BAAL REPORT ***Primary Languages Policy in England***

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Thanks to an award from the BAAL Applied Linguistics Support Fund, the Research in Primary Languages Network (RiPL [www.ripl.uk](http://www.ripl.uk)) convened a Policy Summit at the British Academy on 23rd November 2018. Its purpose was to bring together key stakeholders to evaluate the implementation of the 2014 statutory requirement to teach a foreign language (FL) in primary schools in England and to share priorities for future development. The Summit brought together invited representatives from a wide range of stakeholders[[1]](#footnote-1), including policy makers, practitioners and academics, and took place according to the Chatham House Rule. Briefing papers were circulated in advance.

The Policy Summit took place at a time-critical juncture when the first cohort of primary school children to have studied a foreign language from age 7 made the transition to secondary school.

During the first part of the day, contributors presented short evidence-based position papers on current practice and provision, current research, inspection findings, national statistics and survey returns to identify the enabling and disabling factors currently affecting the implementation of curriculum reform in primary schools.

Presentations were grouped into three panels which explored i) policy and younger language learning ii) implementation challenges and solutions and iii) school-based explorations of provision and practice. Discussions focused on primary teaching and learning research; inspection evidence; curriculum planning across primary/secondary; transition; professional development; expectations; monitoring and assessment; practitioner experience.

The second part was solution-focussed, and began with an overview of the day’s observations, followed by comments from an invited external panel comprising researchers, language advocates, school leadership and language consultancy. The plenary discussion addressed issues from delegates submitted electronically beforehand, as well as questions from the floor.

The summit conveners concluded by summarising key points which had arisen during the day. These formed the basis of a 24-page authoritative report ‘*White Paper: Primary Languages Policy in England – the Way Forward*’ reflecting the views of attendees who were invited to comment on drafts, and incorporating research evidence. Published on 5 March 2019, the White Paper describes the current national context:

“The principal problems in schools relate to time allocation, teacher subject knowledge and language proficiency, limited access to professional development and a lack of shared and agreed understanding of pupil progress at the point of transfer from primary to secondary schools. Given the central importance of subject knowledge to good teaching, the variability of initial teacher training in subject knowledge development is a cause of concern. The current infrequency of Ofsted inspection of primary languages is a further cause of concern.” (p. 9).

Lessons from research into primary language learning and implications for practice were then summarised:

i. During much of middle childhood children learn mostly implicitly and need rich and plentiful input for learning to take place: sufficient time needs to be allocated;

ii. Enjoyable activities should capitalise on emergent learning strategies and very active cognitive development;

iii. Links with L1 and home languages for both monolingual and EAL children should be strengthened as strong early L1 literacy skills are associated with higher FL attainment;

iv. Progress motivates: clear planned progression is essential to boost motivation and increase uptake at KS4;

v. Teaching time, teacher language proficiency, and teaching approach affect pupil progress: access to high quality initial teacher training and continuing professional development is crucial;

vi. Teaching approaches should acknowledge the linguistic and cognitive skills that multilingual children bring, as the percentage of EAL pupils is steadily increasing.

Building, therefore, on shared understandings of the current primary FL landscape, the concluding section of the White Paper presented ten recommendations towards a sustainable implementation strategy:

1. **Time allocation** at least one hour per week, a non-statutory minimum of 140 hours over KS2;
2. Government-funded **professional development** for primary teachers, strengthening primary language subject knowledge, pedagogical understanding and language proficiency;
3. **Curriculum planning**: non-statutory guidance on what children should know/be able to do by the end of Key Stage 2;
4. **Transition**: strengthen primary-secondary collaboration; provide receiving schools with a clear statement of curriculum content and learner linguistic outcomes at the point of transfer;
5. **Assessment and reporting**: agree a nationally recognized benchmark by the age of transfer from KS2 to KS3;
6. Develop effective use of **digital technology** to support learning, training and reporting; develop and pilot an e-folio;
7. **School accountability**: Ofsted should include a focus on primary languages, gathering evidence of intent, implementation and impact;
8. **School leadership**: Develop effective partnerships between senior leadership and governors to strengthen accountability and improve coherent and structured progression;
9. **Strategic role of research**: a focus on the implementation of primary languages policy in the next round of social research aims, to garner high quality evidence to further inform policy and practice;
10. Create a **National Taskforce for Primary Languages** (NTPL) to support school-led improvement in the teaching of primary languages, future language learning at KS3 and potentially increased uptake at KS4.

Policy Summit evaluations showed that both researchers and education stakeholders valued this unique opportunity to share knowledge and develop deeper understandings of issues surrounding primary FL policy implementation. The White Paper dissemination strategy includes press releases, and presentations throughout 2019 at practitioner and academic conferences. Two publications are planned aimed at both national and international audiences. The RiPL team are organising additional public engagement activities and impact events to support further awareness-raising of the White Paper recommendations.

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The White Paper is available at: <http://www.ripl.uk/policy/>

<https://twitter.com/riplnetwork>

<https://www.facebook.com/theriplnetwork>

1. All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages; Association for Language Learning; Association of School and College Leaders; British Academy; British Association for Applied Linguistics; British Council; ; Business in the Community; Confucius Institute; Department for Education; Education Endowment Fund; Education Policy Institute; Goethe Institut; Hackney Learning Trust and the Primary Schools Network; Independent Schools’ Modern Languages Association; Harris Federation (ITE); Institut Français; King’s College, London; Manchester Metropolitan University; National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education; OFSTED; Ofqual; Our Lady of Mount Carmel R C Primary School, Tameside; Rushey Mead Educational Trust; Spanish Embassy Education Office; Speak to the Future; Springfield Primary School, Sale, Trafford; St Paul’s C of E Nursery & Primary, Brighton; The Primary Schools Network; The TENAX Schools Trust; University of Cambridge; University of Essex; University of Oxford; University of Reading; University of Southampton. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)