

The Spanish First Language Initiative

Evaluation Report

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 **Hackney**

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Organisations which have supported the Spanish First Language Initiative:

Hackney Education and the chairs of the Spanish Steering Group: Martin Buck, Sue Roberts and Anton Francic

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Parkwood Primary School: Raquel Tola Rego and Paul Thomas

Hackney Spanish teachers

Hackney Headteachers

Consultants: Anushka Sonpal and Bernadette Clinton

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The Hackney Spanish First Language Initiative

Final evaluation report

1 Introduction

The teaching of a foreign language, either modern or ancient, became a statutory requirement for Key Stage 2 pupils in September 2014 (Department for Education, 2013). In Hackney, Headteachers had chosen Spanish as the focus for this statutory requirement at a meeting in 2013, as some primary schools were already teaching Spanish as a second language. The initiative was overseen by the Hackney Learning Trust, responsible for education in Hackney, and had three objectives:

1. To implement and promote the teaching of Spanish in all primary and secondary schools in Hackney.
2. To ensure a coherent and smooth transition from primary to secondary school.
3. To enable pupils to attain high standards in Spanish.

Research into the primary languages policy resulted in a White Paper (Holmes and Myles, 2019), which reviewed the implementation nationally of the statutory requirement to teach a foreign language throughout Key Stage 2. Hackney Learning Trust has waited a further year to evaluate the implementation of the Spanish First Language project, in order to include data from secondary schools concerning Year 7 pupils arriving in September 2018 and September 2019. This evaluation report has six objectives:

1. To highlight the extent to which Spanish is being taught and learned in both primary and secondary schools in Hackney.
2. To highlight opportunities and barriers for coherent and smooth transition from primary to secondary schools and to identify effective practice.
3. To assess teachers' development and retention.
4. To assess pupils' attainment in Spanish at primary level and an initial cohort at secondary.
5. To describe the overall environment for language learning, including extra-curricular opportunities.
6. To gain teachers' views on the overall project and the impact it has had both in terms of Spanish learning and of wider motivation.

These six objectives are addressed in this report, and the findings are compared to the findings and recommendations of the White Paper to consider whether the Spanish First Language Project offers an example of good practice for implementation of national primary language policy.

Some data were collected through face-to-face group interviews. However, as a result of the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of the data was collected through online questionnaires. Given the circumstances, there was not the opportunity, therefore, to ask participants to elaborate on some of their responses in detail.

2 Background and development of the project

The Spanish First Language project was initiated by Martin Buck in 2013, in his role as Head of Secondary Service for Hackney Learning Trust. He was concerned about developing a closer relationship between primary and secondary schools in Hackney, so that pupils would be able to transition more successfully between schools than was then happening. Before 2010, fewer than 30% of parents wanted to send their children in Hackney primary schools to a Hackney secondary school, at a time when a number of secondaries were struggling and were subject to the government's policy of academisation. At the same time a local secondary school Headteacher told Martin of his desire to improve language teaching in his school; he had observed that pupils coming into Year 7 had little or no foreign language development and wanted to give them a much better experience of language learning. These two concerns developed into the Spanish First Language Initiative.

Spanish was chosen as the target language rather than French or German because it is regarded as "a world language", and is deemed by some teachers of Modern Foreign Languages to be more accessible for learners, particularly at the earlier stages of acquisition and particularly when learning the language orally. A steering committee was set up with representation from primary schools, a secondary school Headteacher, and Bernadette Clinton and Anushka Sonpal, languages specialists employed by Hackney Learning Trust to oversee and implement the project. The aim was, over a two to four year period, to persuade all primary schools to begin systematically introducing Spanish teaching for their Key Stage 2 pupils.

Initially, it was decided to trial the initiative with a small number of schools, and seven enthusiastic primary schools found time in their crowded curriculum for Spanish teaching. They found a specialist language teacher to deliver the lessons, supported by a training programme for school staff run by Hackney Learning Trust. However, Martin Buck commented that Hackney Learning Trust had to take "a very slow-burn approach" towards involving all schools in the Spanish First Language Initiative, as persuading school leaders that the project had value was not always easy and relied on goodwill. In

one school, a senior member of staff led the work, supported by the languages specialists at Hackney Learning Trust along with other staff, and this made a real difference to the project's implementation.

There were also a small number of secondary teachers heading up Modern Foreign Languages departments who were already meeting as a network in 2013, who started to find time and support from their Headteachers to develop their links with primary feeder schools, and this was key in developing the inter-school relationships that would support a more positive transition experience for pupils, meeting Martin Buck's initial desire for the project.

Secondary schools were valued by primary schools for their expertise and began to invest time and resources in building a partnership with their feeder primaries. By 2014, a stable steering group had been established, with four primary schools and one secondary school as members of the group committed to the project; the secondary school was a specialist language college which also helped with prioritising the Spanish First Language Initiative. The statutory requirement to teach a foreign language in Key Stage 2 from September 2014 helped to build interest in the project, and all but one primary schools in Hackney were teaching some Spanish from this time.

However, numbers of secondary schools involved in the initiative did not begin to rise until the 2015/16 school year, really picking up by 2016/17. By 2017, three quarters of secondary schools were involved in the project in some manner, along with a similar proportion of primary schools. Not all of these primaries were teaching Spanish to every year group consistently, but they were teaching a substantial quantity and quality of Spanish in at least two year groups, if not three, at this time. By 2018, 45 primary schools were teaching Spanish to year 6 and transferring data to their secondary schools, and by 2020 this number had risen to 51 primary schools, out of a total of 58 primary schools in the borough (Hackney Learning Trust, 2019). The three schools which were already teaching Modern Hebrew were not involved in the Spanish First Language Initiative and several new primary schools did not yet have Year 6 pupils on roll.

In addition, almost 90% of parents of pupils in Hackney primary schools wanted to send their children to Hackney secondary schools by 2017, showing how the culture in the borough had changed over the period of the Spanish First Language Initiative. It would be unrealistic to claim that this culture-change was as a result of the project, but it is probable that it made a positive contribution towards greater connections between primary and secondary schools, particularly in the connections made between schools during transition.

3 Primary schools

The statutory requirement to teach a foreign language at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 states the learning aims but does not set out how those aims should be achieved or how much time should be dedicated to achieving them (Department for Education, 2013). The White Paper found that the time allocated to the teaching of a foreign language in primary schools was 'often irregular or eroded by other priorities' such as Year 6 SATs, with normal allocation amounting to only 30 minutes per week or '2% of available curriculum time', in comparison with the OECD average of 4% (Holmes and Myles, 2019, p.7). The HLT Spanish First Language Initiative stipulates a minimum of 45 minutes language learning per week for primary schools, although the schools themselves are free to decide on how that time is allocated.

Initial commitment to the Spanish First Language Initiative varied between primary schools. Some immediately introduced Spanish across KS2 which has had a strong influence on Spanish teaching in secondary schools from early on in the project. Others began with Year 3, with provision growing across KS2 as that first year group progressed through the school. Most primary schools are now teaching Spanish throughout KS2, in line with the statutory guidance. However, practice varies between schools: in some, teachers employed by the school teach Spanish in addition to their other responsibilities, even where they are not fluent Spanish speakers, while other schools have employed peripatetic Spanish language specialists to deliver their Spanish curriculum. Both of these options have associated strengths and difficulties.

Teachers who are asked to teach Spanish but do not have strong Spanish language skills themselves seem to feel that they are at a disadvantage in the classroom, and are dependent upon materials provided by Hackney Learning Trust and other providers. Sue Roberts, current chair of the Spanish First Language Initiative steering group and secondary school representative for Hackney Learning Trust, said that one of the aims of the project has been to 'skill up' teachers so that they have the confidence to teach Spanish, regardless of whether they have language skills or not.

One teacher, a permanent member of staff but a Drama specialist rather than a languages specialist, commented in March 2020 that although Key Stage 2 were supposed to have one 60 minute lesson per week, staff changes had resulted in classes being split so that Year 4 were only having 30 minutes per week, and Year 6 had had no Spanish teaching since before the Christmas holidays. She was also teaching during PPA time, with some pupils taken out of her lessons for intervention groups, and intervention groups even taking place in the same classroom while she was trying to teach. She was struggling to meet the requirements of the Spanish curriculum in a school that clearly had some staffing issues, and was planning to leave the school imminently, potentially leaving it without a

Spanish teacher at all. Although this seems an extreme case, it demonstrates that without a full commitment to teaching Spanish to all pupils as part of the project by the school leadership team, delivering the Spanish curriculum can be particularly difficult.

Peripatetic teachers have different difficulties in meeting the requirements of the Spanish First Language initiative. Often these teachers are native Spanish speakers, and therefore do not have the language difficulties that are evident for some non-specialist teachers. However, their relationship with the schools is different, and some report that they have been forgotten about in some of the schools' plans, such as arriving to teach lessons to a year group who have gone out of school on a visit: this can emphasise the loneliness of not being a permanent member of school staff mentioned by several teachers.

However, Sue Roberts sees the use of these peripatetic teachers as both positive and pragmatic for primary schools. She suggested that just as secondary school teachers move between classes, so do peripatetic Spanish teachers, and they still get to know the groups well through regular weekly or fortnightly contact. There has been a lot of training of teachers and teaching assistants to develop their language teaching skills. However, the use of external teachers who are native Spanish speakers, 80% of whom have QTS (Qualified Teacher Status), ensures that pupils are well taught. This also enables schools to release teachers for PPA (Planning, Preparation and Assessment) time, although some teachers remain in class to learn alongside their pupils. In addition, good peripatetic teachers can be shared between primaries, ensuring similar provision.

The allocated teaching time for Spanish varies between primary schools and within a school, depending upon the age of the pupils and the timing of the lesson within the school day. In Key Stage 2, most pupils have one lesson of Spanish per week. However, this lesson varies from 30 minutes to 75 minutes long and can be disrupted by other school events and priorities, as noted in the White Paper (Holmes and Myles, 2019). By year 5 and 6, many pupils have an hour of Spanish a week, and of those who have less time than Hackney Learning Trust's recommended 45 minutes per week, some also teach other subjects such as Art through Spanish, further extending pupils' use and knowledge of the language (see section 6). Most primary schools involved in the project are now teaching Spanish throughout Key Stage 2.

The data from those schools in Hackney who responded to questionnaires suggest that the target of a minimum of 45 minutes of Spanish per week in Key Stage 2 is not being met across all primary schools, with some schools missing this target because of changing circumstances but others clearly planning for shorter lessons of only 30 to 40 minutes per week. It is not clear whether this scheduling relates to the availability and/or cost of employing specialist language teachers, or is purely the result

of ‘competing priorities’ (Holmes and Myles, 2019, p.13). All Key Stage 2 pupils are, however, receiving some Spanish tuition, and primary schools have been encouraged by Hackney Learning Trust to reinforce this learning on a daily basis as far as possible, through whole staff INSET with many of the schools involved in the initiative.

Some primary schools are also teaching Spanish in Key Stage 1 and even in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), with one school beginning Spanish language lessons with 2 year olds. Here, lessons are shorter. In EYFS, children receive between 15 and 30 minutes of teaching per week, which according to one teacher is ‘informal’. In KS1, pupils receive between 30 and 45 minutes of teaching per week. In one school pupils only receive 15 minutes of teaching per week in KS1, although they also use some Spanish in their Art lessons, as with older pupils. When these very young children reach secondary school, they may have had up to nine years of Spanish lessons of some form. Spanish will therefore be a consistent part of their school culture, and Sue Roberts refers to it as a core subject alongside English, Mathematics and Science within the borough.

Support from Hackney Learning Trust is clearly important, particularly where teachers are non-specialist language teachers: ‘the guidance [...] has helped a lot by explaining what they children need to be able to do at the different levels and how they develop their language learning’. The structure offered by Hackney Learning Trust has made clear what pupils should be learning: ‘when the objectives are clear the teachers know what to teach’, and the assessment programme has ‘provided a consistent way of assessing children’s levels across the schools’.

The primary curriculum was designed by Bernadette Clinton in association with primary and secondary teachers but was intentionally *not* designed around progression towards GCSE examinations. The aim was to teach Spanish as ‘a language rather than a subject’, where teachers could be creative and design enjoyable lessons using language that would be useful, including topics such as cooking and art. Sue Roberts commented that some of the best practice in primary schools includes the use of ‘a few Spanish phrases’ in multiple other subject areas, such as PE, which means that all the staff are learning some Spanish alongside their pupils and acknowledging that Spanish is a positive part of their school’s culture.

4 Secondary schools

Secondary schools in general have Modern Foreign Languages departments that employ specialist language teachers as permanent members of the school staff. Their students therefore benefit from native or fluent Spanish speakers who belong to the school. The way that teaching is carried out, with students moving between classrooms and a more rigid timetable structure, is also beneficial for

language teaching, as it is less likely that other subjects will erode teaching time, as they appear to do for some pupils in primary school. Secondary schools should therefore be able to consolidate and build on their students' varied primary school experiences in a more structured way, so that the students can confidently develop their Spanish language skills.

Lessons in Hackney secondary schools typically last for 55 or 60 minutes. At Key Stage 3, the norm appears to be two lessons per week, rising to three lessons per week at Key Stage 4 and five lessons per week at Key Stage 5. In one school, Year 10 were having four lessons per week, although the teacher stated that he expected that to revert to three per week at the end of the school year, and in another school where lessons are one hour long, Key Stage 4 had two lessons per week but Key Stage 5 had five lessons per week plus an additional hour of conversation skills. In one new school, where currently there are only students in Years 7, 8 and 9, the teacher fully expected the teaching of Spanish to be taught throughout Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 once the school has a full cohort of students.

Spanish is now the first foreign language taught in Hackney secondary schools, whereas previously French was the dominant foreign language taught across the borough. Sue Roberts commented that the focus on teaching Spanish in secondary schools has made Hackney feel like 'a Spanish borough', suggesting that the embedding of a language in schools across a borough can affect the whole community. The students who have received four years of teaching of Spanish in primary school as part of the Spanish First Language Project are currently only in Year 9, but there is evidence that the Hackney Learning Trust initiative has resulted in changes in attitude towards and enthusiasm for Spanish as pupils progress. One Head of Department of Modern Foreign Languages in a Hackney secondary school commented, in response to an online questionnaire,

Our GCSE groups have seen a real surge in uptake of Spanish. The impact of the programme can be clearly seen further up in the school – uptake for Spanish GCSE compared to French has surged, we now have 4 Spanish groups and 1 French group which is a complete reversal of what it was a few years ago.

The statistics in Table 1 demonstrate how Spanish GCSE is growing in Hackney.

Table 1: Hackney GCSE entries for Spanish compared to GCSE entries for French

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Spanish	677	808	1,009	1,213
French	347	403	311	301

(Data provided by Hackney Learning Trust)

In fact, entries for French GCSE have not decreased across Hackney as much as the teacher quoted above suggests, and entries for Spanish GCSE have nearly doubled. The number of students studying

a language to GCSE has therefore increased significantly, suggesting that the embedding of a language in primary schools can lead to increased language learning across all key stages in secondary school: the change in school culture and provision is also being reflected at A level, shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Hackney A level entries for Spanish compared to French

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Spanish	32	40	33	62
French	15	12	10	26

(Data provided by Hackney Learning Trust)

While A level entries nationally have dropped, Hackney is ‘bucking that trend’, according to Sue Roberts, with numbers going up even though these students are too old to have participated in the primary project. The statistics show a similar doubling to the GCSE figures, along with a significant rise in French A level students, showing that languages have become more attractive to students. Once students who have received four or more years of language teaching in primary school take GCSEs and A levels, the continued tracking of these statistics is expected to demonstrate continued heightened interest in the study of languages. Whether the numbers continue to increase or plateau remains to be seen, but they are not expected to decrease while there is such strong support for languages teaching within the borough.

5 Transition

Successful transition from primary school to secondary school has been seen as an important aspect of the Spanish First Language Initiative since its inception in 2013. When interviewed for this evaluation report, Sue Roberts commented, ‘In order to really make [the project] useful it has to have data which has to be used by the secondary school, otherwise it hasn’t got that continuity, it hasn’t got that long-term impact’, and from her perspective, the number of primary schools sending reliable data has increased ‘hugely’, while the number of secondary schools using that data ‘properly’ has increased ‘significantly’, suggesting that this data is a vital contributor to the project’s success.

The data sent by primary schools includes the number of years that a pupil has studied Spanish and an overall level of achievement in Spanish that covers Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, the four core areas of the primary Spanish curriculum. The inclusion of data for Spanish demonstrates the language’s status as a core subject alongside English, Mathematics and Science. In 2016, many secondary teachers of Modern Foreign Languages in secondary schools were apparently unaware that this data was available to them, but now it is used by many and offers them a pragmatic way of covering the curriculum by building on knowledge that their students already possess.

Six Modern Foreign Languages department heads responded to a survey as part of the evaluation of the Spanish First Language Initiative. The survey asked for their views on whether or not the primary schools project had affected teaching of Spanish in their secondary schools, and how useful the transition information provided by Hackney Learning Trust was for teaching in Year 7.

Teachers were asked to compare their 2018 intake with their 2017 intake and comment on the students' confidence, fluency, accuracy and motivation for learning Spanish. The 2018 intake included students who had studied Spanish at primary school for four years, throughout Key Stage 2, although this could not be guaranteed across the cohort. However, some of the 2017 intake may also have had considerable Spanish teaching in primary school, depending on how their primary school approached the statutory requirement to teach a modern foreign language and/or participated in the Spanish First Language Initiative, therefore this is not a simple comparison between students who have had significant levels of Spanish teaching before transitioning to secondary school and students who have not.

The most striking responses related to confidence: two of the six teachers responded that their 2018 students had much more confidence than their 2017 students, and two said that their students had slightly more confidence, compared with one who said confidence was the same, and one who was not sure. Two teachers also commented that their students had much more motivation to study Spanish at secondary school than previously, although the other four teachers stated that motivation was similar. In terms of language skills, one teacher said that students were much more fluent, while three said that they were slightly more fluent; one also said that students were much more accurate in their Spanish language use, with two saying that they were slightly more accurate. These teachers' comments suggest that for many of the students who have had more Spanish language teaching in primary school, there has been a significant shift in both attitude and ability towards studying Spanish in secondary school.

As a result of this shift, teachers have seen some changes in results at the end of Year 7, and some have adapted their teaching accordingly. One school has seen much better results across all four areas of the curriculum: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Another school has seen slightly better results in Reading and Listening, while two schools found slightly better results in Writing, and students in three schools had slightly better results in Speaking. These results may be as a result of a predominantly oral curriculum in primary schools, particularly as pupils begin learning Spanish, so it should not be a surprise that Speaking is the area where improvements are most identifiable.

The transition information provided by primary schools via Hackney Learning Trust is particularly important in supporting secondary school teachers to build on what has previously been learnt. One of the six teachers who responded to the questionnaire stated that they use this data

‘to help us gain a fuller understanding of what our yr7 students can already do upon arrival [...] It allows us to focus our attention on supporting those who have never done Spanish (or any language), and to really stretch those who have already achieved highly at primary school’.

Another teacher was particularly concerned about ‘the Listening and Speaking elements’, while a third uses the information to know what to recap from prior learning and to differentiate between students. However, the data is not used by all teachers, with one commenting, ‘No standardisation. Is the data accurate? Is the data meaningful?’, showing distrust of the information received. In addition, ‘students come in with a real range of skills’, reflecting the variability of their prior language learning skills in a range of primary feeder schools.

Teaching in Year 7 has changed, apparently as a direct consequence of the high level of Spanish language skills. There is ‘more grammar and translation’ in Year 7, and the use of some GCSE activities to complement the Key Stage 3 curriculum. One teacher stated that ‘Exams [in Year 7] changed due to increased confidence, fluency, accuracy’, and another commented that lessons are:

more challenging and do not linger on the more basic language, instead we go over things like numbers, simple opinions and expect students to bring them into their learning, rather than spending lesson time explicitly teaching them.

This teacher also said that the school’s approach was to ‘challenge students to work just beyond their comfort zone, but still offer support to those who need it’. This suggests that because students arrive with evidence of some competence in speaking Spanish, the school can encourage them to work at a much higher level much earlier than would be the case with students who have no Spanish language skills, as a direct result of the Spanish First Language Initiative.

The secondary MFL department heads could see that good practice was developing in primary schools, but noted a number of issues with transition, in particular the varied experiences of their new Year 7 students. One noted that in primary schools there is a lack of specialist teaching and not enough allocated learning hours to successfully teach Spanish. This is not necessarily the case, as has been shown in Section 3. Another asked for a standardised, low-stakes test for all primary schools, since the communication between primary and secondary schools was not adequate for their purposes. However, a third school welcomed the sharing of data, calling it ‘a valuable opportunity for our planning’. As a separate issue, ‘teachers’ heavy timetables’ prevent ‘time for planning and organising visits’, something that is clearly desirable for this teacher as part of the transition process.

Successful transition depends on primary teachers sending accurate data to Hackney Learning Trust for passing on to secondary schools, and on secondary teachers trusting and then using the data provided. In many cases this has been successful, and secondary teachers have changed their lessons and examinations as a result of their Year 7 students' higher language skill levels. To further support this Year 7 teaching, from 2021, Hackney Learning Trust will add a checklist of knowledge and skills to the transition information sent to secondary schools. However, since some pupils come to Hackney secondary schools from primary schools outside the borough, teachers will still need to make allowances for students who have had little or no previous experience of the language.

6 Content and Language Integrated Learning

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) involves the teaching of content through a second or other language (British Council, n.d.). The CLIL element of the Spanish First Language Initiative was introduced as the project developed, in association with the Spanish Department of Education at the Spanish Embassy, which seeks to promote the learning of the Spanish language internationally.

Initially in two primary schools and one secondary school, teachers started conducting Art lessons in Spanish, as a way of encouraging pupils to use the language other than purely in Spanish subject lessons. Art was seen as a subject that was not very demanding in terms of content, particularly in primary where it is a predominantly practical subject, and therefore the language needed for the lessons would be relatively limited. Where this has been practiced it has been successful, and in the school year 2020/21, it was planned that ten more schools would incorporate CLIL schemes of work into the Spanish curriculum, although these plans are on hold because of Covid 19 restrictions. Some schools have also begun to teach some Mathematics in Spanish and to use Spanish phrases during PE lessons.

Sue Roberts suggested that CLIL was harder to develop in secondary schools where teachers are subject specialists and therefore reluctant to allow non-specialists to teach their subjects. In one school, for example, the Spanish teacher taught Art during Spanish lessons, rather than taking over Art lessons, thereby reducing the amount of time available for direct language instruction. However, as more schools are reverting to a three year Key Stage 3, she hopes that there will be more space for curriculum experimentation, although this will need strong support from senior school leaders to ensure that it happens.

As with the rest of the Spanish First Language Initiative, training has been key to the development of CLIL teaching. The Spanish Embassy has offered training in London, and Hackney was successful in applying for EU Erasmus+ funding to enable 18 secondary and primary teachers to attend a one-week

intensive CLIL course in Tenerife. In addition, online courses specifically relating to CLIL have been available to teachers, to further develop their skills in this pedagogy.

CLIL is an exciting development of the overall project, and Martin Buck sees it as very important, a way of 'culturally as well as linguistically broadening a more diverse approach to language teaching'. However, it is unlikely to be taken up by all schools because of the additional effort, knowledge and time required to introduce it into the timetable. The pupils who have the opportunity to learn other subjects in Spanish will almost certainly have an advantage when they transition to secondary school, but they are likely to remain in the minority.

7 Inter-school relationships

One important development of the project has been the building of relationships between secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. Each primary school is linked with its main secondary school, and at the beginning of the Spanish First Language Initiative teachers were able to observe a lesson in their partner school and to discuss approaches after the lesson. One primary school teacher of Spanish provided a strong example of continued good practice in an online questionnaire, stating,

We have developed strong links with 3 secondary schools, two in Hackney and one in Islington. They bring students from Y7-Y11 and they teach primary pupils. KS2 pupils have been teaching Spanish lessons to Y7 and Y8 students. Teachers have shared good practice and observed each other.

The spreading of good practice into a neighbouring borough suggests that the project will have a greater reach than was originally envisaged. In addition, the use of primary pupils to teach secondary students and vice versa shows an enthusiasm for the children to use the language they are learning, rather than treating it as an academic exercise. Another school used inter-school relationships to support Spanish teaching when the subject leader was absent, demonstrating both a commitment to Spanish for their pupils and good use of the network created by Hackney Learning Trust to support teaching and learning. This suggests that Spanish is an integral and important part of the curriculum in the school.

In addition, many schools involved in the Spanish First Language Initiative have developed relationships with schools in Spain to further develop their knowledge of the Spanish language and culture. At their most simple, these relationships involve the exchange of letters and cards at Christmas and Easter between pupils. However, some schools have developed their contacts further, exchanging school news which has been included on the English primary school newsletter, undertaking communication via Skype, both as a class and in a whole school assembly, and twelve

primary schools have travelled on school exchange visits at least once. For some this has become an annual event, with Year 5 pupils attending their exchange partners' school every day. Elsewhere, topics such as the water cycle, art and sport and health have been taught across both the English and the Spanish primary schools, using both languages.

8 Availability of external support and resources

Hackney Learning Trust has continued to provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities for teachers within the borough, alongside resources and connections with the Consejería de Educación, the British Council, the Río Cinema and the Instituto Cervantes, amongst other institutions. A scheme of work is available for those schools and teachers who wish to use it, something that is particularly important for those primary schools where the teacher of Spanish is not a languages specialist. This also enables specialist teachers to know that similar content is being taught across the borough, reducing the variation in experience noted by secondary school teachers in Year 7.

One teacher was particularly impressed with the support from the Consejería de Educación: 'The Consejería offers free posters, stickers, videos and lots of useful resources. But also they visit schools and run workshops and assemblies that are fantastic!' These events demonstrate how the support of outside agencies enables schools to include additional opportunities for engaging with Spanish beyond the weekly class lessons. Staff from the Consejería were present at the teacher CPD meeting in March 2020, where posters and other items were distributed freely to those teachers who wanted them, as well as giving advice on the CLIL approach to embedding Spanish in the curriculum, further demonstrating this support. It is not clear whether schools would have accessed this additional provision without Hackney Learning Trust making the connection, but it is likely that there is a much stronger connection with agencies such as the Consejería because of the Spanish First Language Initiative.

Events that have been supported by outside agencies have included 'assemblies, cooking, storytelling, salsa and flamenco workshops' as well as participating in the annual Hispanic week. In addition, one teacher mentioned that their school has used their connection with the Arsenal Double Club, an education programme run by Arsenal Football Club, to support language learning for their pupils (Arsenal, 2017). The relationship between Hackney schools and Arsenal Football Club is an ongoing one, and could be further used to support language learning in this way.

The Hackney Learning Trust has clearly used its connections with agencies such as the Spanish Embassy, and also the British Council, to offer schools a wide range of enrichment activities that make

learning Spanish fun. For Sue Roberts, the fun element of language learning is particularly important, so that pupils use language rather than see it as a subject for study. This was a recurrent theme, particularly when talking about language learning in primary schools, and the activities offered suggest that the practical use of Spanish has been highlighted by the project.

9 Teacher development and retention

Teacher development has been a priority for Hackney Learning Trust. One teacher commented, 'Hackney has a fantastic CPD (Continuing professional development) programme and very supportive consultants'. Another teacher has accessed online Spanish courses run by the Instituto Cervantes and has also attended language courses in Spain through the Erasmus programme, to enhance their personal development as a Spanish teacher. Since 2015, Erasmus+ funding has enabled 120 teachers across the borough to attend courses in Spain. Schools are also encouraged to share resources that they have created themselves with other schools in Hackney. In addition to language learning, there have been 'regular CPD meetings which allow for reviewing progression, getting to know the attainment criteria and moderation, allow for good judgements on progress and attainment.' Support has been to a 'Good extent', with the resources and documentation from Hackney Learning Trust, which include a full scheme of work for those that want to use it, described as 'excellent and easy to navigate'.

Some teachers commented that there is less support at Key Stage 1 and for early years. One teacher said that she makes her own resources for this age group, which she would be happy to share, and also uses Spanish language songs on YouTube. Where a school had only just started teaching Spanish to Reception and Years 1 and 2, the teacher said that she would benefit from more support with providing suitable resources, and possibly Early Years and Key Stage 1 teachers could form a sub-group within the project to support each other. However, the Spanish First Language Initiative is not aimed at this age group, and it is therefore not surprising that Hackney Learning Trust does not offer the same support as it does for teaching older pupils and students.

Secondary schools are more likely to be independent when it comes to providing resources, with one teacher stating that he creates his own, and another commenting that there is enough support for teaching but a lack of funding, suggesting that limited school budgets can prevent teachers from accessing externally-produced materials. This independence in secondary schools is evident to Sue Roberts, who said that it is often down to the presence of specialist Spanish teachers and well-established routines for teaching Modern Foreign Languages, compared to primary schools who are learning those routines as they teach and therefore are more likely to use the resources, support and connections with outside agencies provided by Hackney Learning Trust.

The Spanish First Language Initiative has also created a positive atmosphere amongst Spanish teachers in Hackney, particularly peripatetic Spanish teachers at primary level. One said that ‘in other boroughs language teaching can be isolating’, and another commented that the teacher network has ‘100%’ kept them working in the borough:

I have also worked in Islington, Enfield and Westminster. Only Hackney has a network like this and only in Hackney Spanish all schools transfer Spanish data to secondaries. Outside Hackney, primary Spanish/MFL teachers are alone, have their lessons cancelled or moved often...

The comments of some peripatetic teachers discussed above (section 2) suggest that these problems are still evident within Hackney primary schools, but the feeling of being ‘alone’ is clearly less apparent. The teacher meeting in March 2020 demonstrated how relationships have developed between teachers and between schools, and one teacher at that event commented that teachers of other subjects such as Geography are jealous of the inter-school connections that have developed during the project, so that good practice can be shared between schools at events like this one.

In-school support from senior leaders has also been important in developing this atmosphere, releasing teachers for training, protecting PPA time for planning and assessment, and protecting curriculum time for teaching Spanish. One teacher has a ‘dedicated Spanish classroom’ and another speaks of ‘a whole school commitment to Spanish [...] SLT, teachers, TAs, kitchen and office staff, caretakers, all get involved’. While this level of support is far from universal, it clearly makes a difference to a school’s provision of Spanish teaching where it is evident. Some teachers have been given opportunities to share their Spanish work with other teachers in their schools, and this positive encouragement has clearly contributed to the language flourishing in their settings.

Other teachers found that the project was ‘very motivating’ when looking for other jobs, and ‘somewhat’ influential in keeping them working in Hackney. The links with secondary schools are important for primary Spanish teachers, because ‘kids know about continuity to secondary school whereas in other boroughs they lose interest in Y6 because they know they will learn French in Y7’. This clearly makes for a far more rewarding experience than teaching a subject where there is no continuity between key stages. One secondary school teacher said that he had been looking for a new position, including beyond Hackney, but that the Spanish First Language Initiative had been a real influence on his search, stating that the ability to share practice and ideas is very important and the teacher network in Hackney ‘keeps me invested’.

These comments suggest that the Spanish First Language Initiative has not only had a positive effect on language teaching within Hackney, but has also contributed significantly to teacher development, confidence and networking, making the borough a desirable place for language teachers to work. This

has involved considerable time and expense from Hackney Learning Trust to initiate and then direct and resource the project, but the benefits would appear to be long-term for the pupils, teachers and schools.

10 The wider reach of the Spanish First Language Initiative

Primary school teachers in particular are clear that the Spanish First Language Initiative has had positive and long-lasting consequences for their pupils. One teacher commented:

Most children in my school want to keep learning Spanish and languages when they leave. Lots use Duolingo and other apps at home to try languages similar to Spanish such as Italian [...] Many speak English as a second language and Spanish is their 3rd language.

Another teacher observed:

The resources and teaching materials really help children to connect with the Spanish language, many of whom have gone on to explore learning Spanish at secondary school and in their own time.

These teachers both recognised that pupils were consolidating and developing their language learning in their own time, and all three teachers who responded to the question asking whether the primary experience of Spanish had enhanced pupils' love of languages were emphatically positive.

In addition, pupils have been encouraged to teach their families Spanish at home, and some schools have run Spanish lessons for parents, so that whole families can become involved with the project. Most parents who have expressed an opinion about their children learning Spanish have been 'very, very positive'. Non-Spanish speaking parents have had opportunities to be involved with assemblies in one school and at an International Evening in another, through musical performances. However, native and bilingual Spanish-speaking parents have supported schools by 'running Latin dance workshops, reading stories and teaching traditional songs', and leading 'a band singing in Spanish'. These schools have clearly taken the initiative to extend their commitment to Spanish in the curriculum into their communities, creating a much more holistic experience for their pupils.

11 Recommendations

The Spanish First Language Initiative has become an important part of Hackney Learning Trust's provision for schools within the borough. It demonstrates effective collaboration between primary and secondary schools and outside agencies to provide Spanish teaching as a fourth core subject, alongside English, Mathematics and Science. As such, it is an exemplar for other boroughs for the teaching of modern foreign languages and also for other curriculum subjects, showing how

collaboration and shared CPD events can benefit teachers. The recommendations that follow aim to build on the work done thus far, so that it continues to benefit children within Hackney.

One of the clear messages from primary school teachers is how valuable the support from Hackney Learning Trust has been, both for developing their skills as language teachers and for connecting those specialist peripatetic teachers with others working in similar conditions. The training day in March 2020 exemplified the sharing of good practice and offered opportunities for asking questions of other teachers and of the team at Hackney Learning Trust. These events also offer an opportunity for primary teachers to meet up with their secondary school colleagues, building relationships that will ensure transition data is valuable and trustworthy. It is important therefore that Hackney Learning Trust continues to value the work done by the steering group and its languages specialists, and continues to invest in the Spanish First Language Initiative, to ensure that this network of colleagues can be maintained and strengthened, something that seems unlikely to happen without such support.

The statutory requirement for teaching a modern foreign language is limited to Key Stage 2 and above, however, some schools are systematically extending their provision downwards, into Key Stage 1 and even into the Early Years Foundation Stage. Hackney Learning Trust could therefore look at how to support these schools with materials for younger pupils, where teachers currently seem to be searching for appropriate lesson content on the internet. At its simplest, this support could be a repository for materials and lesson plans found and/or created by teachers, for other teachers to use as appropriate. With more time invested, a scheme of work could be created as guidance for teachers, similar to the guidance given for teaching older primary school pupils.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is also developing in some schools, with Spanish being used in a variety of lessons such as PE, although Art seems to be the main curriculum subject to be taught in Spanish, according to questionnaire responses received. CLIL offers an important contribution to the Spanish First Language Initiative, because it underpins the use of Spanish as a language, rather than a curriculum subject. However, CLIL lessons remain limited across Hackney as a whole, and the Covid 19 pandemic has currently halted aims to extend this method of teaching; this is an area of the project that could be developed further with continued support from the language specialists at Hackney Learning Trust.

Transition data is entered by primary school teachers and is then transferred electronically to secondary schools by the data team at Hackney Learning Trust (now Hackney Education). It is therefore efficient but relies on primary school teachers being consistent and accurate in their data entry procedures and on secondary teachers trusting the transition data provided by their primary feeder schools. The inclusion of Spanish as the fourth core subject in transition data is to be welcomed,

although data for the 2019/20 school year was limited to the number of years spent studying Spanish and a 'single, combined numeric assessment across Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing', according to the guidance notes given to primary schools completing the data entry procedure. The move to include a checklist of knowledge and skills at the end of the 2020/21 school year is to be welcomed, as this will offer secondary school subject leaders a greater insight into the content of the primary Spanish curriculum and will hopefully allay concerns from some secondary school teachers regarding the reliability of the transition data. The value and use of this more comprehensive data should be further assessed for students transitioning to secondary school in September 2021.

In addition, requesting that a teacher of Modern Foreign Languages from each Hackney secondary school is involved in the transition process will highlight the importance of the Spanish data and of the primary Spanish curriculum. This could be encouraged by Hackney Learning Trust and may build further relationships between schools following the example of the small number where pupils currently visit each other across the key stages.

The Spanish First Language Initiative is clearly a model of good practice that offers an exemplar for regions that have been less successful at implementing the statutory requirement for teaching a modern foreign language in Key Stage 2. In particular, the evidence from Hackney shows that the borough has been far more successful in promoting language learning than the White Paper suggests is the case nationally (Holmes and Myles, 2019). The success of the project was disseminated more widely in the August/September 2020 issue of *The Linguist* (Clinton, 2020), but opportunities should be sought to continue to share best practice nationally as an integral part of the work of Hackney Learning Trust.

Brexit appears to have brought an end to Erasmus+ funding, which has been so important for enabling teachers and young people to engage with the Spanish language and culture through exchanges and training courses. Alternative funding will need to be sourced if this part of the project is to continue offering exchange opportunities to Hackney's children. This may not be easy in a post-Brexit, post-pandemic world, but the exchanges clearly offer an important and enriching experience for the pupils and their continuation should be encouraged where and when possible.

The Spanish First Language Initiative is working well, and these recommendations are not intended to detract from a very successful project. However, it is clear that continued support from Hackney Learning Trust is essential for many teachers of Spanish within the borough, particularly in primary schools, to enable them to build an enriching and valuable curriculum which engages pupils and prepares them for secondary school. These recommendations therefore assume that Hackney

Learning Trust is willing to continue investing in Spanish teaching in the borough, as part of the core curriculum for all pupils.

12 Conclusion

It is clear that the Spanish First Language Initiative has had a significant impact on language learning in Hackney, and, in some cases, on the culture of local school communities beyond the classroom. The majority of primary school pupils in the borough have had a minimum of four years of Spanish lessons before they move to secondary school, with some beginning second language learning as young as 2 years old. The introduction of CLIL lessons has extended the use of Spanish into other areas of the curriculum, further embedding the language into school culture.

One of the key recommendations of the White Paper was in relation to transition, where nationally the transfer of data between primary and secondary schools was limited: 'Only 18% exchange information on language teaching informally, and only 9% provide data on pupil progress in language learning at the point of transfer' (Holmes and Myles, 2019, p.8). The Spanish First Language Initiative tries to ensure that transition data on language learning is as reliable as possible, so that it can be trusted and used by secondary school language teachers to inform their schemes of work. According to the majority of secondary school teachers who responded to the question, this appears to be the case in Hackney. Pupils are arriving at secondary school with some language skills, but perhaps more importantly, with confidence and motivation to continue learning. This is reflected in increased numbers taking GCSE and A level examinations, contrary to the national trends highlighted in the White Paper (Holmes and Myles, 2019).

Teachers acknowledge that the Hackney First Language Initiative is not perfect. However, the consistent support and initiative provided by Hackney Learning Trust, recently renamed Hackney Education, in particular through the experience of Bernadette Clinton, has ensured that as many schools in the borough as possible have been able to take advantage of a wide range of expertise to develop their language teaching. Schools can take part in as much or as little of the provision as they wish, but the best results seem to come from those that embrace the project whole-heartedly, developing links with their local secondary schools and with Spanish partner schools, and involving parents and other agencies in an holistic programme of teaching and learning. This dedication to seeing a modern foreign language taught requires support from senior leaders, in the form of time, curriculum space and resources. Where these are available, that language can become part of school culture: a language, rather than a curriculum subject, to be used throughout the school and beyond it. This initiative therefore provides an important case study for any borough or education authority wishing to embed language learning in its schools.

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