pupils receive weekly thirty-minute lessons in French in Key Stage 2 and are introduced to Latin in P7. Classroom strategies tend to focus on speaking and listening, with less emphasis on reading and least on writing. In the view of the class teacher in S7 for example:

*“So I personally...I try to keep it as interactive as possible with not too much written work for them because you do step on the toes of the next school. It is different if it is colouring and matching, you try and make it as fun as possible, but definitely the thrust for us ...was the oral. Listening and speaking. Role play; a lot of role play and greetings. Things they can use on holiday really. A little market stall, survival areas, that sort of thing. We don't get into the subjunctive!”* (Class teacher, S7)

### Partnerships

The non-PMLP schools had developed a number of partnerships to enhance their additional language provision. S1 had submitted an application for Erasmus Key Action 1 funding for staff development. S4 had been twinned with a school in a Nordic country through collaboration with a Higher Education Institution. S7 had collaborated with the Chinese Welfare Association and Multilingual. When asked about professional development opportunities, the class teacher from S6 said:

*“Well I went to the British Council thing for years until I found that I could have taken them myself because I had been to them all! So I don't go any more. The thing about the British Council afternoons is that they are just pushing their own programmes. We have done our Comenius, we are going to do Erasmus+, the International School award. There is no training in terms of language learning”.* (Class teacher, S6)

Classroom strategies tend to focus on speaking and listening, with less emphasis on reading and least on writing.







One other major drawback with the language assistant programme included a lack of continuity in personnel

The principal and teacher in S6 stressed the large amount of paperwork that they believed had to be completed in order to apply for a British Council language assistant. One other major drawback with the language assistant programme included a lack of continuity in personnel. As the teacher in S6 put it:

*"I am lucky that the governors are on board, because otherwise you wouldn't be able to do it. It is quite a lump of money. It is quite a chunk for me to ask for, and the problem with the British Council programme is that we don't get to choose who it is. The girl we have this year...it is someone different every year. They like to switch people around because so many people want on to the programme. You don't always get the person you want. Someone who is going to gel with staff, prepare their lessons properly. It is a totally flawed system. This year we have been incredibly lucky to have someone who has fitted in so well and has done so well".* (Class teacher, S6)

#### **Should children in primary schools learn additional languages?**

When asked about the importance of additional language learning in primary schools, all four principals agreed that additional language learning was important. They also highlighted the high degree of enthusiasm for language learning they witnessed in their pupils. The principal in S1 gave a number of reasons including pupil openness to additional language learning, pupil enthusiasm and issues around identity:

*"I would say it is important. For a number of reasons... Number one, the earlier we get them the more able they are to acquire a second language. Our own experience here is that currently we do Irish, French and German. They seem to be able to assimilate it, acquire it, and they are very keen. It is pretty easy for us... But they are keen; they are very keen. So is it important? Absolutely... I would also contend, very much, that being Irish, we see ourselves as on the periphery of Europe. Irrespective of what the Conservative party want to do with Europe, in or out, I think still think it is essential to break down this barrier of being on the periphery of Europe. I see ourselves as very much European".* (Principal, S1)

In agreement with the PMLP principals and teachers, the non-PMLP interviewees advocated the benefits of an early start, particularly to build towards successful learning at a future more advanced stage. The principal in S4 stressed the value of an early start in additional language learning:

*"I think it is very, very important. I think young children pick up a second language very, very quickly the earlier they are introduced to it...It is partly enthusiasm, they certainly do love anything fresh and different at primary level, that is for sure, but I think the potential within the brain to absorb new language skills or to form new science. They are just ripe for it".* (Principal, S4)

The principal in S6 argued that learning a second language subsequently enabled children to learn additional languages more easily, and believed it was good preparation for transition to post-primary school and success in additional language learning at post-primary level:

*"Well it is absolutely vital. They are moving around in different countries so they need to at least....once you start to learn one language, you start to learn how to learn a language and you pick you a second language a lot quicker. It is also important for me for children in this school because when I personally went to my post-primary school, I was the only one in the class who hadn't done French. So therefore I struggled from day one and then failed my O-Level. Once you get that background...all those kids were just zooming ahead of me".* (Principal, S6)

The principal in S7 outlined a commitment to progression in one language throughout the school:

*"Well for us language learning is very important. We start it from the summer term of P1 and that would be them, introduced to Spanish, continuing right the way through to P7. I think we are recognising that, for the children, it is looking at their sound recognition and looking at their understanding of the language that is there but it is also building up a picture of the wider world for them".* (Principal, S7)

Additional language learning was viewed as an effective way to enhance intercultural awareness. As the teacher in S7 put it 'We would have a European language morning at the start of the year and then we would have international activities so it is really good for them to realise that they aren't the only people in the world'. The class teacher in S4 highlighted the benefits for travel and broadening intercultural understanding:

*"It is really important because they will probably travel and end up meeting other people from other cultures. It is really useful to have another language and to even have the same experience of it".* (Class teacher, S4)

The principal in S4 saw benefits in additional language learning for developing intercultural understanding within increasingly multicultural schools in Northern Ireland:

*"... also children from other ethnic cultures coming to us...that flexibility in our language skills is very, very important. ...I think the world is getting very small".* (Principal, S4)

The Principal in S7 saw strong links between additional language learning and ICT in terms of resources and strategies. The principal in S1, reflecting the views expressed by pupils in the focus groups, pointed to a strong correlation between pupils' digital lives and the opportunities presented by digital additional language learning resources:

Learning a second language subsequently enabled children to learn additional languages more easily








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Additional language learning was deemed to embrace an important element of challenge, encouraging children to think

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*"We are able to use IT and software, so in many ways it is a contemporary...I used to teach the [additional language] here myself, and I was just using lots of online programmes. So you are using contemporary methodologies to teach a single language... Do I think there are many challenges for kids themselves? Very few because I think kids naturally have a propensity to learn. A propensity now, in the 'e-era', let's say of all of the technologies that are out there. They are online. That is what some of the children said, that they were at home reading and learning all the time".* (Principal, S1)

The teacher in S7 viewed additional language learning as an effective way of developing elements within the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, such as "Working with Others", as well as the benefits in terms of improving English literacy:

*"I think it is very good for their listening skills because they really do have to sit and listen to the sounds because it is so foreign to them and also further up the school I would introduce the noun and the idea of a noun, a verb...A colour has to match the noun and that sort of thing. So that is good for their English and literacy".* (Class teacher, S7)

Principals and teachers also valued the opportunity additional language learning brings to broaden the curriculum, arguing that this raised the profile of their school in the wider community as an extra offer. The principal in S4 said parents valued the opportunity for their children to learn an additional language:

*"I think it is good from the school's perspective to be able to say to the parent body that we can teach one or two languages. I think parents are very interested in that".* (Principal, S4)

They also argued that the active methodologies used in additional language learning at primary level were motivating. Moreover, additional language learning was deemed to embrace an important element of challenge, encouraging children to think.

#### ***The Benefits of Additional Language Provision outside the PMLP***

A number of teachers and principals expressed a clear preference for the classroom teacher (generalist) model as opposed to the peripatetic specialist model of delivery. It was believed that the classroom teacher could be more flexible in terms of timetabling. As the principal in S7 put it:

*"...if it is someone inside the school, when we have something like our show at the moment, you can work lessons around or whatever. When you have someone from outside coming in then no matter what is happening then Spanish has to happen at 11am on that particular day".* (Principal, S7)

Principals expressed the view that freedom to choose and control the curricular provision, as well as the budget, was an advantage. Funding could be sourced by application to a range of providers including the British Council and Extended Schools. As the principal in S1 put it:

*"For the school in general it raises our profile and it offers an additional... It is something that we can offer that maybe not a lot of other schools are offering. It broadens the curriculum of course. It presents different challenges to kids to think and to learn. It's fun; there are a lot of fun elements to it".* (Principal, S1)

#### ***The Challenges of Additional Language Provision outside the PMLP***

Teachers and principals in the non-PMLP schools outlined a number of challenges involved in additional language provision. Firstly, it was seen as a disadvantage that additional languages are not included in the NI Curriculum, as the class teacher in S6 explained:

*"... there is no place for it in the curriculum. You don't have to teach it. No one is going to say to you 'why have you not done that this week?' ".* (Class teacher, S6)

Lack of teacher expertise was mentioned by a number of the principals as a key factor. A number of principals drew a comparison with music, arguing that a specialist teacher offered the best provision due to enhanced knowledge and expertise. In the words of the principal in S6:

*"The teaching of language is a lot like the teaching of Music. There are a lot of people who will do it if they have to but because there are a lot of people who could do it much better than them then they...".* (Principal, S6)

The principal in S4 reiterated the lack of teacher expertise and confidence:

*"...obviously your next question is 'What are the difficulties with it?' I think straight on the heels of that answer is that we feel ill equipped to teach any language outside of English because none of us are second language trained. So there is a huge fear. We have one teacher at the moment who is a primary trained language teacher but to use her round the school is technically very difficult. She teaches P4....An absolute dearth of expertise, but she tried to battle with the staff to try and enthuse them to get them to teach themselves. It is like talking to a wall... Lack of expertise. Time and money are way down the list of issues, I'm not that fussed about that. If we think it's important then we will find the time and we will find the money".* (Principal, S4)

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Principals expressed the view that freedom to choose and control the curricular provision, as well as the budget

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Time pressures, and timetabling were mentioned as challenges

Time pressures, and timetabling were mentioned as challenges and, as the principal in S6 put it, this was due to a lack of prioritisation of additional languages in our society and also because of the fact that it is not an assessed aspect of the Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum:

*"Well there is no time because there is no room made for it. It is not seen as a priority here like it is seen in Europe. Why would you need it? Sure I'm going on holidays but everyone speaks English. There is no value put on it...Anything not assessed will not be given priority because at the end of the day, what is going to happen? Clipboards are going to arrive, i.e. the inspectorate, and they are going to look at all the subjects that are assessed. Remember literacy and numeracy are infused right through the curriculum, and now ICT is becoming an assessed subject, but they are not just going to look at your ICT, they are going to look at how you are doing ICT and literacy, ICT and numeracy, the World Around Us. So those three core areas are moving right through the curriculum. Languages?"* (Principal, S6)

Principals and teachers interviewed highlighted lack of relevant staff expertise, both linguistic and methodological, as a concern, together with insufficient development and training opportunities. The class teacher in S7 explained:

*"I don't think teachers themselves feel as equipped. There isn't as much support and there isn't much training, so unless you feel like, 'Oh OK I am only taking P3 French, to this level, and I know that vocab, so I am OK.' I think teachers wouldn't be so confident in it... I think teachers do get a bit self-conscious doing it and worried about their skills set".* (Class teacher, S7)

The need for a language specialism in ITE was also highlighted by the class teacher in S7:

*"I think it is like asking one of us to do another subject. Someone else compared it to music teaching. Someone is not going to be comfortable coming in, but if it is their passion...and they are trained".* (Class teacher, S7)

This was echoed by the principal in S7:

*"My background is that I actually did do French ... [with] Primary teaching. That has given me the confidence, I suppose, in how to deliver it. But now that that isn't available any more...I know that it is gone, which is a pity".* (Principal, S7)

### Future Development

Principals and teachers interviewed supported the inclusion of additional language learning in the curriculum. The principal in S6 said:

*"I think languages should be...a language should be a core part of the curriculum. I don't even think that it should be just stuck in, like say Art. Don't tell anyone I said that! It should be alongside literacy and numeracy because when they go out into the big bad world, what do people want? They want computer skills, they want coding and they want languages. That is what businesses want".* (Principal, S6)

The teacher and principal in S6 expressed strong opinions that political leaders in Northern Ireland should make additional languages a priority. The class teacher put it like this:

*"I think there is a need to move away. If the case can be made to the Department. We don't need diversity. That is old. It is like the DMU, EMU, Protestant and Catholic. That's old. That's when I was at school. It's not real anymore. It is coding, ICT and languages. That is what is real now ..."* (Class teacher, S6)

This principal of S6 expressed strong concerns that although as a multi-ethnic school they had worked hard to develop language and international provision throughout the school to promote intercultural understanding in diversity, they had received no major programme of government funding:

*"What is the major programme at the minute? Shared Education. This school, this multi-ethnic, as diverse a primary school as they come...we are not getting any of that money because we are not doing any programmes that are bringing Protestant and Catholics together. Now, they don't recognise that in this school we have broadly, 10% Catholic, 30% Protestant and 60% others who maybe don't even know who they are... So one of the things I think we need to take education forward is if anything....it's ICT at the moment, but languages come hot on the heels of that, but what we need are actual grown-ups at Stormont who are prepared to make grown-up decisions".* (Principal, S6)

As the principal of S8 explained, inclusion of additional language learning in the curriculum would validate the development of provision in schools:

*"To be honest, teaching is such a busy profession that it is hard to sell that, to be honest: this is something which is not your expertise, but I want you to give up your time to research it, get confident in it and do it... Because it is not statutory there is that temptation to say we already have so much to fit in with Literacy, Numeracy; all these other things. Actually is this something we'll now only deliver to P5 - P7 or will only deliver to certain classes? We are fortunate that we have someone who is passionate about it and will push it, keeping sure that it stays on curriculum, but it could easily be something that drops off. Yet if you look at the future world that our children are moving into, they are moving into a culture which is very multi-cultural. Being able to have the world at your fingertips ..."* (Principal, S7)

Inclusion of additional language learning in the curriculum would validate the development of provision in schools







The development of Mandarin Chinese was included in the School Development Plan

The principal in S6 noted that parents in Northern Ireland were not receiving positive messages about language study generally:

*“But sure why would you do modern languages? It has just been lifted away from the University of Ulster. The whole department. Why would I, as a parent, why would I encourage my child to do something that is not actually catered for in Northern Ireland? We are lazy because everybody speaks English”.* (Principal, S6)

In terms of development planning, S1 included additional language learning in the School Development Plan and also had a European Plan for application for Erasmus Key Action 1 funding. They were also working towards a British Council International School Award. S4 had no specific language policy, but the development of Mandarin Chinese was included in the School Development Plan. It was stated that other languages could not feature in this due to a lack of funding. S6 had what it termed an unwritten policy. In the case of S6, funding was also mentioned in relation to policy development, as the principal explained:

*“Well, we have a policy in that the Governors have agreed that we are continuing with French. So it is an unwritten policy. We are going to have to fund this. We deliberately make the decision every year. I could fund an entire set of literacy or numeracy books or I could have 25 iPads, or a French assistant. You obviously try and do a bit of both, but those are the decisions that schools are making. In the face of those decisions, and our budgets being slashed, they are quite major decisions. So the direct answer is that we don’t have a policy, but it is a policy direction in that the Governors are endorsing and we are continuing”.* (Principal, S6)

S7 had a development plan and an action plan in place, but the principal also made this link between funding and planning:

*“[The foreign languages policy] has just been updated this month. As in Monday it was updated there! But yes we would have a policy just stipulating what we would be envisaging the children to do...It is not always a priority but there is always an Action Plan made so the years when it is a priority, you have funding going towards it ... a little bit of money. Little being the key word! ... But years when it isn’t a priority, actions are still there to try and make sure that it is progressing”.* (Principal, S7)

When the non-PMLP principals and teachers were asked about language choice, S1 preferred Spanish and French and had decided to offer Mandarin. They had also considered Arabic, hosting visitors from the British Council to discuss this. However the principal in S1 feared a lack of continuity:

*“That’s fine, we will broaden horizons, and we will give them a taster but what happens when they leave us? There is no continuum. That is my big fear. So when they are doing their French, all our feeding secondary schools are providing French, so there are no issues there”.* (Principal, S1)

The class teacher in S4 preferred Spanish due to the number of speakers worldwide. The principal in S4 agreed:

*“I am slightly biased because I holiday in France, but Spanish is growing in massive popularity. It seems to be...so those two can compete, I don’t really mind which it is but I do think we should have a second language in the school”.* (Principal, S4)

The teacher in S6 preferred French and German for employability reasons. However, as the principal in S6 put it, who preferred French due to geographical proximity and Mandarin due to the number of speakers worldwide, the key issue is transferrable additional language learning skills:

*“...once you acquire the basics of learning a language then those skills are transferrable to whether it is Poland or wherever... You can pop across to France. If we were all being really smart about it, if you learn Mandarin and you can speak English, you will be able to communicate with 76% of the population. If you were making a pure logistical decision, it should be Mandarin”.* (Principal, S6)

On the other hand, Spanish was preferred by the principal in S7 for economic reasons, with French valued due to the proximity of France itself:

*“I think if you are thinking of our kids for the future market they are going into, Spanish is one where it is spoken so widely that it is important. I also think with French being our closest neighbour it is something that parents at home could help out with potentially. I think there is an importance to that”.* (Principal, S7)

Other reasons given for language preferences included the linguistic expertise of staff and the linguistic knowledge of family members of pupils.

When asked to describe their development needs in terms of additional languages provision, the principal in S1 pointed to the need for pedagogical expertise:

*“...proficiency in teaching a second language... that would be really the contemporary pedagogies in being able to deliver a second language, and the competencies”.* (Principal, S1).

In S7 the class teacher suggested that specialist Initial Teacher Education should be a priority:

*“...that would have produced 10-12 teachers with a specialism in a language. That is not there now because they have stopped the course. But maybe...”* (Class teacher, S7)

Other reasons given for language preferences included the linguistic expertise of staff and the linguistic knowledge of family members of pupils.







French works so well because there is someone in this school who looks after the French assistant who then pushes further

The principal in S4 stated a preference for provision structured around Area Learning Communities:

*"I can't see any reason why not, in my naivety, why area based learning communities which are structurally in place around the country can't provide, with joint funding and a little money from everyone including the primary schools, one teacher who could teach a language in, for instance, ten local primary schools. Coming in doing a couple hours in each a couple of days a week. If we all chipped in a few grand each, there are twenty schools in our area, there's £40,000. That would pay a teacher for a year. I think there is a way to do it, but it will need to come from a top down drive opposed to bottom up".* (Principal, S4)

The principal and teacher in S6 expressed the need for the prioritisation and support of school governors and leaders, together with a language champion among the school teaching staff:

*"...so you need to decide that it is one of the school priorities, but you need to have someone driving it. ...We need to make that happen. So management need to be on board ...You need someone making sure, liaising with that French assistant. French works so well because there is someone in this school who looks after the French assistant who then pushes further. That is the principal's viewpoint...But then it takes you to have...a forceful, passionate personality and then sometimes you have to explain to them that other teachers don't see French as the priority".* (Principal, S6)

Resources were also mentioned, as a key development need, particularly online resources that are collated and readily accessible. In the words of the principal in S7:

*"I think there need to be resources. It is very hard to get staff to do something if they are fumbling around in the dark and they have no idea. So having something like that. Whether it is the CCEA website, we have the games and activities there, but something you can click on in that way... There isn't that much really. Having looked, it is hard to find resources. There is nothing coming from the Education department... There were guidelines that were created years ago and I have that as part of my policy for modern languages but it is probably quite out-dated. It is probably still relevant, the content, but it hasn't been updated in the last years...So a need for more support, more resources..."* (Principal, S7)

These views were echoed by the principal in S7, who also expressed concern at a perceived lack of guidance despite the availability of digital resources online:

*"You get your box pack for delivering Personal Development skills or whatever. There isn't actually a languages box, even say that they have given it in German, but we aren't going to do German because*

*we have already started down the road with Spanish, but look at the types of topics they do and how they develop it. There isn't anything along those lines... it is looking at the actual classroom practice. That is what is missing. You could put a child on and stick earphones on and say play this game, you'll hear the words, going over the CD but there needs to be interactive, a social...let's play a game. Greetings... going to the market stall. That's what's important, I think".* (Principal, S7)

The class teacher in S1 believed that successful provision would require clear curriculum guidelines:

*"Probably some sort of model of what is expected. An outcome at the end of each year so that by the end of P1 they should have... some kind of levels of progression where you can see ...Planning to put it in place... The same as any other subject, where you are given guidelines about what they need to have achieved because at the minute there isn't anything like that and you are just kind of like just guessing..."* (Class teacher, S1)

### 3.3 The Views of PMLP and Non-PMLP Schools on Additional Language Learning Provision

The following section presents views expressed in answers to survey questionnaire questions by participants in the survey from both PMLP and non-PMLP schools. When asked if Primary Languages provision had benefits for pupils, 100% of participants agreed. When asked to cite the benefits of additional language learning in primary school, the highest gains were considered to be communication and cultural awareness. One Principal stated that learning an additional language was enriching. Another Principal said 'reflecting on previous language experiences in my last school I know of the enjoyment of curricular provision and the interest in learning something brand new - often pupils with difficulties and delays particularly thrive with languages'. The importance of preparation for post-primary education was mentioned also: 'Having another language not only gives pupils a head-start in their post-primary education but equips them to take up jobs which they could not otherwise apply for'. One Principal commented that 'The UK is well behind other European countries in that most people remain monolingual because they start learning a language too late'. The view of another principal was that:

*"Overall it is extremely beneficial for children to learn a second language and to start the process when they find it most easy to learn. We supplemented the language programme and paid for the language teacher to stay for the whole day, so all classes could avail of the teaching".*

Having another language not only gives pupils a head-start in their post-primary education but equips them to take up jobs which they could not otherwise apply for








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The largest obstacle was perceived to be funding, closely followed by lack of time to plan, and the lack of inclusion

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Another principal said:

*“In Northern Ireland we traditionally have had very, very few international visitors, commercial links. There has been a lot of overt racism, not to mention ignorance of other countries and their language and history. Another language should occur at the beginning of a child's education and introduction into the wider world at primary school level”.*

When asked to describe the challenges involved in developing Primary Languages in Northern Ireland, the largest obstacle was perceived to be funding, closely followed by lack of time to plan, and the lack of inclusion, or space to include additional language teaching in the curriculum. Inconsistency in the quality of PMLP tutors and the lack of continuity in the PMLP from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 were cited as further challenges, as well as the need in schools for teachers with relevant expertise. 63.9% of participants strongly agreed, and 26.8% agreed, that language learning is important in Northern Ireland. Reasons given for this included employability, the importance of European relationships, the international and global dimension of an increasing number of jobs, and our increasingly multilingual society in Northern Ireland. One principal said:

*“It really is time that primary school pupils had access to language teaching and the opportunity to become proficient in a second language. The benefits educationally and socially would be enormous over a period of time. Please do not forget the importance of British Sign Language. In this school our P7 pupils have a weekly session of BSL”.*

Another added that the:

*“Primary Languages programme was cancelled due to the budgetary cuts across education. [This is] very disappointing and shows the lack of value placed on the importance of preparing our children to be part of a global workforce. It is embarrassing”.*

According to one principal:

*“Other countries provide foreign language learning from a very young age, which sets the children in excellent position for further learning and job opportunities later in life”.*

Another expressed the view that:

*“Yes - if we are to seek to deliver a top class education regionally we need to teach our children in such a way that they are enabled to go into the world and communicate effectively - this encompasses being able to speak using a different language- at whatever level this is possible for each child”.*

Finally, in the words of another principal, language learning in primary school ‘Is a great motivator for children, boosts confidence and fosters an interest in other cultures and appreciation of diversity’.

73.5% of participants strongly agreed that children enjoy learning languages, while 22.4% agreed. One principal noted that:

*“Children absolutely love learning a new language, especially if it is started in the early years. They have no inhibitions and find pronunciation much easier. If it is carried through the whole school they can build up confidence and skill in the language and this can result in them pursuing languages at post-primary level”.*

Another observed that ‘young children very quickly assimilate the rhythms, intonation and structures of another language’. Another agreed:

*“Children learn best when they are young. They are able to absorb vocabulary, phrases and pronunciation easily when this is taught to them in early life. In class I have observed the children engage and stay focused whilst learning a new language as well as showing an enjoyment in what they are doing”.*

According to another participant, ‘all children enjoy languages regardless of ability in class’. The importance of pedagogical expertise was also highlighted:

*“Some children do not [enjoy learning a new language] but on the whole I think young children enjoy the experience if delivered by someone who is skilled in teaching languages”.*

When asked if being able to speak an additional language was valuable for the economy, 70.1% strongly agreed and 25.8% agreed. The importance for language skills in the global economy was noted and one principal highlighted the need for translators and interpreters. Another stated:

*“It's obvious. In Northern Ireland, because of its geographical position, business leaders have to reach out to attract investment. This is made more attractive when a region has a well-trained workforce, but a range of international language skills also, in order to sustain communication over time with the world market”.*

67% strongly agreed that being able to speak an additional language in a multicultural context was valuable while 27.8% agreed. One principal said

*“In a time when our country is multicultural and children are mixing with more children who speak English as a second language, an awareness of other cultures and languages facilitates acceptance and provides a means of communication”.*

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The importance for language skills in the global economy was noted and one principal highlighted the need for translators and interpreters

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Since children hold and have the right to express such views about learning in primary school, particularly on matters that may affect them, such as additional language learning

Another said:

*“With an ever-growing multi-cultural society, it is imperative that we prepare our children to be able to communicate effectively”. When asked whether teacher CPD in Primary Languages would be valuable, 52.6% of participants strongly agreed while 34% agreed. This question elicited a wide range of views. 35 schools stated that Primary Languages should be centrally funded by the DENI. Alternative suggested funders include the Education Authority, British Council, European Grants, Atlantic Philanthropies and international businesses and industries. A number of schools suggested that primary languages teacher development should begin in Initial Teacher Education and others suggested that post-primary language teachers should be involved.*

### 3.4 The Views of Pupils at Key Stage 2

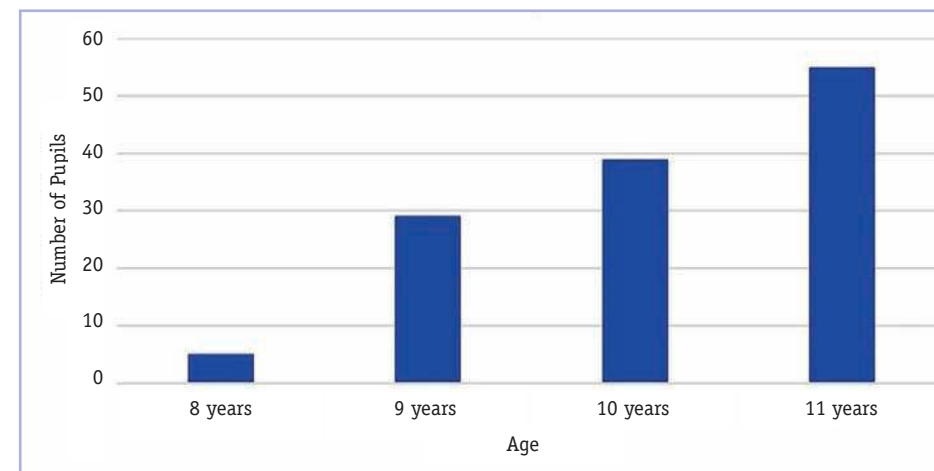
Children’s views about their education are important, and this has been recognised increasingly in recent years. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) gives children and young people the right to express their views on all matters affecting them, and for these views to be given due weight in accordance with the child’s age and maturity’ (Robinson, 2014, p. 3). Previous studies have shown that children have views about the learning that takes place in primary schools. For example, Hopkins (2008) found that children aged 7-11 years had developed clear opinions about the relationship between active learning and the enjoyment of lessons, a desire to be challenged and a preference for high levels of participation in learning activities.

Since children hold and have the right to express such views about learning in primary school, particularly on matters that may affect them, such as additional language learning, this study sought to engage with children at Key Stage 2. All of these children had some experience of language learning in primary school, and we aimed to explore this, and find out more about their opinions, in order to improve future practice. Two methods were used to do so. Firstly, a paper survey, and secondly, a number of pupil focus groups.

A total of 165 children in five schools (S1, S2, S4, S5 and S8) completed a paper survey. Three of these schools had been involved in the PMLP (S2, S5 and S8) and two (S1 and S4) have offered provision in MFL outside the PMLP. Of the 165 pupil surveys returned, 128 were returned from PMLP schools, and 37 were returned from non-PMLP schools. In this section, results from the PMLP and non-PMLP schools will be presented separately.

#### *The Views of Pupils in PMLP Schools: Paper Survey*

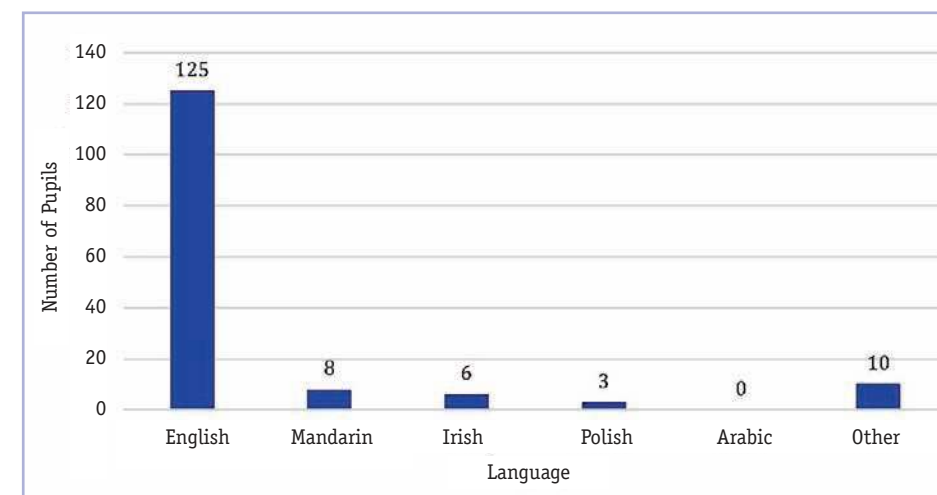
Three schools involved in the PMLP (S2, S5 and S8) were provided with paper surveys to be administered to Key Stage 2 pupils. A total of 128 pupils were surveyed with the following returns: S2 (70 pupils), S5 (27) and S8 (31). All pupils were from Key Stage 2, in Primary 5, 6 or 7 (aged from 8 – 11 years). Both boys and girls were involved with 72 (53.3%) female pupils and 56 (43.8%) male pupils.



**Fig. 6:**  
**Pupil Age (PMLP)**

### Which language(s) do you speak at home?

Pupils were asked which language(s) they spoke at home (English, Irish, Polish, Arabic, Mandarin, and/or Other).



**Fig. 7:**  
**Which language(s)  
do you speak at  
home? (PMLP)**

125 pupils (97.7%) spoke English at home, eight pupils (6.3%) spoke Mandarin, six pupils (4.7%) spoke Irish and three pupils (2.3%) spoke Polish, No pupils stated that that they spoke Arabic at home. Ten (7.8%) pupils responded ‘Other’.

If they responded ‘Other’, pupils were asked to identify which language they spoke at home.

14 pupils replied to this section, with French and Spanish being the most popular responses. Three pupils said they spoke French at home. Two pupils said French and Spanish. Two pupils said Spanish on its own, and one pupil said Spanish and Slovakian. Two pupils replied Gaelic. Individual pupils said Latvian, Maltese, and one said Ulster-Scots.

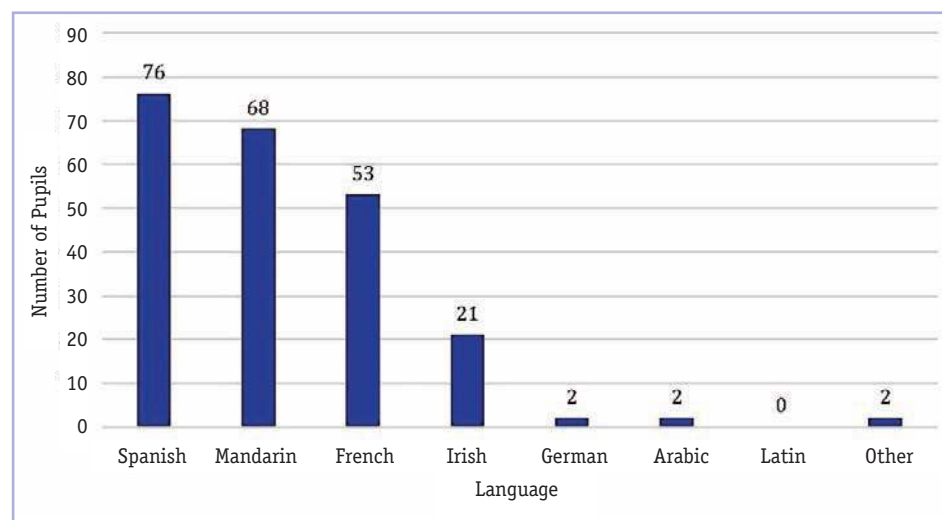
### Which language(s) do you learn at school?

Pupils were asked to indicate which language(s) they learn at school (Irish, Spanish, French, German, Latin, Mandarin, Arabic and/or Other).





**Fig. 8:**  
*Which language(s) do you learn at school? (PMLP)*

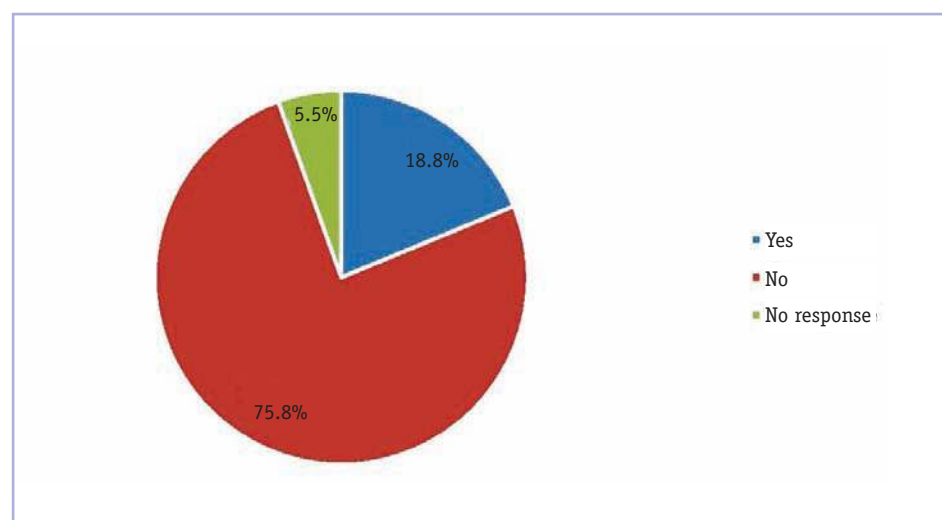


76 (59.4%) pupils said they had been learning Spanish, 68 (53.1%) said Mandarin, 53 (41.4%) said French, 21 (16.4%) said Irish, and two (1.6%) responded German. No pupils said they were learning Latin or Arabic. A total of two pupils said 'Other'. If they responded 'Other', pupils were asked to identify which language(s) they learn at school. One pupil said Polish and the other Portuguese.

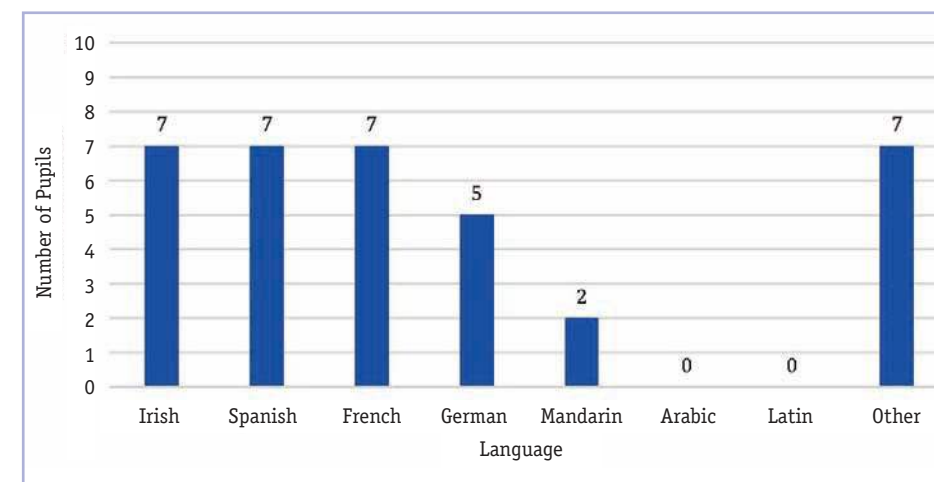
#### **Do you learn any language(s) outside school?**

Pupils were asked if they learned any language(s) outside school. 24 pupils (18.8%) responded 'Yes'. 97 pupils (75.8%) said 'No'. A total of seven (5.5%) pupils did not respond to the question.

**Fig. 9:**  
*Do you learn any language(s) outside school? (PMLP)*



**Fig. 10:**  
*What language(s) do you learn outside school? (PMLP)*

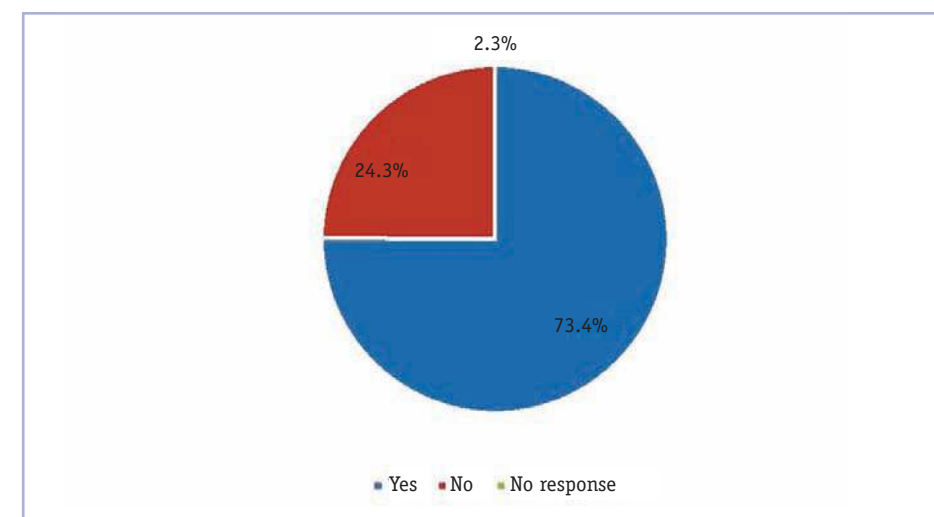


Pupils were asked to identify which language(s) they were learning outside school (Irish, Spanish, French, German, Latin, Mandarin, Arabic and/or Other). Irish, Spanish and French received the same number of responses with each having seven (5.5%) pupils indicating that they had been learning the language. Five (3.9%) pupils said German and two pupils (1.6%) said they had been learning Mandarin. No pupils stated that they had experience with Latin or Arabic outside school. A total of seven pupils responded 'Other'.

If they responded 'Other', pupils were asked to identify which language(s) they had been learning outside school. The most popular response was Polish (two pupils) with other languages including Gaelic, Latvian, Maltese, Swedish and Ulster-Scots also being learnt by individual pupils outside school.

#### **Have you visited a country where people don't speak English?**

Pupils were asked whether they had visited a country where people don't speak English. 94 pupils (73.4%) said 'Yes', with 31 pupils (24.2%) indicating 'No'. Three pupils (2.3%) did not respond to the question.



**Fig. 11:**  
*Have you visited a country where people don't speak English? (PMLP)*

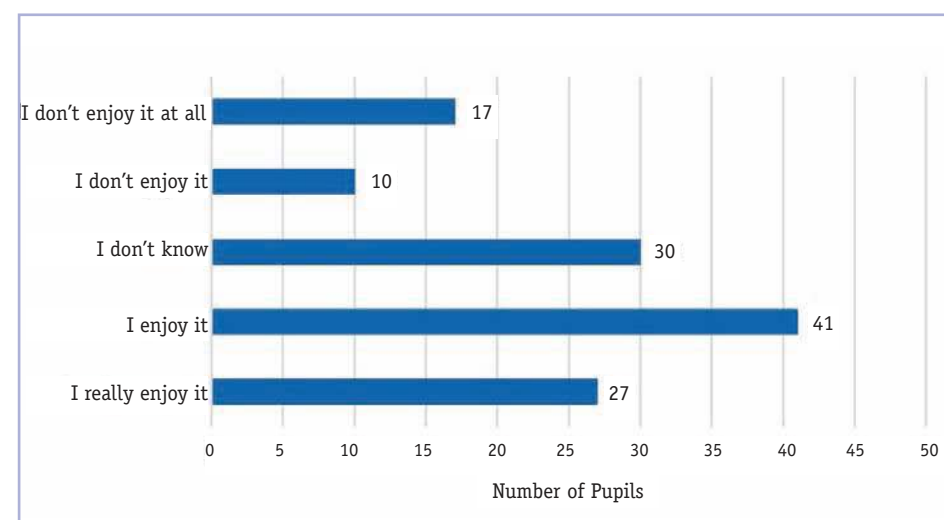
If yes, pupils were asked to identify the country (or countries) they had visited.

Country	No. Mentions
France	10
Rep. Ireland	4
Bulgaria	3
Germany	3
Greece	3
Italy	3
Turkey	2
Africa	1
Belgium	1
Brazil	1
Cyprus	1
Czech Republic	1
England	1
Latvia	1
Scotland	1
Spain	1
Wales	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>

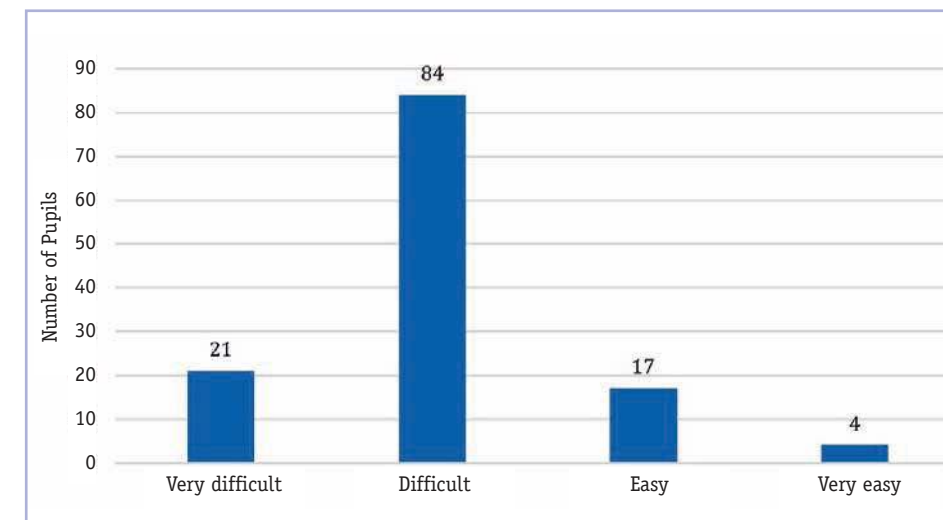
**Table 1:**  
*Have you visited a country where people don't speak English? (PMLP)*

#### How do you feel about learning a new language?

Pupils were asked how they felt about learning a new language. The majority responded positively, with 27 pupils (21.1%) saying 'I really enjoy it', and 41 pupils (32%) saying 'I enjoy it'. 30 pupils (23.4%) were unsure, responding 'I don't know', while a total of 27 (21.1%) pupils responded negatively. Three pupils (2.3%) did not respond to the question.

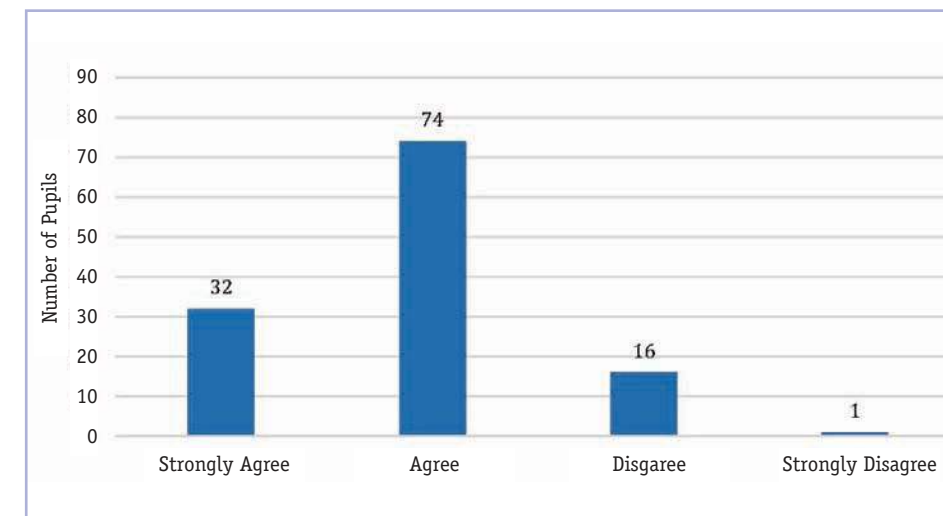


**Fig. 12:**  
*How do you feel about learning a new language? (PMLP)*



**Fig. 13:**  
*Learning a new language is... (PMLP)*

21 (16.4%) pupils responded 'Very difficult', 84 pupils (65.6%) 'Difficult', 17 pupils (13.3%) 'Easy' and four pupils (3.1%) said 'Very easy'. Two pupils (1.6%) did not respond to the question.



**Fig. 14:**  
*Learning a new language is hard (PMLP)*

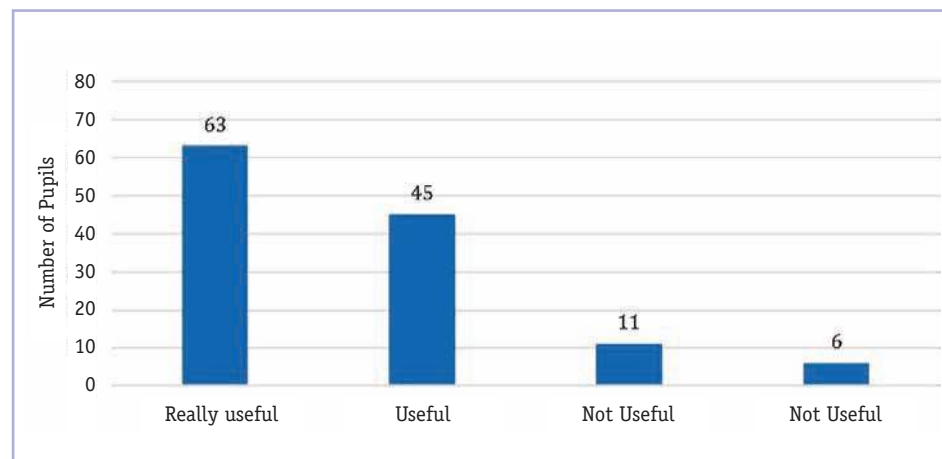
32 pupils (25%) said they strongly agreed that learning a new language was hard, 74 pupils (57.8%) agreed, while 16 (12.5%) pupils disagreed and one pupil (0.8%) strongly disagreed. Five pupils (3.9%) did not respond to the question.





### How useful do you think it is to speak more than one language?

Pupils were asked how useful they thought it was to speak more one than one language.

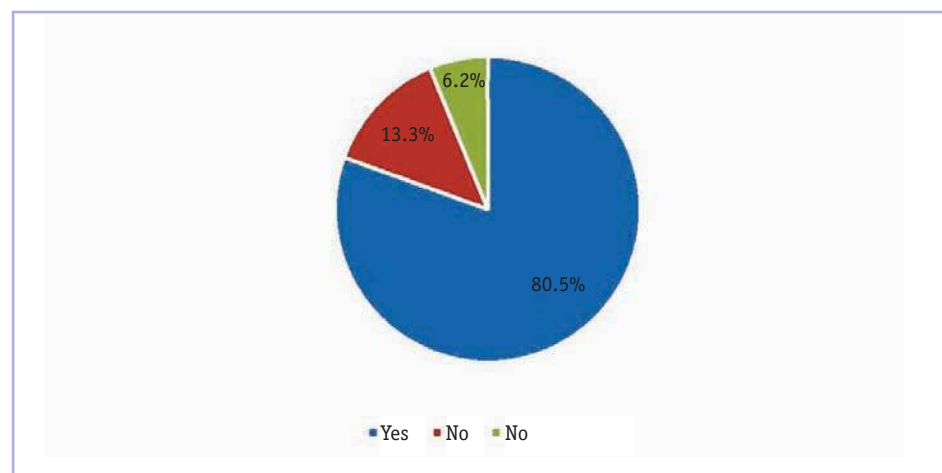


**Fig. 15:**  
*How useful do you think it is to speak more than one language? (PMLP)*

The response to this question was predominantly positive, with 63 pupils (49.2%) saying that it was 'really useful' and 45 pupils (35.2%) saying it was 'useful'. A total of 11 pupils (8.6%) said being able to speak more than one language was 'not useful' and six pupils (4.7%) said it was 'pointless'. Five pupils (2.3%) did not respond to the question.

### Do you think all primary school pupils should learn a new language?

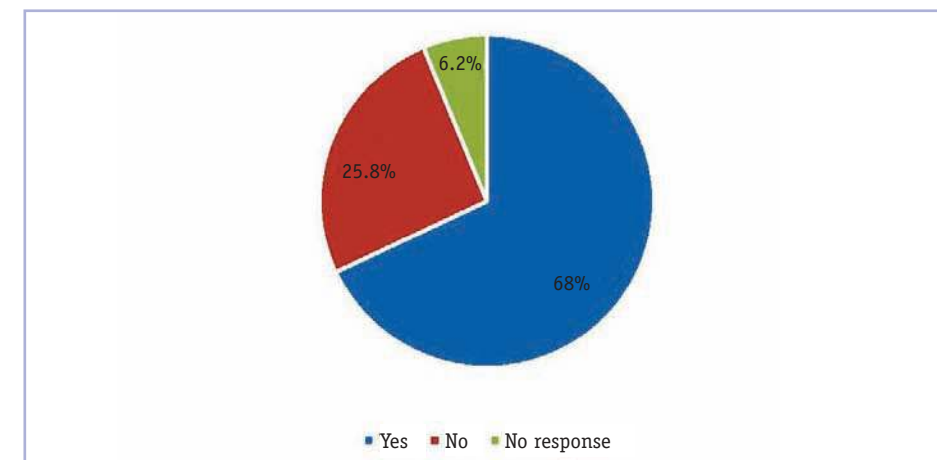
Pupils were asked if they thought all primary school pupils should learn a new language. 103 pupils (80.5%) said 'Yes' and 17 pupils (13.3%) said 'No'. Eight pupils (6.2%) did not respond to the question.



**Fig. 16:**  
*Do you think all primary school pupils should learn a new language? (PMLP)*

### Would you like to continue to learning languages in the future?

Pupils were asked whether they would like to continue learning languages in the future. 87 pupils (68%) indicated 'Yes' with 33 pupils (25.8%) saying 'No'. Eight pupils (6.3%) did not respond to the question.



**Fig. 17:**  
*Would you like to continue to learn languages in the future? (PMLP)*

If they responded 'Yes', pupils were asked which language(s) they would like to learn. A range of answers was given, as shown below.

Table 2: Which language(s) would you like to learn? (PMLP)

Country	No. Mentions
French	28
German	20
Irish	18
Italian	6
Chinese (Mandarin)	5
Polish	4
Spanish	4
African	4
Russian	2
Arabic	1
Russian	1
Swedish	1
Portuguese	1
Gaelic	1
Dutch	1
Hungarian	1
Welsh	1
Latin	1
Japanese	1
Maltese	1
Indian	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>103</b>

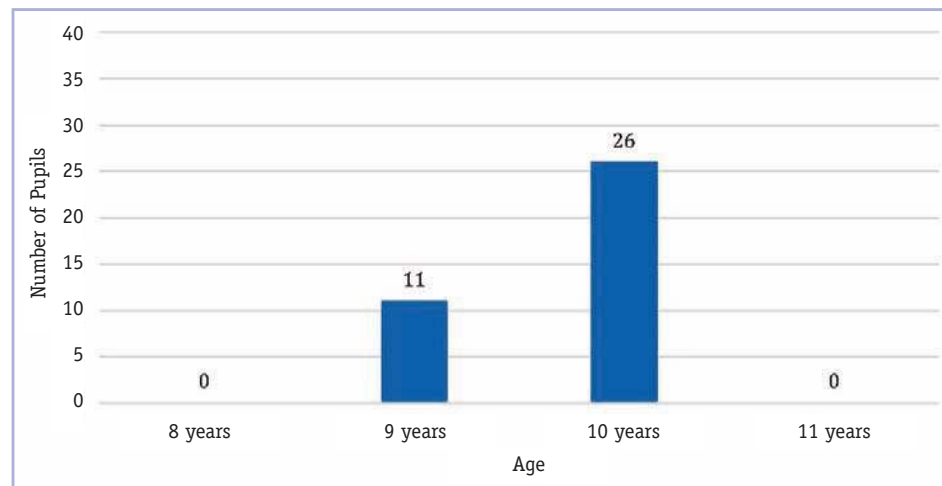
**Table 2:**  
*Which language(s) would you like to learn? (PMLP)*

### The Views of Pupils in Non-PMLP Schools: Paper Survey

Two schools not involved in the PMLP (S1 and S4) were provided with paper surveys to be administered to Key Stage 2 pupils. A total of 37 pupils were surveyed in S1 (nine pupils) and S4 (28 pupils).

All pupils were from Key Stage 2 – Primary 5, 6 or 7 (aging from 9–10 years).

**Fig. 18:**  
**Pupil Age**  
**(Non-PMLP)**

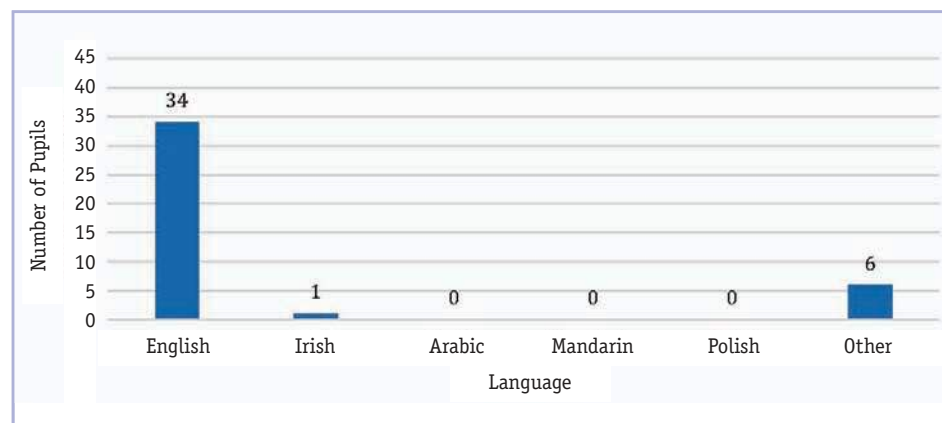


Both boys and girls were involved with 14 (37.8%) female pupils and 23 (62.2%) male pupils.

#### Which language(s) do you speak at home?

Pupils were asked which language(s) they spoke at home (English, Irish, Polish, Arabic, Mandarin, and/or Other).

**Fig. 19:**  
**Which language(s) do**  
**you speak at home?**  
**(Non-PMLP)**

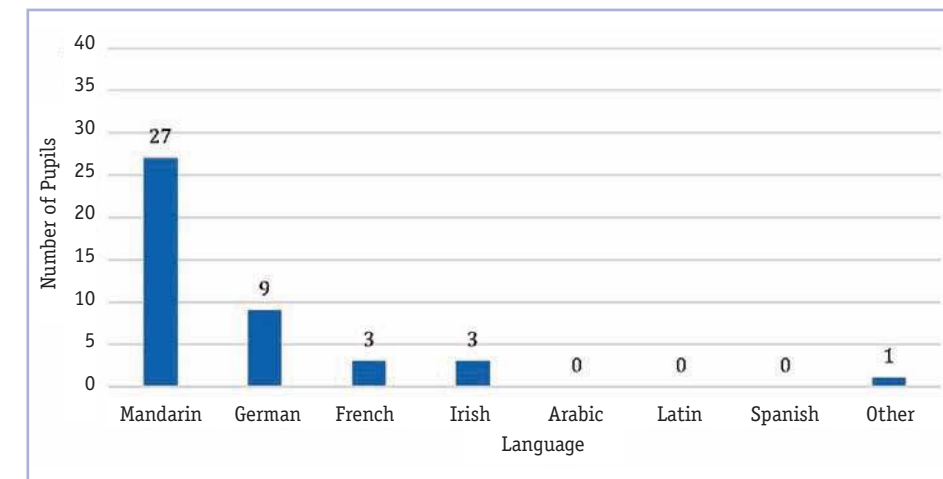


34 pupils (91.9%) said they spoke English at home and one pupil (2.7%) indicated Irish. Six pupils (16.2%) said 'Other'. No pupils indicated that Polish, Arabic or Mandarin were spoken at home.

If other, pupils were asked to identify which language they spoke at home. Seven pupils replied to this section, with two pupils saying French, and another two saying German. One pupil said German and Lithuanian and two other pupils said Lithuanian.

#### Which language(s) do you learn at school?

Pupils were asked which language(s) they learn at school (Irish, Spanish, French, German, Latin, Mandarin, Arabic and/or Other).

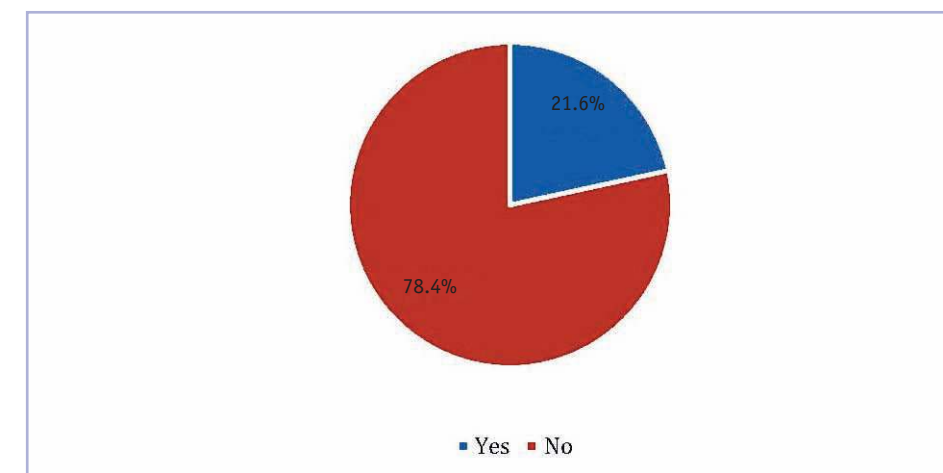


**Fig. 20:**  
**Which language(s) do**  
**you learn at school?**  
**(Non-PMLP)**

27 pupils (73%) said they were learning Mandarin Chinese at school. Nine pupils (24.3%) said German, while three pupils (8.1%) stated French and three pupils (8.1%) were learning Irish. No pupils indicated that they were learning Latin or Arabic. One pupil responded 'Other'. If other, pupils were asked to identify which language(s) they learn at school. The single pupil did not identify which language.

#### Do you learn any language(s) outside school?

Pupils were asked if they learn any language(s) outside school. Eight pupils (21.6%) said 'Yes' and 29 pupils (78.4%) said 'No'.



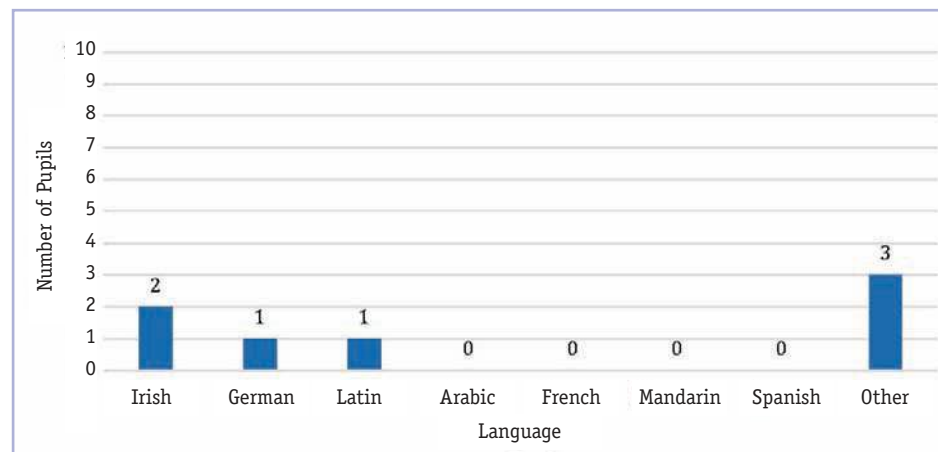
**Fig. 21:**  
**Do you learn any**  
**language(s) outside**  
**school? (Non-PMLP)**



Pupils were asked to identify which language(s) they learn outside school (Irish, Spanish, French, German, Latin, Mandarin, and/or Other).

Two (5.4%) pupils said Irish, one (2.7%) pupil said German, and one (2.7%) pupil said Latin. Three pupils responded 'Other'.

**Fig. 22:**  
*What language(s) do you learn outside school? (Non-PMLP)*

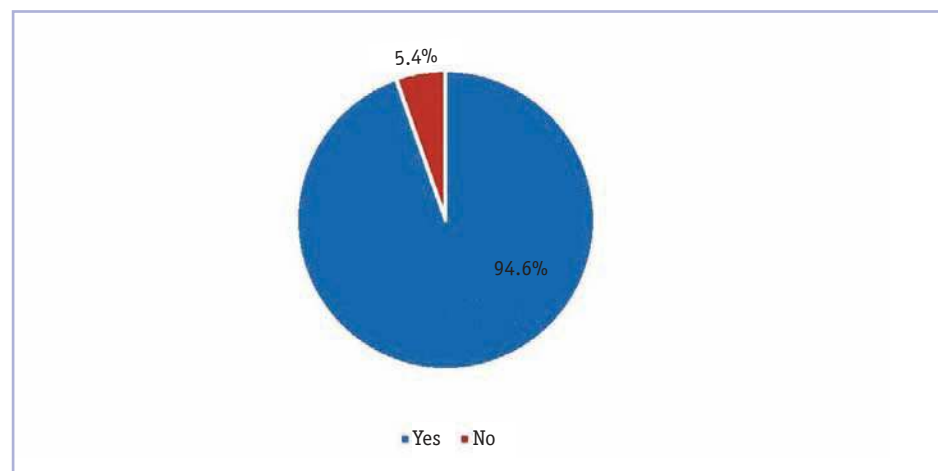


If other, pupils were asked to identify which language(s) they learn outside school. There were three responses with one pupil learning Dutch and the other two pupils saying they were learning Russian outside school.

#### Have you visited a country where people don't speak English?

Pupils were asked whether they had visited a country where people don't speak English. 35 pupils (94.6%) said 'Yes' and two pupils (5.4%) said 'No'.

**Fig. 23:**  
*Have you visited a country where people don't speak English? (Non-PMLP)*

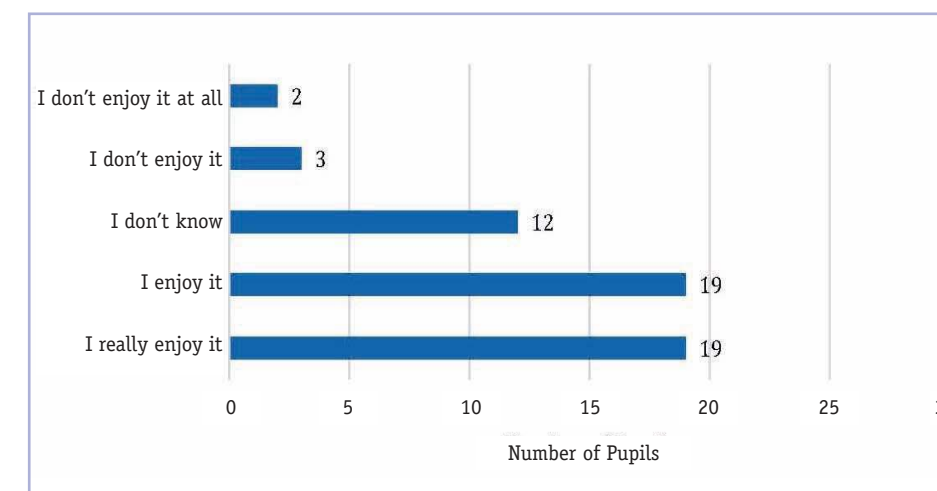


If yes, pupils were asked to identify where they had visited.

Country	No. Mentions
Spain	21
France	16
Italy	8
Portugal	5
Lithuania	3
Greece	2
Turkey	2
Cyprus	2
China	1
Netherlands	1
Russia	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>

**Table 3:**  
*Have you visited a country where people don't speak English? (Non-PMLP)*

#### How do you feel about learning a new language?



**Fig. 24:**  
*How do you feel about learning a new language? (Non-PMLP)*

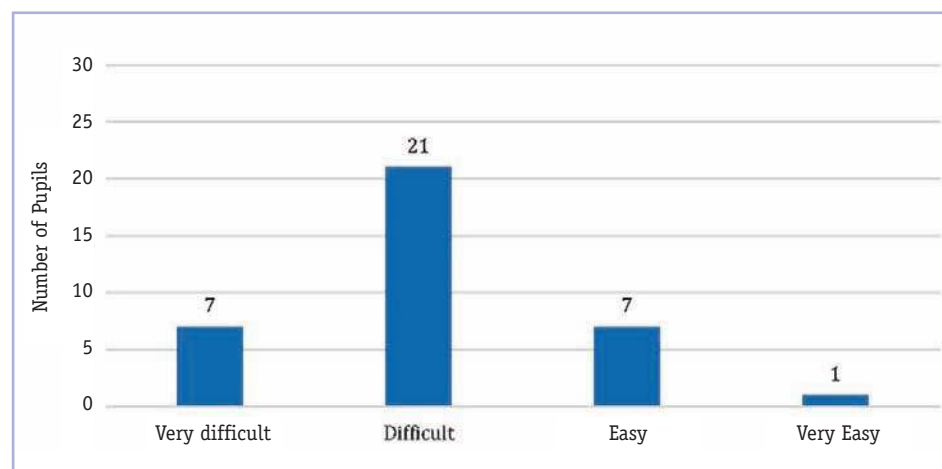
Pupils were asked how they felt about learning a new language. The majority responded positively, with 19 pupils (27%) saying 'I really enjoy it', and 19 pupils (27%) saying 'I enjoy it'. 12 pupils (32.4%) were unsure, responding 'I don't know', while a total of five (13.5%) pupils responded negatively.

#### Pupils were then asked about the difficulty of learning a new language.

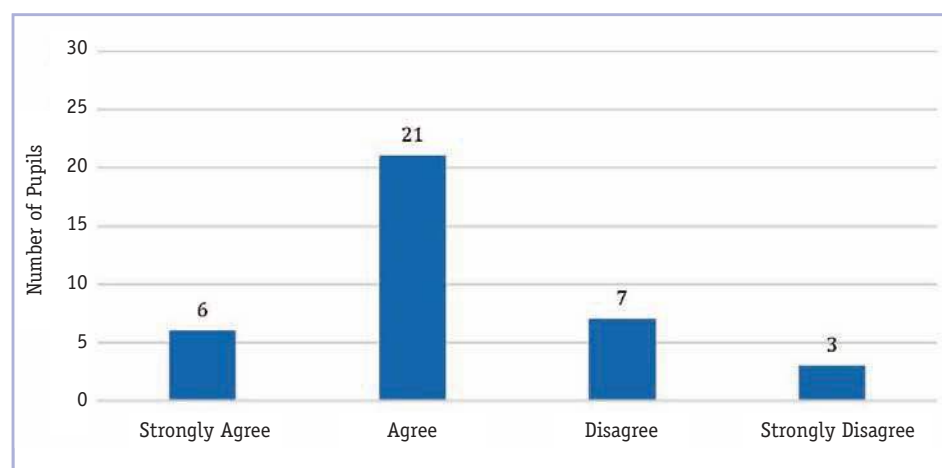
Seven pupils (18.9%) said learning a new language was 'very difficult' and 21 pupils (56.8%) said it was 'difficult'. Seven (18.9%) pupils said learning a new language was 'easy' while one pupil (2.7%) thought it was 'very easy'. One pupil (2.7%) did not respond to the question.



**Fig. 25:**  
*How do you feel about learning a new language? (Non-PMLP)*



**Fig. 26:**  
*Learning a new language is hard (Non-PMLP)*

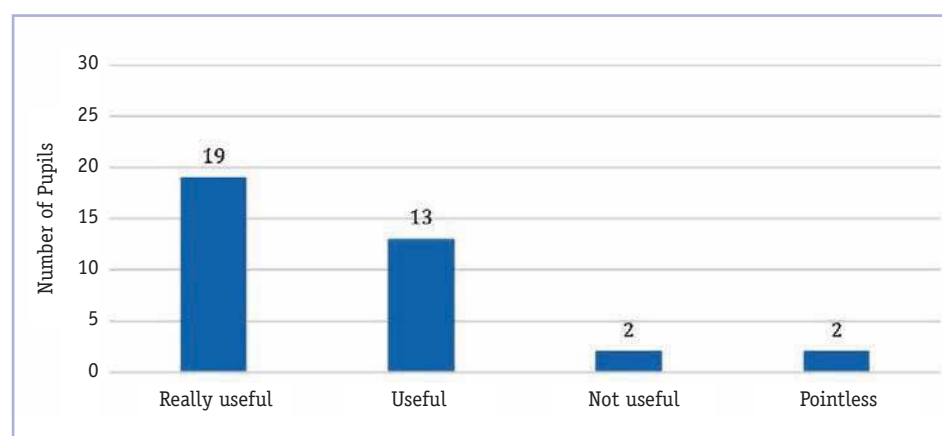


21 pupils (56.8%) agreed that learning a new language is hard, while six pupils (16.2%) strongly agreed. Seven pupils (18.9%) disagreed while three pupils (8.1%) strongly disagreed.

#### How useful do you think it is to speak more than one language?

Pupils were asked how useful they thought it was to speak more than one language.

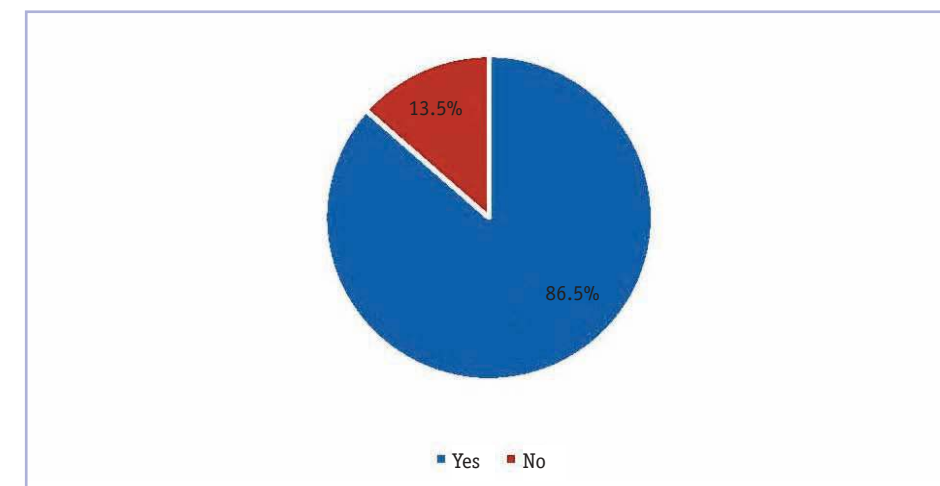
**Fig. 27:**  
*How useful do you think it is to speak more than one language? (Non-PMLP)*



19 pupils (51.4%) thought it was 'really useful' and 13 pupils (35.1%) said it was 'useful'. Two pupils (5.4%) thought it was 'not useful' and two pupils (5.4%) said it was 'pointless'.

#### Do you think all primary school pupils should learn a new language?

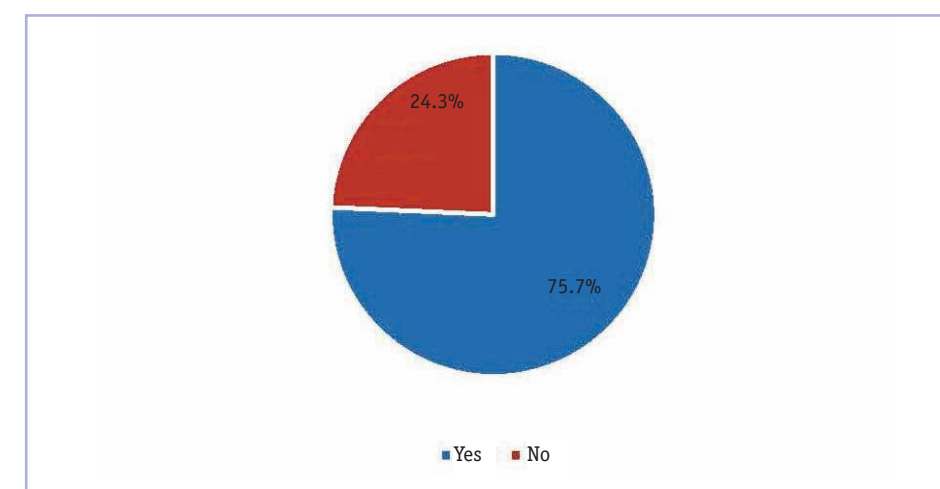
Pupils were asked did they think all primary school pupils should learn a new language. 32 pupils (86.5%) said 'Yes', and five pupils (13.5%) said 'No'.



**Fig. 28:**  
*Do you think all primary school pupils should learn a new language? (Non-PMLP)*

#### Would you like to continue to learning languages in the future?

Pupils were asked whether they would like to continue learning languages in the future. 28 pupils (75.7%) said 'Yes', and nine pupils (24.3%) said 'No'.



**Fig. 29:**  
*Would you like to continue to learn languages in the future? (Non-PMLP)*

If they responded 'Yes', pupils were asked which language(s) they would like to learn.



**Table 4:**  
**Which language(s)**  
**would you like to learn?**  
**(Non-PMLP)**

Country	No. Mentions
Greek	1
Arabic	1
Chinese (Mandarin)	1
French	11
German	4
Russian	1
Irish	2
Italian	3
Polish	1
Spanish	12
Portuguese	2
Dutch	1
Japanese	1
Danish	1
Finnish	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>

#### The Views of Pupils: Pupil Focus Groups

Four pupil focus groups were held in four different primary schools, (S1, S2, S3 and S4): two in PMLP schools (S2 and S3) and two in non-PMLP schools (S1 and S4). Two of the schools were from the Maintained sector and two from the Controlled sector. There were twenty-four pupils in total, both boys and girls; all were from Key Stage 2 – Primary 5, 6 or 7 (aging from 8 – 11 years). The focus groups took the form of semi-structured discussions in small groups of three to eight pupils, guided by a schedule of questions.

In this section preliminary qualitative findings from the pupil focus groups will be presented. The pupils were asked what language they spoke at home. The majority of the pupils responded that they spoke just English, but pupils in S2 said that they sometimes spoke Polish or Spanish or Chinese at home. One pupil in S2 was learning Polish at home. One boy in S4 had travelled a lot with parents and had been to Egypt and China. The children tried at times to remember words from these languages.

The pupils were then asked what languages they spoke at school. The responses varied between schools. The children from PMLP schools who participated in the pupil focus groups currently learn Spanish and Mandarin, and Irish respectively. The latter group formerly learned Spanish but this ended with the close of the PMLP. The children from the non-PMLP schools have been learning Irish, German and French (S1) and Chinese for about one year (S4). Some of the pupils in S1 were learning Irish in an after-school club. The children in the two PMLP groups mentioned that their language learning had been interrupted at certain points and spoke of the possibility of forgetting previous

learning. In S2 one pupil said: *'We used to speak Spanish. We used to learn it in P4 but I don't know why we stopped.'* Similarly, in S3 one girl said: *'We used to do Spanish but now we don't anymore but we just do Irish now.'* A boy in the same school replied: *'We still remember some things from Spanish.'* In S4 all of the pupils had been having some Mandarin language classes for around one year.

In response to a question about whether or not they had visited a country where people did not speak English, a number of countries were mentioned. The majority of the children had travelled outside Northern Ireland, mainly in Europe. France was mentioned six times, Spain five times and Germany twice. Pupils in all of the schools had visited a number of other countries such as Egypt and Turkey. A minority of the pupils had never been abroad. In S2 one boy asked: *'Does it count if you went to Spain but they speak Spanish and English?'*

The pupils were asked how they felt about learning a new language – was it a good or a bad thing to do? Was learning a language a useful thing? A number of responses in the pupil focus group discussions concerned the idea that having another language might allow them to get a job, or a better job, and have more opportunities when they are older: *'Very useful so you can go to different countries and get jobs there'* (S1). Other pupils agreed that learning another language would be helpful for learning languages in secondary school. The pupils in S3 thought that language learning would be good for the exchange trips that are organised by the secondary school that many of them hope to attend. A pupil in S2 thought that learning another language would be useful if they went to other countries, and agreed with the interviewer that if they spoke the country's language they would be able to chat to other people and read the signs. Another pupil in the same school said: *'It's a great opportunity because not many schools get to do it.'* The pupils in S3 discussed the usefulness of language learning by saying that it depends on what jobs people want to get.

One said: *'If you are going for a world-wide job you need it'*, while another said *'Well it really depends on where you want to go. If you don't really want to go to many places then you don't really need to'*. A third pupil said that whenever he had been in Portugal and Turkey, the people there already knew English. The pupils in S3 agreed that it impresses people when you can speak another language, and all the pupils in S4 agreed that knowing another language was a useful thing.

The pupils were asked how hard or easy they thought it was to learn another language. The responses varied from *'Really easy'* to *'Some words are easier than others'* to *'"Hello" and "goodbye" are easy'* to *'Pronunciation is hard and spelling is hard'*. One pupil in S4 simply said that it depended on the language being learned. Pupils in a number of the schools felt that if you continually had classes in a language you would pick it up more easily. One pupil in S1 said: *'Mr \_\_\_\_ makes it fun'*, while another pupil in the same school described the use of an *'app'* called *Duolingo*; some of the pupils liked using the app while others did not. All preferred worksheets, as the app required very accurate responses to allow the pupils to advance. The group preferred writing

Pupils in all of the schools had visited a number of other countries such as Egypt and Turkey. A minority of the pupils had never been abroad.







Family members including parents and older siblings were also important in the promotion of language

the language rather than speaking it as they found pronunciation to be difficult.

The pupils were asked if all primary school pupils should learn another language, and if so, why? All of the pupils in S1 and one in S3 suggested that they would be more confident going into secondary school having learned some French. All of the S2 pupils agreed that it was a useful thing and that all primary school pupils should learn another language. A pupil in S1 thought that learning another language when you are too young was a waste of time because pupils would just forget what they had learned; similarly, one pupil in S4 thought that additional language learning should only be included in upper primary classes. A girl in S3 commented positively: *'I think it is going to be fun because I like learning languages and it is going to be easier if you learn it in primary school'*

Travel experiences were significant factors for most of the children in terms of their understanding of the importance of learning a new language. Family members including parents and older siblings were also important in the promotion of language learning outside school. Digital language learning resources were mentioned by a majority of the children, including "Duolingo", translators and "Babble". A number of children referred to their interest in books given to them as presents by relatives on holiday or books used by older siblings doing homework.

The pupils were asked if they had anything else to say about learning another language. One boy in S2 was keen to learn more Afghan because - *'My dad is Afghan and I have a lot of Afghan relatives...'* One girl explained how she enjoyed learning new words in an informal way: *'Sometimes my mum is on the phone talking to her sister and I listen and hear some new Japanese words.'* When asked which languages they would learn if they had a choice, the pupils enthusiastically suggested a wide range of possibilities including French, German, Russian, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese. One pupil in S1 was keen to learn ancient Greek and Latin:

**Girl 1: Greek and Latin**

**Boy: Chinese and....Ancient Greek.**

**Girl: Ancient Greek? He is trying to outdo you!**

**Boy: No it's because I have been reading the Horrible History books.**

Although the majority of the children were enthusiastic and positive about their experience, they expressed some concerns. In S1 one female pupil perceived language lessons as lacking in planning: *'None of the lessons are planned. We just think of something on the day and then we learn it like through phrases...'* Another girl stated that language lessons were not challenging enough. *'I'd like to do more advanced things. Maybe it's just because I already knew...'* Another girl agreed: *'Yeah there are people who joined new this term and then you have to go over loads of stuff.'* One boy in S1 had concerns that too much knowledge in an additional language on arrival at secondary school might be a disadvantage: *'But the thing is what if people come over and beat you up because you know it all!'* Another boy wanted to learn French in order to be able to sing it.





## Chapter 4 Discussion and Recommendations

### Discussion

This research investigated provision in additional language learning in primary schools in Northern Ireland, firstly in the PMLP and secondly outside of the PMLP, with a view to making recommendations about future provision. The PMLP came to a close in spring 2015, and additional languages are not currently part of the statutory curriculum in primary schools in Northern Ireland. However, all of the schools participating in the questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews and pupil focus groups in this study had some experience of offering provision in additional languages in recent years.

The PMLP schools participating in the questionnaire survey reported that Spanish was the most widely taught language with the majority of provision offered at Foundation Stage or Key Stage 1, whereas in the non-PMLP schools the most popular language was French, followed by Mandarin, with the majority of provision offered at Key Stage 2. The choice of language in the non-PMLP schools as reported in the survey was determined by relationships with other stakeholders outside the school. The majority of the teachers on the PMLP did not possess a teaching qualification, whereas the majority of teachers in the non-PMLP schools, including native speakers, did have such a qualification. Most pupil progress in the PMLP schools was deemed to have involved speaking and listening rather than reading and writing. Similarly, the non-PMLP schools reported more progress in speaking and listening, but nine non-PMLP schools reported progress in writing and in reading also. Skills developed by pupils in the PMLP schools included linguistic skills, communication skills, literacy, tolerance and intercultural awareness. In the majority of PLMP schools (70%) no assessment of learning was reported to have taken place, while the assessment in the remaining 30% of schools varied in nature. This was reflected in the non-PMLP schools with 68.8% reporting no assessment.

Since the PMLP came to an end, two of the four schools in the PMLP cohort participating in the semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers had either reduced or terminated additional languages provision, while all four of the non-PMLP schools participating in the semi-structured interviews with principals and teachers currently offered provision for pupils to learn at least one additional language. The languages currently offered by these schools are French (5 schools) Spanish (4 schools), Mandarin Chinese (3 schools), German (1 school), Irish (1 school) and Latin (1 school). Of the non-PMLP schools, all four offer provision in at least two languages, with one school offering four languages. Time allocated to provision within the school week varies, and there is also variation in terms of the Key Stage at which language provision is offered. Mostly the current provision is at Key Stage 2.

The majority of the teachers on the PMLP did not possess a teaching qualification, whereas the majority of teachers in the non-PMLP schools, including native speakers, did have such a qualification







Both the PMLP and non-PMLP schools have developed a range of partnerships to promote additional language learning by pupils

Both the PMLP and non-PMLP schools have developed a range of partnerships to promote additional language learning by pupils. Both groups mentioned participation in European funded Comenius and Erasmus programmes, and collaboration with the British Council, the Confucius Institute and post-primary schools. The non-PMLP schools mentioned relevant HEI links. Both groups expressed concerns over the application processes involved for some partnerships programmes.

The PMLP and non-PMLP principals and teachers involved in this study highlighted similar reasons why additional language learning in primary school is important. These included the need to develop communication skills in a global world; the importance of European identity; the benefit of an early start in language learning; advantages at transition to post-primary school; success in future language learning; the development of intercultural awareness at home in Northern Ireland, with its growing immigrant communities, and also abroad. Teachers in the PMLP schools valued the self-esteem, confidence, creativity, and talent development that additional language learning fostered in primary school pupils. They also highlighted that additional language learning could be flexible in terms of curriculum delivery. The non-PMLP schools also mentioned the relevance of additional language learning to the development of the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework, and to cross-curricular skills such as Using ICT.

Benefits of the PMLP highlighted by teachers and principals included the advantages brought by an early start in language learning, high levels of pupil motivation, the pedagogical approach taken in the main by tutors, some effective teamwork, the breaking down of psychological barriers for teachers regarding language learning in general, and the raising of the profile of the school in the community. In two out of the four non-PMLP schools, the teachers and principals demonstrated a preference for additional language learning delivered by the classroom teacher, as this was deemed to be more flexible, and because the classroom teacher had valuable knowledge of developmentally appropriate methodologies as well as an enhanced understanding of differentiation and inclusion. The non-PMLP teachers and principals valued the freedom to choose and to control their curriculum provision in additional language learning and also their budget. They agreed with the PMLP teachers and principals that offering additional language learning raised the profile of their school.

In the PMLP schools a number of disadvantages of the PMLP were discussed. Success in joint planning and collaboration between the classroom teacher and the peripatetic tutor varied. As highlighted in a previous evaluation carried out by ETI (2009), at times communication was poor and a lack of progression in learning was highlighted, together with a lack of continuity between Key Stages. Pedagogical approaches were inconsistent, and it was agreed that qualified primary teachers had a better understanding of lesson planning, inclusion and differentiation. Teachers and principals stressed the need for capacity building among staff relating both to linguistic and pedagogical expertise. The PMLP was

open to a degree of tutor dependence, and success depended on the degree of 'buy-in' from school leaders and classroom teachers. The professional development courses offered provided valued resources, but one was held in the target language and this was off-putting for one teacher. Short, weekly lessons were felt to be insufficient compared to a more regular and repeated linguistic input. A need was expressed to move beyond a perceived emphasis in the Department of Education and Education and Training Inspectorate on the measurement of success in literacy and numeracy. One principal expressed the view that the curriculum was already very crowded. Budgeting after the close of the PMLP emerged as an issue in two schools.

In the non-PMLP schools the fact that additional languages are not included as a statutory part of the curriculum was mentioned as a disadvantage. A perceived lack of prioritisation by government and society was also seen as a disadvantage. The lack of an Initial Teacher Education qualification incorporating a modern language specialism in Northern Ireland, as well as a dearth of training opportunities were mentioned. Teacher expertise (which was likened to the expertise of a music teacher) in pedagogy and language, together with teacher confidence, were seen as prerequisites for successful provision.

All of the participants, both principals and teachers, in both the PMLP and the non-PMLP schools participating in this strand of the study, argued for the inclusion of additional language learning in the Northern Ireland Curriculum as a statutory requirement. One principal had concerns around achieving equity of provision for all pupils in all schools, and another expressed concerns around how additional language learning would 'fit in' in an already busy curriculum.

Two of the PMLP schools had included additional language learning in their School Development Plans. One had no policy and one school saw languages as part of a wider policy on inclusion. Three of the non-PMLP schools had included additional language learning in their School Development Plans. One school stated that their policy was 'unwritten' and one school had action planning in place also.

Out of the eight participating schools, six expressed a preference for Spanish to be taught in primary schools, citing as factors in this the number of speakers worldwide, the accessibility of its phonetic structure by children, and its economic importance. Five out of the eight schools expressed a preference for French due to its geographical proximity and its importance in post-primary schools. In one school German was preferred due to its economic importance. One school expressed a preference for Mandarin due to the number of speakers, but concerns were expressed about teacher expertise and lack of progression to post-primary school.

The needs highlighted by PMLP schools for the future development of additional language learning in primary schools were: clear direction and leadership from the Department of Education by including it in the Northern Ireland Curriculum, the building of teacher capacity and

Five out of the eight schools expressed a preference for French due to its geographical proximity and its importance in post-primary schools







The majority of the children viewed additional language learning in primary school as useful for employability and travel reasons

resources, the development of links with post-primary schools and a recalibration of focus from literacy and numeracy to elements beyond this, including additional language learning. In non-PMLP schools teachers and principals agreed that additional languages should be included as a statutory part of the curriculum in primary schools, and highlighted the need for teacher development at all levels, including ITE and CPD. Collaboration within Area Learning Communities was suggested as one way forward together with clear guidance material with respect to additional language learning and expected levels of progression.

The majority of children participating in this study spoke English at home, but mentioned a range of other European and non-European languages that they spoke or were learning outside school. The majority of children who participated in the questionnaire survey reported that they enjoyed additional language learning; that it was challenging, that it was useful and that they wanted to continue learning languages in the future. Although the children surveyed mentioned a wide range of languages that they would like to learn, the most frequently mentioned languages were Spanish and French. The majority of the children viewed additional language learning in primary school as useful for employability and travel reasons, but also believed it would help them as they moved to post-primary school. Several pupils saw an advantage in learning an additional language at Key Stage 2 for this reason, and one pupil thought learning an additional language at Key Stage 1 and then dropping it would be a waste of time. The pupils saw a need for additional language learning to be continual in order to be effective, and some expressed concerns over interrupted learning that they had experienced, a lack of progression, and a perceived lack of planning of additional language lessons in school.





- The inclusion of additional language learning as a statutory part of the Northern Ireland Curriculum to afford the opportunities of additional language learning to pupils in all primary schools thus addressing concerns around equity
- The development of levels of progression and other appropriate curricular and cross-curricular guidance for teachers and schools
- The development of age-appropriate resources, including e-resources, to support additional language teaching in primary schools
- The development of a funded specialist qualification in Primary Education with modern languages in Initial Teacher Education
- The development of funded modern languages support in Continuing Professional Development for teachers in collaboration with Initial Teacher Education providers, the Education Authority, and NICILT
- Further funded research into flexible, cross curricular approaches to modern language learning such as CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) and STEM-L (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics with Languages), in order to address concerns raised about space for foreign languages in the primary school timetable
- Further funded research into possible models of collaboration between schools both at primary level and between primary and post-primary schools to ensure progression in learning and to promote a positive transition between Key Stages 2 and 3
- More effective area-based planning to ensure better linkage between the languages offered in primary and post-primary schools.

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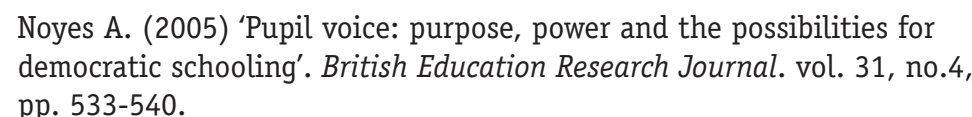
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### A. Letters of Introduction and Consent Slips

### *Principals' Letter of Introduction: Online Questionnaire Survey*

Dear Principal

In order to evaluate current provision for learning a Modern Language in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland, and to inform future improvements, we are conducting a Review of Primary Languages Provision across all primary schools in Northern Ireland. This review is funded by the Northern Ireland Languages Council / Department of Education. The two aims of the review are:

- a) To gather information on the Primary Modern Languages Programme (PMLP) in Northern Ireland and evaluate possible improvements
- b) To map the extent of provision for learning a Modern Language outside the PMLP and make recommendations

The views of primary school principals and teachers are crucial for the development of high quality future provision for learning Modern Languages in our primary schools.

To this end we would request that two short questionnaire surveys be completed: the first by the school principal, and the second by a teacher/coordinator involved in primary languages at your school. The two questionnaire surveys can be accessed and completed online via the links below:

[Link to Principals' survey]

[Link to Teacher / Coordinators' survey]

This review is subject to the highest standards of ethical approval set by Stranmillis University College's Research and Ethics Committee. In order to comply with these standards and to ensure the well-being of all involved in this study, we would be grateful if you could return the attached form to indicate your consent for the school to participate in this research within the next ten working days. Please note that all information gathered will be treated as confidential, will be used for the purposes of research only and that no school, teacher or pupil will be named in any research findings unless written permission has been sought in advance.

Yours faithfully

Dr Sharon Jones (on behalf of the Research Team)

Dr Sharon Jones (Principal Investigator)

Dr Richard Greenwood

Dr Noel Purdy

Ms Emer McGuckian (research assistant)







### SCHOOL CONSENT FORM (Pupils' Questionnaire)

School name: \_\_\_\_\_

Principal name (print) \_\_\_\_\_

Principal name (signature): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Please highlight the relevant option.

A. I agree to the school taking part in the Review of Primary Languages Pupils' Questionnaire

☐

B. I do not agree to the school taking part in the Review of Primary Languages Pupils' Questionnaire.

☐

### Information for Parents and Guardians

Dear Parent / Guardian,

In order to find out more about current provision for learning Modern Languages in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland, and consider how to make future improvements, we are conducting a Review of Primary Languages Provision across all primary schools in Northern Ireland. This project is funded by the Northern Ireland Languages Council / the Department of Education.

In order to help us understand the views of primary school pupils about learning Modern Languages we would invite you to grant permission for your child to complete a short questionnaire under the supervision of the class teacher.

The anonymous information gathered from the questionnaire will be held in a secure room at Stranmillis University College, accessible only to the research team. All information will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation. No names or photographs of children or schools will appear in any reports or publications arising from this research without written consent. You can let us know, without explanation, if you wish to withdraw your child's involvement from the study at any time.

Yours faithfully,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr Sharon Jones (on behalf of the Research Team)  
Dr Richard Greenwood  
Dr Noel Purdy  
Ms Emer McGuckian (research assistant)  
\_\_\_\_\_





### *Information for Parents and Guardians*

Dear Parent / Guardian,

In order to find out more about current provision for learning Modern Languages in Primary Schools in Northern Ireland, and consider how to make future improvements, we are conducting a Review of Primary Languages Provision across all primary schools in Northern Ireland. This project is funded by the Northern Ireland Languages Council / the Department of Education.

In order to help us understand the views of primary school pupils about learning Modern Languages we would invite you to grant permission for your child to take part in a short group discussion in school with an experienced researcher from Stranmillis University College. The discussion will take place in school and will last approximately one hour.

The anonymous information gathered from the group discussion will be digitally recorded and transcribed. After transcription, the digital recording will be deleted. All electronic data will be held on a secure PC in a secure room at Stranmillis University College, accessible only to the research team. All information will be processed in accordance with data protection legislation. No names or photographs of children or schools will appear in any reports or publications arising from this research without written consent. You can let us know, without explanation, if you wish to withdraw your child's involvement from the study at any time.

Yours faithfully,

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Dr Sharon Jones (on behalf of the Research Team)  
Dr Richard Greenwood  
Dr Noel Purdy  
Ms Emer McGuckian (research assistant)

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### *Pupil Focus Group Schedule of Questions*

1. What languages do you speak at home?
2. What languages do you speak at school?
3. What languages do you learn outside school?
4. Have you visited a country where people did not speak English? Where?
5. How do you feel about learning a new language? Why?
6. How hard/easy it is easy to learn another language?
7. How useful is it to speak more than one language?
8. Do you think all Primary School Pupils should learn another language? Why?
9. Would you like to continue learning language(s) in the future? If yes, what languages would you like to learn?





## *Semi-structured Interviews Schedule of Questions*

### **PMLP Principals and Teachers**

#### **General**

1. How important is language learning for children in Primary School in Northern Ireland? Why?
2. What are the benefits of language learning for pupils?
3. What are the challenges for pupils?
4. What are the benefits of language teaching and learning for  
a) teachers b) schools?
5. What are the challenges of language teaching and learning for  
a) teachers b) schools?

#### **Current Provision**

6. How was the PMLP implemented in your school?
7. What were the advantages of the PMLP? For a) pupils b) teachers  
c) your school
8. What were the disadvantages of the PMLP? For a) pupils  
b) teachers c) your school
9. During the PMLP (2007-2015) did your school work in partnership  
with other organisations to promote languages/international  
awareness in your school?
10. What current provision does your school provide?
11. Does your school a policy regarding languages?

#### **Future Provision**

12. Are languages included in your school development plan?
13. Describe the professional and personal development opportunities  
offered to you/your staff by the PMLP
14. What are your current professional and personal development  
needs?
15. Do you think that learning a second language should be included  
in the Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum? If yes, which  
language(s) do you think should be included?
16. What elements do you think need to be in place for a school to be  
successful in primary language teaching and learning?
17. How do you think languages should be developed in primary  
schools?



## *Semi-structured Interviews Schedule of Questions*

### **Non-PMLP Principals and Teachers**

#### **General**

1. How important is language learning for children in Primary School in Northern Ireland? Why?
2. What are the benefits of language learning for pupils?
3. What are the challenges of language learning for pupils?
4. What are the benefits of language teaching and learning for  
a) teachers b) schools?
5. What are the challenges of language teaching and learning for  
a) teachers b) schools?

#### **Current Provision**

6. Please describe current language provision in your school.
7. What are the advantages of this model?
8. Do you work in partnership with other organisations to promote  
languages/international awareness in your school?
9. Does your school a policy regarding languages?

#### **Future Provision**

10. Are languages included in your school development plan?
11. Which languages related professional and personal development  
opportunities have been offered to you/your staff) since 2007?
12. What are your current professional and personal development  
needs?
13. Do you think that learning a second language should be included  
in the Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum? If yes, which  
language(s) do you think should be included?
14. What elements do you think need to be in place for a school to be  
successful in primary language teaching and learning?
15. How do you think languages should be developed in primary  
schools?





## Learning about Languages

### Pupil Questionnaire (Paper Survey)

1. What age are you? .....

2. Are you a boy or a girl? .....

3. Which language(s) do you speak at home?

English ☐ Arabic ☐  
 Irish ☐ Mandarin ☐  
 Polish ☐  
 Other (tells us which language(s) below) ☐

4. Which language(s) do you learn at school?

Irish ☐ Latin ☐  
 Spanish ☐ Mandarin ☐  
 French ☐ Arabic ☐  
 German ☐  
 Other (tell us which language(s) below) ☐

5. Do you learn any language(s) outside school?

Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, which language(s)?

Irish ☐ Spanish ☐  
 French ☐ German ☐  
 Latin ☐ Mandarin ☐  
 Arabic ☐  
 Other (tell us which language below) ☐

6. Have you visited a country where people don't speak English?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Where?

7. How do you feel about learning a new language? Be honest!

I really enjoy it ☐ I enjoy it ☐  
 I don't know ☐ I don't enjoy it ☐  
 I don't enjoy it at all ☐

Why?







Difficult 

Very easy ☐

## Why?

## 9. Learning a new language is hard

Strongly Agree ☐

Agree ☐

Disagree ☐

Strongly Disagree ☐

Why?

10. How useful do you think it is to speak more than one language?

Really useful 

Useful 

Not useful ☐

Pointless 

Why?

11. Do you think all Primary School pupils should learn a new language?

Yes ☐

No ☐

Why?

12. Would you like to continue to learning languages in the future?

Yes ☐

No ☐

## Why?

13. If yes, which language(s) would you like to learn?

I would like to learn .....

## Why?

**Thank you for answering our questions!**





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