



## Community languages, supplementary schools and the National Language Strategy at KS2

Research undertaken on behalf of Lambeth Education, Inclusion and Standards Division  
by The Resource Unit *for* Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools  
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*"Every child should have the opportunity throughout Key Stage 2 to study a foreign language and develop their interest in the culture of other nations."* Languages for All : Languages for Life (DfES, 2002)

Lambeth is one of the most diverse boroughs in London; 38% of its population is from minority ethnic background and 157 different languages are spoken in Lambeth schools. As a result the Borough boasts more than 30 supplementary schools teaching languages as varied as Portuguese, Vietnamese, Kurdish, Amharic, Somali, Mandarin or Cantonese. From an early stage Lambeth Council has showed an interest in working with these community schools. In 2000 the LEA commissioned a report to study supplementary education in the Lambeth EAZ and to identify ways to promote partnership between supplementary schools and mainstream providers. In 2004 the EMA Team produced a Directory of supplementary schools to publicise the work of community schools in and around the Borough. Lambeth has thus recognised that supplementary schools represent a great resource that is still to be utilised, particularly in light of the new DfES emphasis on community involvement.

With this in mind and in preparation for the Primary MFL Conference, Lambeth LEA commissioned the Resource Unit for Supplementary and Mother Tongue Schools to carry out research into the place of community languages and the possible role of supplementary schools in the delivery of the National Language Strategy (NLS) at primary level. This paper summarises the key findings of the research, presents examples of good practice and formulates some recommendations.

### **Background**

The National Language Strategy gives some leeway and flexibility to schools and LEAs as to its implementation. The Strategy does not provide any specific guidance on which languages are to be taught as Primary Modern Foreign Languages (PMFL). This therefore leaves scope for the introduction of non-European languages, in particular community languages. Community languages (CL), as opposed to MFL, include any languages commonly spoken by minority ethnic groups in the UK. The European Commission Review on Foreign Languages in Primary Education<sup>1</sup> states "it is appropriate to favour foreign languages widely spoken locally." It therefore seems relevant to look at the place of community languages in the NLS at primary level, and in addition to this, to consider the contribution that supplementary schools, as representatives of different linguistic communities, can make within the framework of the Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> Foreign languages in primary and pre-school education, European Commission (2004)  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/foreign\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/lang/key/foreign_en.html)

There is no official definition of supplementary schools; they vary in nature, size and content. In general they provide out-of-school-hours educational opportunities for children and young people; they focus on core subjects such as history, culture and mother tongues of the different minority communities; they are run by local groups.<sup>2</sup> The positive contribution of supplementary schools has been acknowledged by the DfES<sup>3</sup> and the QCA; a number of LEAs fund and support them very actively. Their demonstrated benefits include increased pupil motivation and self-esteem, maintenance of the mother tongue and parental involvement.<sup>4</sup>

The NLS leaves some flexibility as to the delivery of language lessons. It states that PMFL “can be delivered by the class teacher ... or a language specialist ... [or] another person with strong language skills, who might work alongside a class teacher.”<sup>5</sup> The Primary Strategy on Excellence and Enjoyment<sup>6</sup> further encourages primary schools to “be creative and innovative” and states that “good primary schools know that working with parents and the community is vital to helping children get the best of learning.” In view of this and of the new agenda for extended schools, one can easily see where supplementary schools can be utilised to assist in the delivery of the NLS with a focus on CL.

### Methodology

We contacted a number of LEAs across the UK including all key stage 2 Language Pathfinder LEAs. The KS2 Language Pathfinders programme was launched in 2003 by the DfES. It provides funding to 19 LEAs across the UK to pilot the introduction of MFL at KS2.

When contacting LEA officers we asked:

- whether officers were aware of community languages being taught in primary schools in their area,
- whether supplementary schools and supplementary school staff were involved in the delivery of languages at KS2,
- about the perception of community languages in LEAs and mainstream schools,
- about the perception of supplementary schools in LEAs and mainstream schools.

We analysed policy documents provided by LEAs.

We approached a number of primary schools in Lambeth and further afield that organised projects in community languages, to find out about the aims of the projects and their outcomes.

We spoke to a number of supplementary schools and community language tutors in Lambeth and Greater London to find out whether they had staff working in primary schools. We also asked about their views on partnerships between mainstream and supplementary providers in the delivery of the NLS.

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<sup>2</sup> QCA definition, see [www.qca.org.uk/10007\\_10032.html](http://www.qca.org.uk/10007_10032.html)

<sup>3</sup> Cabinet Office “Schools Plus” paper (2000), p.38: “The DfEE should ensure that funding is available to promote supplementary schools to assist them in providing a quality experience for young people from ethnic minority communities.” See also S. Twigg MP at [http://www.nlgn.org.uk/mod\\_media\\_speeches.php?article=13](http://www.nlgn.org.uk/mod_media_speeches.php?article=13)

<sup>4</sup> [www.qca.org.uk/10007\\_10032.html](http://www.qca.org.uk/10007_10032.html)

<sup>5</sup> [www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/teach.htm](http://www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/teach.htm)

<sup>6</sup> [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/63553](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/63553)

## Findings

- LEAs and schools make a clear distinction between MFL and CL. The former are very much the focus of most of the LEAs, particularly French and Spanish. As a result, CL are considered as an optional subject, and are taught to smaller groups out of school hours, as no place can be made for them on the curriculum. It has however become clear to people involved in community languages and the DfES that this distinction is detrimental, and a general shift to the more inclusive phrases “foreign languages” or “languages” has been adopted by the DfES.
- In general LEAs recognise the importance of community languages and of mother tongue acquisition. However resources are very limited to promote their learning at primary level. Some LEAs have pointed out to us that schools are autonomous and it is up to them to decide what language they introduce and what staff they use. The LEA only retains a coordination role in this matter.
- Interviewees who were involved in CL teaching were very supportive of their introduction in the primary curriculum. They said that the earlier children start to learn their mother tongue, the better results they will achieve in the relevant GCSE. Some pupils find it extremely hard to start learning their language at KS3 or 4.
- A major concern regarding work with the community at large and supplementary schools in particular is the qualification of teachers. The NLS states that PMFL “can be delivered by ... a language specialist ... another person with strong language skills, who might work alongside a class teacher”<sup>7</sup> and “a wide range of individuals [will contribute] to the delivery of the primary entitlement. Native speakers and those with strong language skills within our community have a wide range of expertise.”<sup>8</sup> The DfES research brief on the provision of MFL teaching at KS2 (2004)<sup>9</sup> showed that in 15% of schools that teach FL at KS2, the classes are delivered by parents and volunteers. Moreover 41% of teachers interviewed in a DfES survey<sup>10</sup> said they were not at all confident about teaching PMFL and 9% of those were actually already teaching them. In spite of all this, schools still seem hesitant as to whether they can employ non-qualified teachers to teach languages to their pupils.
- A common example where community languages are used in primary is through bilingual classroom assistants, who support EAL pupils in their learning of the National Curriculum (e.g. St Mary’s Primary and Henry Fawcett Schools in **Lambeth** LEA). In some schools bilingual assistants also teach their mother tongue to children but not within the main curriculum, i.e. out of school hours, where children choose to attend extra classes to learn their language (for example Punjabi in schools in **Coventry** LEA). In some rare cases, this teaching is extended to all pupils including those with English as their first language. In **Lambeth** after school Portuguese classes are taught by Portuguese teachers allocated by the Portuguese Ministry of Education through the Education Department of the Portuguese Consulate.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/teach.htm](http://www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/teach.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Languages for All : Languages for Life (DfES, 2002), p7

<sup>9</sup> The Provision of Foreign Language Learning for Pupils at KS2, DfES Brief RB572 (2004)

<sup>10</sup> [www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/uploads/KS2%20Research%20EXEC%20SUM.doc](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/uploads/KS2%20Research%20EXEC%20SUM.doc)

Some examples of good practice can be mentioned:

- Effective introduction of CL at primary level: a number of LEAs have successfully introduced community languages as part of the primary curriculum. In **Lambeth** Portuguese is being taught as part of the curriculum for Yr3, 4 and 5 at Stockwell Primary School. In **Sheffield** LEA, 3 primary schools introduced Urdu and Somali (alongside Spanish). The languages are exclusively being taught to children from these backgrounds but some children of other origin have also taken part. This initiative is aimed at encouraging children of Pakistani or Somali origin to prepare for accreditation in their mother tongue as early as possible. Local Somali supplementary schools have been engaged in discussions regarding the accreditation of the pupils' language skills. One of the schools taking part in this initiative, Pyebank Church of England Primary School, has also engaged pupils of all backgrounds in taster sessions in Urdu and Somali. The school management described this as a very positive experience that they are looking to develop. It is worth noting that in these cases Somali and Urdu teachers were not all UK qualified but successfully worked in partnership with the class teacher to deliver the lessons. **Liverpool** LEA is looking to pilot the introduction of Arabic in primary schools in the near future.
- Taster sessions organised as part of another area of the curriculum: Hazelwood Junior School (**Enfield** LEA) has close links with the local Greek community and make their premises available to a Greek supplementary school on Saturdays. As part of a cycle on Ancient Greece the school invited a Greek teacher from a local supplementary school to introduce (Modern) Greek to Year 3 pupils. At Churchfield Primary School (**Enfield** LEA) Turkish was taught to pupils including non-Turkish pupils. At Coleraine Park Primary (**Haringey** LEA) taster sessions of Mandarin Chinese were organised around Chinese New Year. In general, taster sessions seem to focus on raising awareness of linguistic diversity rather than on actual language acquisition. However they provide a good starting point, and following successful taster sessions, some schools have decided to introduce the language as part of the curriculum.
- In **Richmond upon Thames**, the teaching of community languages is organised in primary (and secondary schools) as part of family learning and takes place out of school hours.
- The **Tower Hamlets** experience: Stewart Headlam School has strong links with the local Bengali community. Susan Brown (EAL Coordinator) said<sup>11</sup> "the school has always considered it a priority to expose children to their mother tongue." They host a Bengali supplementary school in their premises after school hours. They have a Bengali music teacher who teaches music through Bengali songs. They also hosted a project that produced dual language books for EAL pupils and bilingual adults are regularly called in to read to the children in the different languages. In his article *Fitting a CL in the curriculum* J. Uddin<sup>12</sup> (Tower Hamlets LEA) recommends liaising "with community schools [to] find an appropriate person with teaching experience to do the teaching."
- Woodnook Primary School in **Lancashire** developed the "talk partner scheme". Pupils who speak the same language are allowed to use it to discuss classroom activities in class; then when speaking to the class they revert to English. The school also had stories translated in

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<sup>11</sup> [www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/pdfs/Early\\_mother\\_tongue\\_learning.pdf](http://www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/pdfs/Early_mother_tongue_learning.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> [www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/pdfs/Fitting\\_a\\_community\\_language.pdf](http://www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/pdfs/Fitting_a_community_language.pdf)

different languages for infant classes and pulled in bilingual assistants to read them to the children. This experience has shown that some pupils with English as a first language picked up words in other languages.<sup>13</sup>

- Shaftesbury Junior School (Leicester LEA). A qualified teacher taught Gujarati in both the local Gujarati supplementary school and at Shaftesbury School. He described his experience as very positive and said that starting the language at primary age helped some children achieve A's or B's in GCSE Gujarati at age 12.
- Sheffield LEA organised training sessions for supplementary school teachers which were delivered by mainstream teachers. They also arranged for supplementary school teachers to observe lessons in the mainstream.
- In general supplementary school teachers interviewed are keen to be involved in the teaching of languages in primary schools.

### Policy documents

As part of our research we asked LEAs for their policy documents on PMFL. We discovered that not all LEAs have policy documents on languages at KS2 and those who do rarely mention CL. We did find some interesting examples of good practice.

Oldham LEA *Modern Foreign Languages at Key Stage 2 Pathfinder Bid* (May 2003)

"By September 2010 all pupils in Oldham primary schools will have in-school access to regular high quality teaching of French, German, Bangla or Urdu depending on each school's needs ... The community language aspect is of particular importance to us as it reflects a locally identified priority. We would seek to involve class teachers and teaching assistants ... We would like to experiment with adults other than teachers delivering some of the language sessions."

Brighton and Hove LEA *Modern Foreign Languages in Brighton & Hove* (January 2005)

"make good use of native speakers from within their communities to support the development of MFL curriculum."

Lancashire LEA *Proposal for Modern Foreign Languages at KS2 Pathfinder*

"offer a diversity of experimental models for primary MFL development, which respond to, draw and build on local contexts and partnerships ... the project will explore ways in which members of the community can contribute to the teaching of primary MFL and also ways of harnessing expertise already in schools ... the project will also obviate the need to prescribe the study of any one particular language in order to achieve progression."

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<sup>13</sup> The Times Educational Supplement, 26.11.2004

## Recommendations

Based on the research findings set out above, the Resource Unit can make the following recommendations to Lambeth LEA.

We recommend that they ...

- Draft and publish a policy document on language teaching which is sufficiently open so as to include CL.
- Remove the distinction between MFL and CL and make it clear that the NLS requirements include CL and are not exclusively MFL.
- As set out in the NLS,<sup>14</sup> provide development and training opportunities for non-UK qualified teachers and provide teaching experience to allow them to use their language skills in schools.
- Find out about the children's linguistic background to define the focus of the language provision. Some schools have developed questionnaires for parents enquiring about the languages the parents would like their children to learn. They then approached local supplementary schools to see if they could deliver some of the lessons. In fact, the NLS and NACELL recognise that "it is important that children have a good model to copy so the teacher must be confident in his or her use of the spoken language"<sup>15</sup>
- Foster links between mainstream teachers and supplementary teachers. Encourage the exchange of teachers and of knowledge on pupils and subjects.
- Encourage schools to introduce primary MFL not as a bolt-on extra but as an integrated part of a rich and coherent curriculum.<sup>16</sup>
- Promote the quality of supplementary education through training and clear quality frameworks.

## Conclusion

The Borough of Lambeth has a track record in supporting community groups and supplementary schools. Lambeth primary schools also work in close contact with the community. We therefore strongly encourage the Borough to further explore, develop and utilise the community's great resources and actively foster partnership working between the supplementary and mainstream sector, particularly in the framework of the NLS at primary level.

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<sup>14</sup> Languages for All : Languages for Life (DfES, 2002), p7 "... develop new training opportunities for Teaching a Foreign Language to support people with language skills, including community language skills, to gain additional teaching skills and recognition to work with teachers in classrooms."

<sup>15</sup> [www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/teach.htm](http://www.nacell.org.uk/bestpractice/teach.htm)

<sup>16</sup> [www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/DSP\\_nationallanguages\\_activity.cfm](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/languages/DSP_nationallanguages_activity.cfm)

**Forward comments, reactions, suggestions on this paper to**  
Amy Thompson, Coordinator for MFL,  
Lambeth Education, Inclusion and Standards Division,  
0207 926 9689  
[athompson@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:athompson@lambeth.gov.uk)

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Lambeth Education  
Ethnic Minority Achievement Team  
International House  
Canterbury Crescent  
London SW9 7QE

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