



BRITISH
COUNCIL

Language Trends 2023

Language teaching in
primary and secondary
schools in England

Survey report by Ian Collen

www.britishcouncil.org

Introduction

The British Council is pleased to present the results of Language Trends England 2023. There is lots of positive news, naturally some areas for further development and an abundance of evidence that teachers are consistently delivering engaging language lessons to children and young people.

Language Trends is an annual survey of primary and secondary schools in England, designed to gather information about the situation for language teaching and learning. Its aims are: (i) to assess the impact of policy measures in relation to languages; and (ii) to analyse strengths and weaknesses based both on quantitative evidence and on views expressed by teachers. Since 2015 there has also been an annual survey in Wales, and since 2019 a biennial survey in Northern Ireland; reports can be found on the corresponding country's British Council website.¹ The Language Trends series shows general shifts in data and seeks to provide a springboard for teachers, school leaders, academics, inspectors, policy makers, school pupils and the public to consider aspects of language learning more deeply.

This year's report builds on the twenty-year history of Language Trends. In subsequent reports, we have exciting plans to include the views of young people through a UK-wide pupil pulse survey, the results of which will be published by Autumn 2023. In the future, we hope to include more qualitative research with teachers and pupils to help us understand the language learning and teaching landscape.

On behalf of the British Council and Queen's University Belfast, we would like to offer our sincere thanks to teachers for participating in our research. Without teachers' participation, our research would not be possible.



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Headline findings

The headline findings for 2023 include:

- Almost nine out of ten responding primary schools have some pupils for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL).
- The 2023 data reflect a positive increase in the number of primary schools in contact with secondary schools concerning language education.
- French remains the most popular language at Key Stage 3, followed closely by Spanish in both state and independent sectors.
- German is the third most popular curricular language, but entries are much higher in the independent sector.
- For the fourth year running, Spanish continues to have the highest number of A-level entries.
- Schools' international engagement is improving since the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Further study is required to observe how parents'/carers' attitudes to languages can affect pupils' desire to study a language.

¹ Language Trends Northern Ireland can be found here: <https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/programmes/education/language-trends-northern-ireland>.

Language Trends Wales can be found here: <https://wales.britishcouncil.org/en/language-trends-wales>.

Policy context and background

The National Curriculum must be taught in all local authority-maintained schools in England and the National Curriculum Framework stipulates that languages need to be seen in the context of educating all pupils aged 7 to 14:

Key Stage	Year Groups	Age of pupils	National Curriculum Requirement to Study a Language
1	1-2	5-7	None
2	3-6	7-11	Study an ancient language or a Modern Foreign Language
3	7-9	11-14	Study a Modern Foreign Language
4	10-11	14-16	None (but encouraged as part of EBacc, see below)

Table 1: National Curriculum Requirements to Study a Language

Many state secondary schools in England are academies, which are not obligated to follow the National Curriculum, although in practice many do (Cirin, 2014). The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is an accountability measure for schools in England and was introduced in 2010. The EBacc encourages all pupils to study a GCSE² in English language, English literature, mathematics, the sciences, a language (ancient or modern) and geography or history. Our report last year showed that the government is currently on track to meet its objective for 90 per cent of pupils to study an EBacc subject combination at GCSE level by 2025, except in relation to languages.

Results from the Teaching Schools Council (2016) regarding teaching and effective pedagogy of Modern Foreign Languages at secondary school in Key Stages 3 and 4 indicated that fewer than half of pupils at the time of the study were taking a GCSE in a language other than English. Following this review, a £4.8 million pilot National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) was set up in December 2018, funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and co-directed by the University of York and the Cam Academy Trust. A significant mission of NCELP was to improve language curriculum design and pedagogy, with the hope of generating higher uptake of languages and greater success at GCSE level. DfE funding for NCELP ended on 31 March 2023 and NCELP has rebranded as 'Language Driven Pedagogy', with the aim of building on the work of NCELP. During the funding of NCELP, Ofsted³ (2021) published its Curriculum Research Review (OCRR) for Languages, with a focus on the three 'pillars' of phonics, vocabulary and grammar.

The DfE has invested £16.4 million into the existing Mandarin Excellence Programme, which now has over 6,500 pupils from 75 schools in England. A similar £4 million programme is running for Latin, delivered by Future Academies, working with up to 40 state schools to improve subject-specific teacher training and resourcing. In early 2023, University College London, the British Council and the Goethe-Institut were awarded £14.9 million to establish a Consortium of Hub Schools to increase uptake of languages qualifications in Key Stage 4 and 5 in English state-funded schools, under the umbrella of National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE). The new Centre will incorporate a ring-fenced German Promotion Project (GPP) to increase the number of German teachers and learners in English schools and raise awareness of the benefits of studying both German language and culture. It also aims to improve transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, provide more opportunities for disadvantaged pupils, address the performance of boys, and better recognise and support the rich diversity of languages in addition to English spoken by one in every five of our pupils. It is an exciting time, and the particular focus on German, which our data over the years has shown to be in decline at Key Stage 3 as well as at public examination levels, is welcome.

From September 2024 for awarding in Summer 2026, the linguistic content of GCSEs in French, German and Spanish will focus on the most commonly occurring vocabulary of each language, with 1,700 words at Higher Tier and 1,200 words at Foundation Tier. Pupils will be expected to know and use the specified linguistic content (i.e., vocabulary and grammar) receptively and productively in the oral and written modalities. Any words on examination papers outside of the prescribed list will be glossed. However, implementing this new approach, which uses vocabulary frequency to determine word lists, has been criticised from many subject associations, practising teachers, and academics such as Milton (2022) and Woore et al. (2022). There are currently no plans to adopt this approach in languages or levels other than GCSE French, German and Spanish in England, nor are there plans to align GCSEs in French, German and Spanish from Awarding Organisations in Northern Ireland and Wales with this new approach. Therefore, for September 2024 candidates, a GCSE in French, German or Spanish from an Awarding Organisation in England will be a different experience to that taken with a Northern Irish or Welsh Awarding Organisation.

² GCSE: General Certificate of Secondary Education, the main qualification taken by pupils in England, Northern Ireland and Wales at age 16.

³ Ofsted: Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills.

Last year's British Council Language Trends England report found that the amount of time devoted to languages in different primary schools across the country varies, with some pupils receiving less than 30 minutes per week. It also ascertained that an increasing number of schools have no international contacts and there is much work to be done in rebuilding an international dimension. Ayres-Bennett et al. (2022) found that investing in languages education in the UK will most likely return more than the investment cost, which means that the benefit-to-cost ratios are estimated to be at least 2:1 for promoting Arabic, French, Mandarin and Spanish in education. Thus, the economic benefit of learning languages cannot be underrated.

A landmark study funded by the British Academy on Language Provision in UK Further Education (Collen et al., 2023) recommended improved communication and sharing of languages teaching and resourcing between secondary, further and higher education, including regional oversight of languages education alongside an overarching strategic unifying voice. The report also accentuated that qualifications in languages in England are almost exclusively focused on GCSE and A-levels; there are now very few vocational qualifications available to learners. The study also recommended a review of qualifications in languages post Level 2, including T Levels, where language skills are currently absent. Given the focus on GCSE and A-level, progression pathways in languages for lower prior attaining learners are unclear; the distinct absence of vocational qualifications is stark.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council and the British Academy have recently funded and launched The Languages Gateway, a one-stop online portal for all things languages in the UK, facilitating links between all those interested in languages: learners, families, community groups, teachers, school leaders, academics, policymakers, subject associations. The funders intend the site to be open and inclusive, a tool for everyone to use and contribute to, building a collective sense of ownership and partnership.⁴

This year's Language Trends England report therefore comes at a positive time of renewed focus on languages in England.

Research outline

The British Council commissioned Queen's University Belfast to conduct research for Language Trends England 2023. Ethical approval was secured from the Research Ethics Committee at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast. All participants gave their voluntary and informed consent to take part and the project was conducted to the highest ethical standards.

As in previous years, the principal research question guiding the study was 'what is the current situation for language teaching and learning in state primary, state secondary and independent schools in England?' The methodology was in keeping with previous series of Language Trends, using questionnaires to survey schools, but also included a case study in relation to a school's engagement with parents/carers about language learning. The questionnaires were developed in autumn 2022 in consultation with an Advisory Panel who represented, among others, in-service schoolteachers, the Association for Language Learning, the Independent Schools' Modern Languages Association, school leadership associations, the Department for Education and representatives of Higher Education.

The survey (using questionnaires and hosted on Questback) was carried out from early February to mid-March 2023. Schools were invited by email to participate, using the Department for Education's (DfE) official Register of Educational Establishments in England, and the links were also distributed for the first time via social media. After data sets had been cleaned, a total of 1,316 schools participated (down from 1,693 schools in 2022), of which 575 were state primary schools, 586 state secondary schools and 155 independent schools. Table 2 shows overall response rates by sector, using the base as the number of schools to which we know our invitation email arrived, and rounded to the nearest percentage. It must be borne in mind that comparison with previous years of Language Trends should be conducted with caution, given the distribution of the survey link by social media for the first time this year.

Response rates	Primary	State	Independent
	10%	21%	28%

Table 2: Overall response rates by sector

Univariate and some multivariate analyses were performed on the quantitative data to identify overall trends; qualitative comments were analysed by means of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) using deductive coding.

⁴ See: <https://www.thelanguagesgateway.uk/>.

Last year's Language Trends focused on the DfE's then eight Regional School Commissioner (RSC) regions. The eight regions did not match up with more widely used regions in other government departments, and a transition phase ensued during which DfE aligned with the nine regions. London now has its own RSC and the North, Lancashire and West Yorkshire, and East Midlands and Humber regions have become the North East, North West, and Yorkshire and the Humber. For the purposes of Language Trends England 2023, we have decided, in this transitional year, to use the nine new regions in the analysis of our primary school data and the eight former regions in our state secondary data.

Findings from the primary school survey

Profile of responding schools

From our email distribution list, we know that our survey arrived by email to 5,703 primary schools. The link was also shared on social media, which makes an exact response rate difficult to ascertain. A total of 575 schools chose to respond, giving a response rate of 10 per cent.

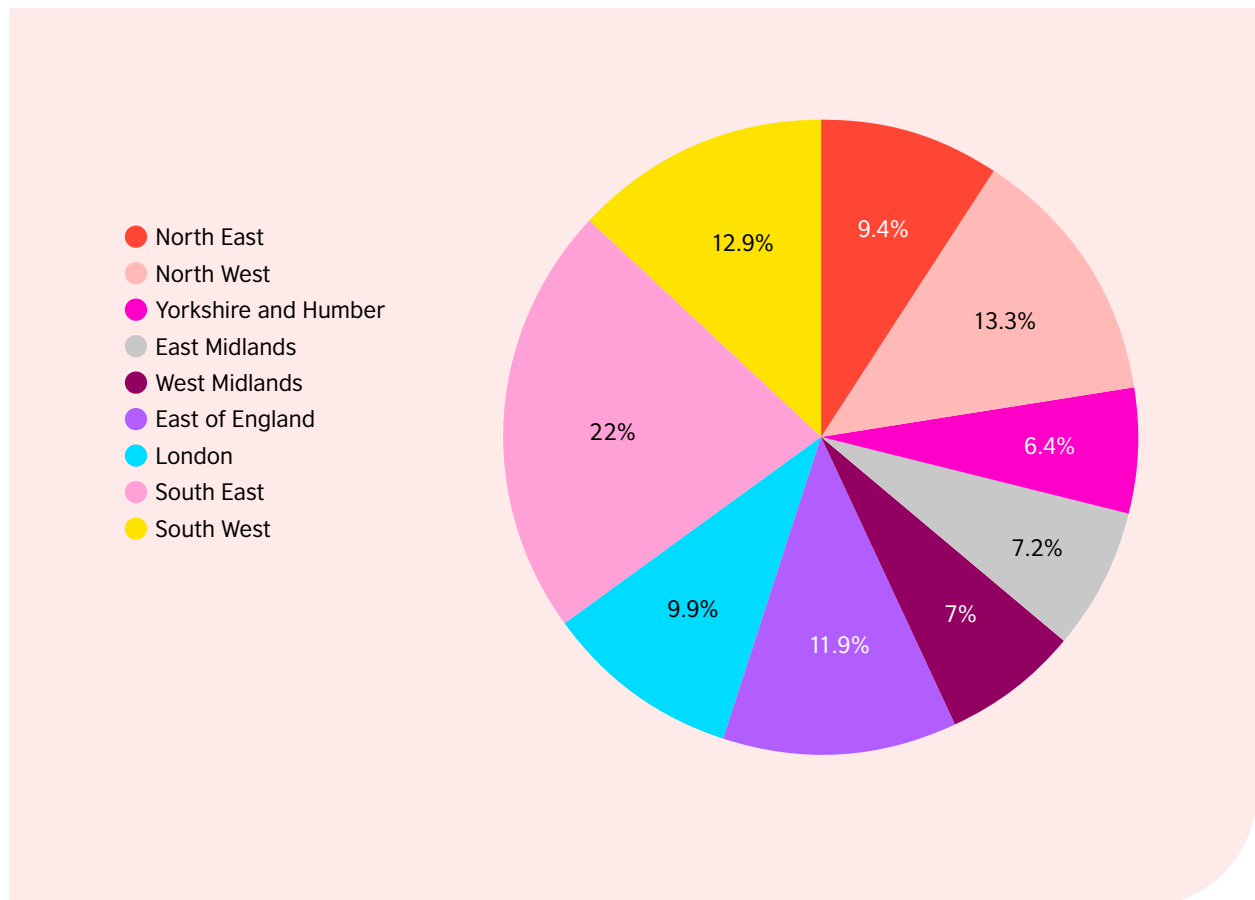


Figure 1: Location of responding primary schools

In terms of socio-economic profile, the main indicator comes from each school's Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME) statistic. In England, children aged 4 to 16 are eligible for free school meals if they live in a household which gets income-related benefits (such as universal credit) and has an annual income of less than £7,400 after tax, not including welfare payments. All infant state school pupils (Reception to Y2) can have free school meals during term time - regardless of household income. The current FSME average for primary schools in England is 23.1 per cent (up from 21.6 per cent in 2022). This figure has been growing annually since before the pandemic.

Using raw data from the Department for Education's 2022 school census, published on 9 June 2022 and updated on 5 April 2023, the research team calculated the FSME quintiles for state primary schools in England:

1 – least deprived	0 – 9.2%
2	9.3% - 15%
3	15.1% - 22.8%
4	22.9% - 34.5%
5 – most deprived	34.6% and above

Table 3: Free school meal quintiles for state primary schools in England

To give us a truly representative sample of primary schools in England, 20 per cent of responding schools ought to be in each quintile. Table 4 shows that over half of schools responding to Language Trends England were in Quintiles 1 and 2, i.e., more favourable than England's FSME average and in lesser deprived areas of the country. While the profile of responding schools is slightly more balanced than in 2021, we are conscious that work remains to be done to encourage participation from primary schools with a high number of pupils entitled to free school meals. As in every year of Language Trends to date, the profile of responding schools could mean that data presented in this report may paint a picture which is slightly more favourable than the reality:

	Percentage participation in our survey
Quintile 1 – least deprived	28%
Quintile 2	24%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	22%
Quintile 4	14%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	12%

Table 4: Participation in our survey by quintile

Languages on the primary curriculum and assessment

Three out of five respondents were language co-ordinators in their school. The balance was mainly Head Teachers or members of Senior Management. Ninety-nine per cent of responding schools have been teaching languages in the 2022/23 school year, showing that almost everyone is meeting the statutory requirement to teach a language (modern or ancient) within curriculum time. Eighty-two per cent of schools reported having taught languages for at least the past five years (up from 78 per cent of responding schools in 2021). One third of respondents said that in this school year, there has been an impact on allocated/dedicated languages time because of pupils spending extra time on literacy and numeracy. Some teachers commented:

“Spanish is a subject that is done in an afternoon and this is where we typically run literacy sessions including phonics catch up. This means that children will be taken out of Spanish.”

“Yes but it is improving. However, there are still issues with a squeezed curriculum generally.”

“Yes, particularly during afternoon lessons. Some students are withdrawn from languages for 15-30 minutes for additional reading support.”

We know from previous iterations of Language Trends that almost all primary schools in England plan for their pupils to make progress in one language in Key Stage 2. Figure 2 shows that French continues to be the most taught language in primary schools, but our data set evidence some diversification of the languages being offered, with Latin appearing in the ‘top four’ for the first time; this will be welcome news for Classicists. German has a low rate, and the GIMAGINE project is thus timely.⁵

⁵ GIMAGINE is one part of the new NCLE project, the objectives of which include raising the profile of German education and learning at GCSE and A-level: <https://www.goethe.de/ins/gb/en/spr/unt/gim.html>.

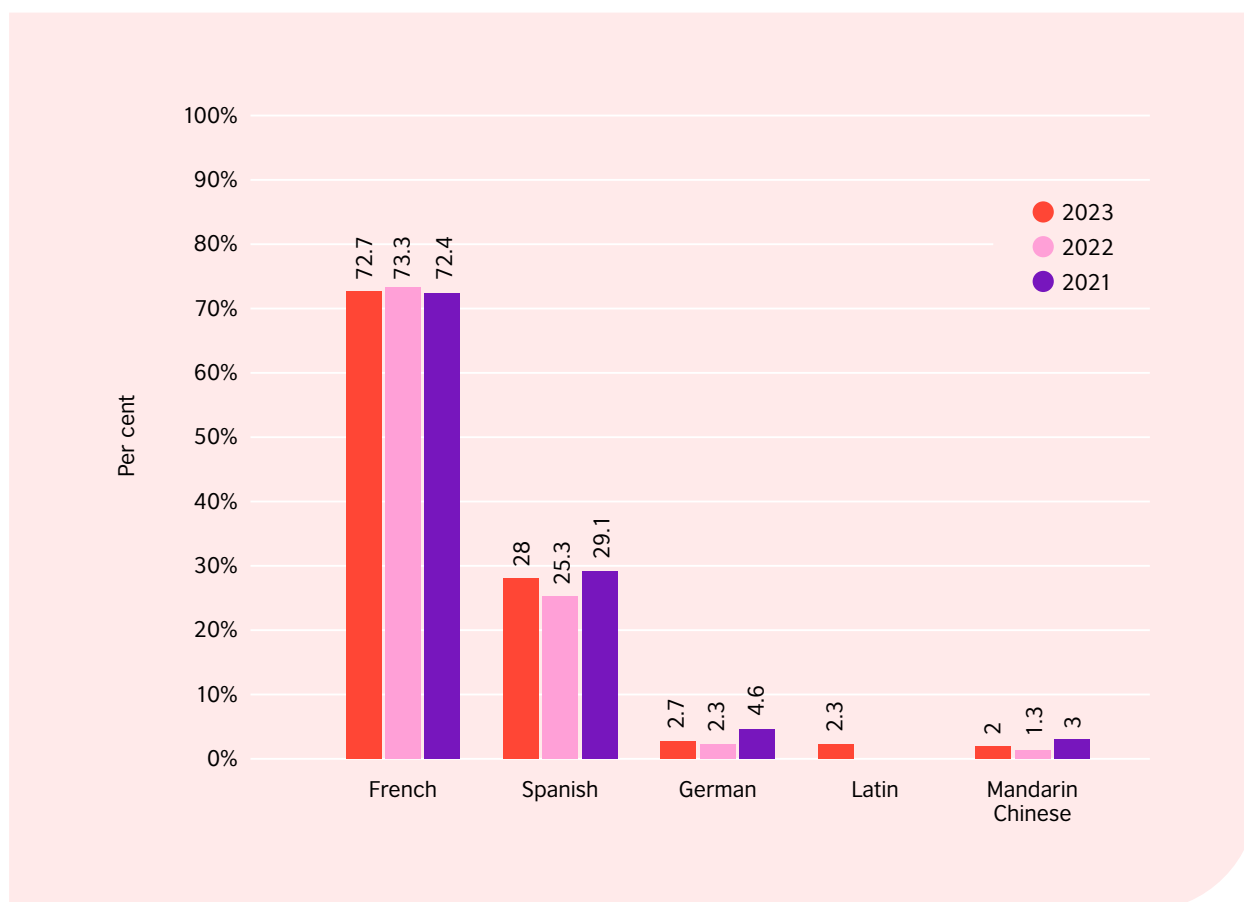


Figure 2: Most frequently taught languages in primary schools

Our data set also contained some evidence of Arabic, British Sign Language, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese and Sanskrit, although reported numbers are so low that we cannot assure statistical significance.

Languages are, for the most part, taught by either the class teacher or a specialist language teacher based in the school. Just 24 schools (out of 575) reported that a specialist teacher of languages from a local secondary school comes in to teach languages.

Resourcing

Aside from the human resource of who teaches languages, the next thing primary schools need is a bank of resources to support primary teachers in delivering the Key Stage 2 Programme of Study. Figure 3 shows that there is a reliance on commercially produced resources (74.7 per cent) and there is scope for cultural institutes to disseminate their excellent and often free resources more widely.

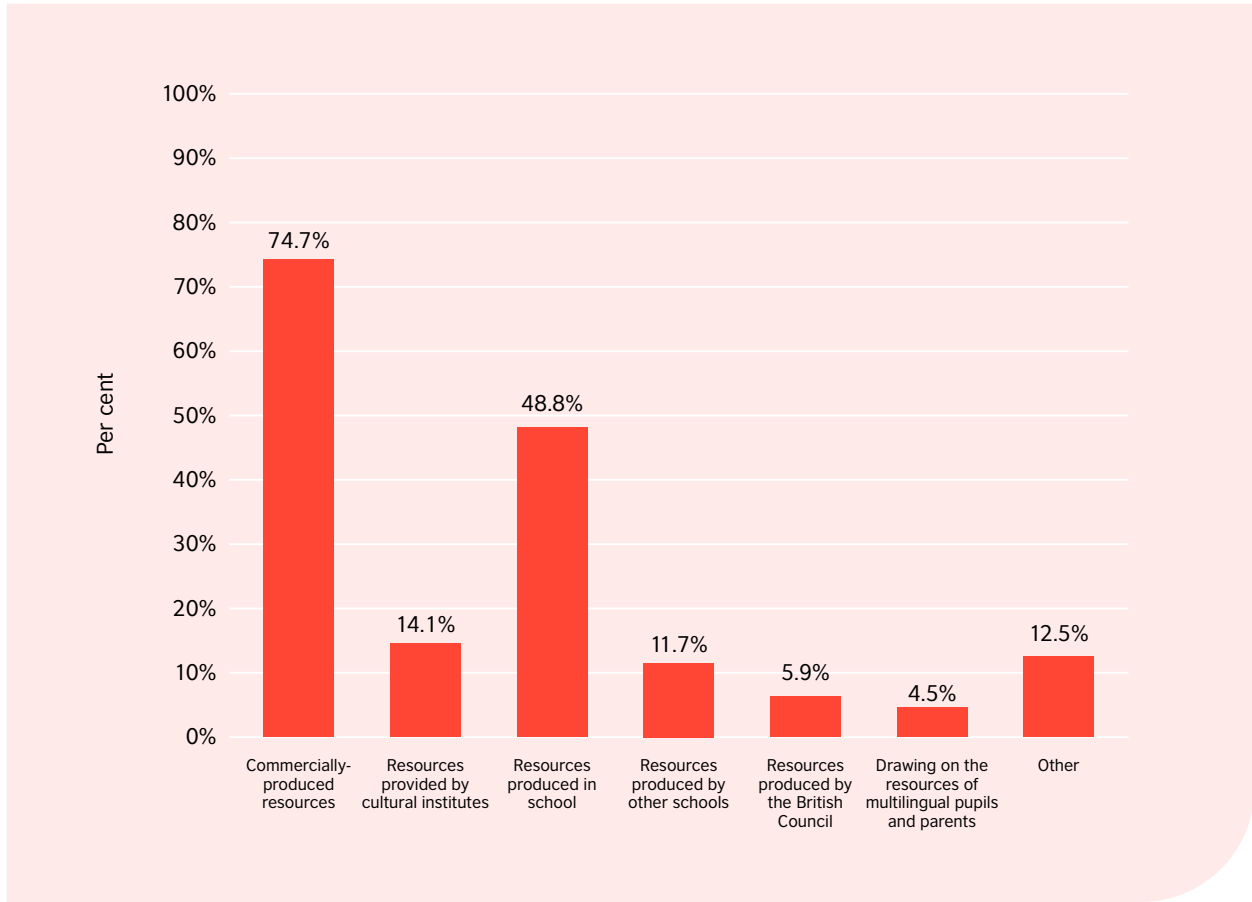


Figure 3: Resources used by primary teachers to deliver the curriculum

Almost half of schools produce their own resources. We asked if teachers had received funding in this school year for the development of resources for primary languages, with results shown in figure 4.

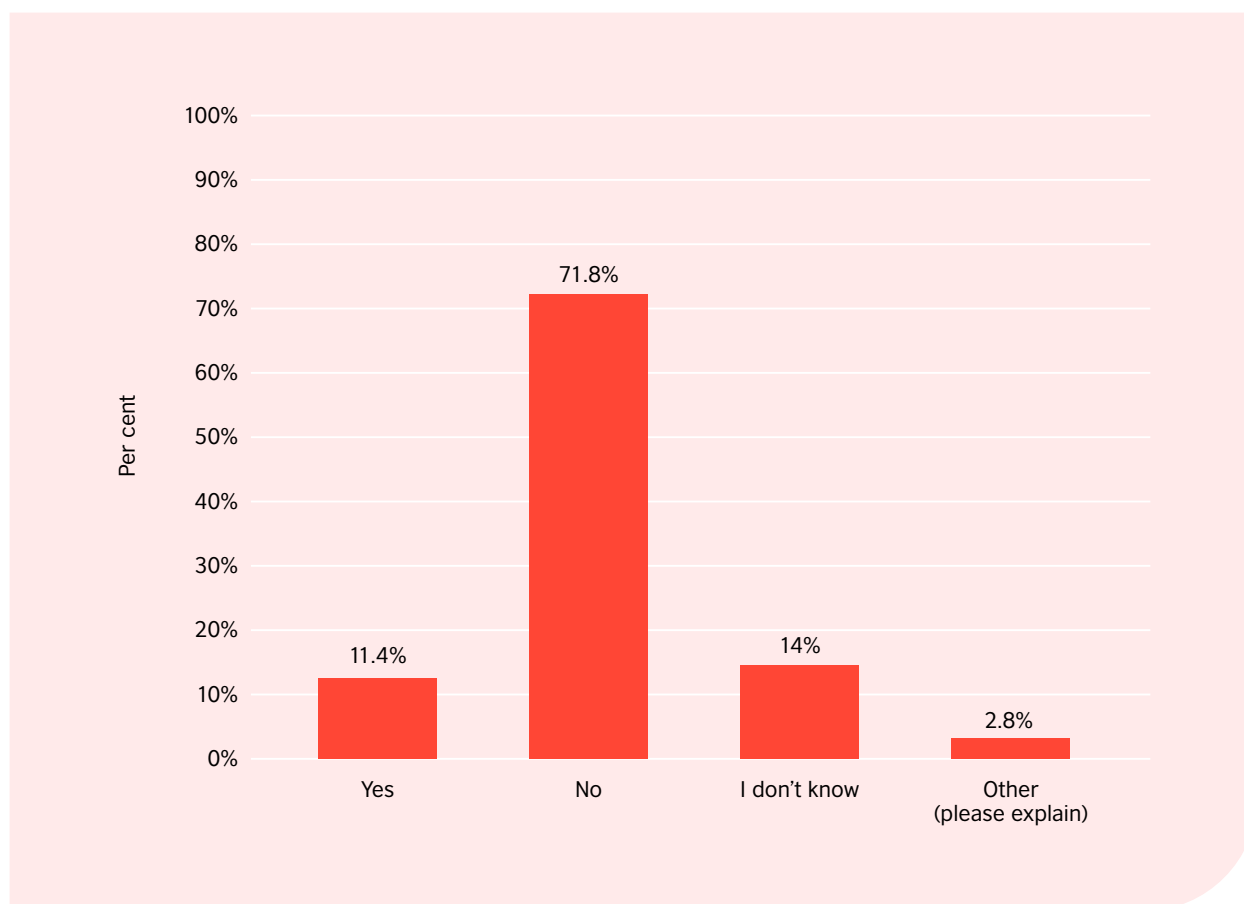


Figure 4: Teachers' responses to the question 'Have you received funding in this school year for the development of resources for primary languages?'

Under the 'other' column, teachers reported receiving money to purchase resources from Classics for All,⁶ from local councils to support recently arrived Ukrainian pupils, Turing funding and from Parent-Teacher Associations.

Technology can be used judiciously by classroom teachers as an accelerator of language learning. Forty per cent of respondents report using apps in their teaching. Popular apps in our data set include Educandy, Wordwall, Duolingo, Kahoot and Seesaw. Some teachers also report using the Planet Languages⁷ web app from the Primary Languages Network.

We asked as an open question what sort of resources teachers would appreciate. We conducted a word frequency count on the resulting data and the most sought-after resource is, quite surprisingly for the times we live in, books, followed by specialist support, games, videos (of native speakers), dictionaries, and interactive resources. Some teachers commented:

"More books, access to quality online materials, videos with authentic native voices."

"We need systematic CPD to build staff confidence and dual language books."

"Age-appropriate magazines and books in French, funds for pupil rewards (stickers/certificates), games."

⁶ See: <https://classicsforall.org.uk/>.

⁷ See: <https://primarylanguages.network/>.

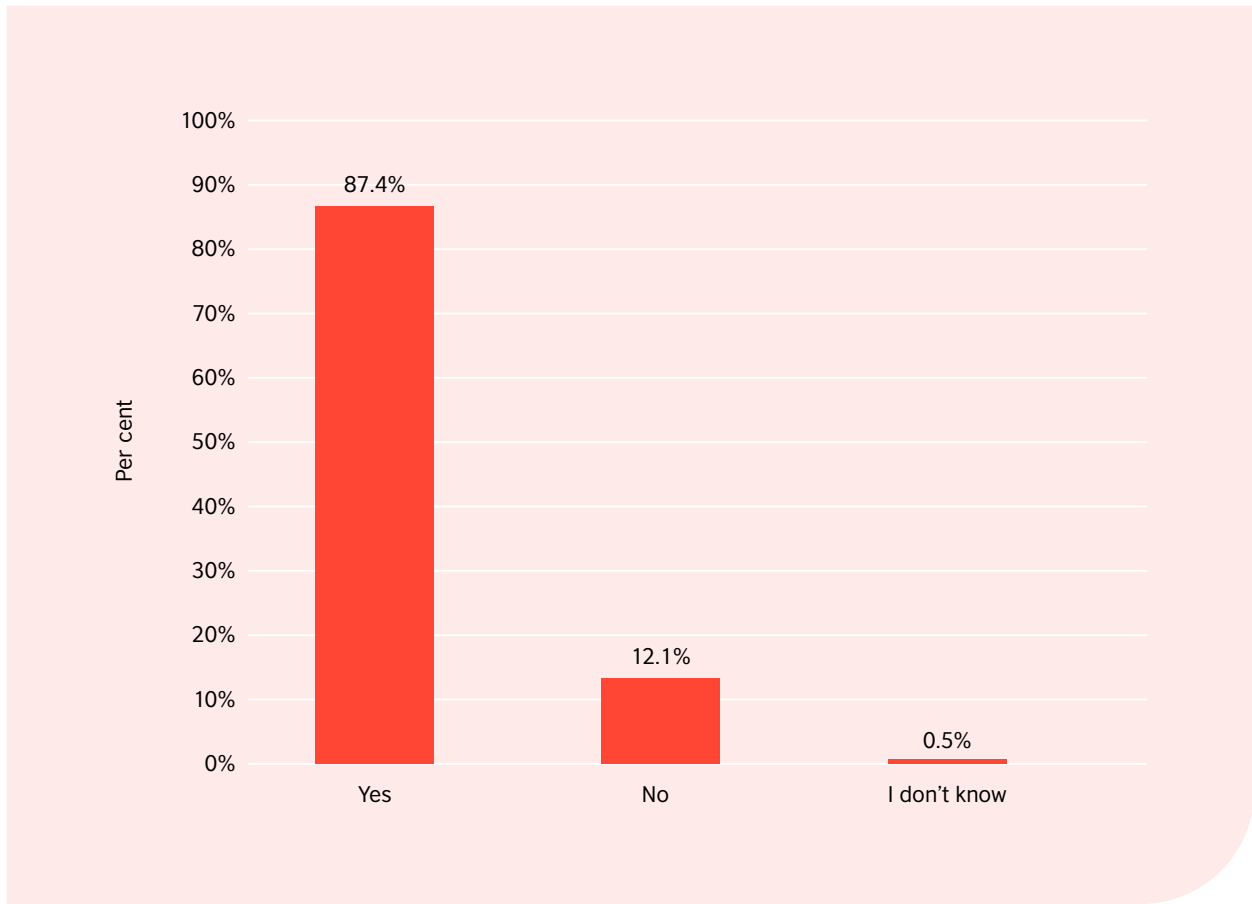


Figure 5: Percentage of schools with EAL pupils responding to our survey

English as an Additional Language

Figure five shows that almost nine out of ten responding schools have pupils for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL). We know from the most recent School Census, carried out by DfE, that almost one in five school pupils in England were recorded as having a first language known or believed to be other than English; in primary schools alone, the figure sits higher still at 21.2 per cent.⁸ This linguistic diversity enriches the experiences of all children and our society.

Recent geopolitical events have led the UK Government to introduce two new visa routes in order to allow persons affected by the war in Ukraine to come to the UK. By 09 June 2022, a total 11,400 Ukrainian school pupils had applied to England's schools.

We offered teachers the chance to tell us how they integrate, if at all, pupils' home languages into the curriculum. Almost all teachers with EAL pupils responded that they do try to weave pupils' home languages into their teaching and comments were heart-warming to read:

"[I have a] Ukrainian child in my class. I have a Spanish-themed classroom that really helps. I teach the Spanish language, get the child from Ukraine to teach us Ukrainian and then this reinforces her English. The majority of kids at my school also speak Urdu."

"We have lessons where we share the home languages and have workshops on cultural day where pupils teach their home language."

"Encourage the pupils to share words from their languages; if relevant, draw out similarities/differences; encourage class teachers to do the same, get the children to teach the class some of the language for the register, [we also] have a celebration display board."

"We use translations into home languages on all teaching materials as well as incorporating the child's home language into the environment. Our website also has a language translate feature which ensures that parents can access school information."

⁸ See: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

Other schools reported inviting parents into school to talk about their home language/culture for European Day of Languages, auditing the languages spoken in school each year, Diwali and Eid celebrations as well as knowledge organisers in English and the home language. Reading through the comments, many teachers are already adopting a plurilinguistic approach in their classrooms, an approach which captures the holistic nature of individual language learners' linguistic and cultural repertoires, focusing on the interconnectedness of different languages and cultures rather than on their differences. After all, we all smile in the same language.

International engagement

We have been keeping a close eye on international engagement over the past few years. Pre-pandemic and before the UK's decision to leave the European Union, international engagement at primary level was reasonably healthy.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	35%	27%	19%	18%	19%	20%
Online / digital links with schools outside the UK	-	-	-	-	-	14%
Involvement in international projects	22%	16%	10%	8%	10%	10%
Host a language assistant	5%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%
None	46%	51%	61%	64%	67%	62%

Table 5: Longitudinal data relating to international activities in primary schools

The data show a decrease in schools with no reported international engagement, while the number of partner schools and level of involvement in international projects remain consistent with figures from 2022; there is still some way to go to return to pre-pandemic levels. As in previous iterations of Language Trends, socio-economic factors do not seem to play a significant role here, with Quintile 1 schools just as likely as Quintile 5 schools to have no international engagement at 59 per cent and 64 per cent respectively. For the first time we included an option of online / digital links with schools outside the UK; of course, nothing can replace the benefits of face-to-face visits for staff and pupils, but we look forward to tracking how primary schools harness technology to develop their international work.

What teachers want to enable them to better deliver primary languages

We afforded teachers an open question to tell us what is the most significant barrier that they are facing in delivering high quality language lessons; almost all respondents cited time followed by teacher knowledge of languages, and this is consistent with data collected in Language Trends England 2021 and 2022. Teachers reported the following:

"Time allocation and class teachers not having time to carry the language across the week."

"The constraints of time. I am only in each class for one short lesson per week. Lack of expertise of some of the other staff teaching French and no time to train them properly."

"It is all about time. I am a native Spanish qualified teacher and I am always looking for strategies to promote speaking and interaction among pupils but time it is always a problem as each session lasts 30 minutes."

The government does not stipulate how much time should be devoted to languages on the primary curriculum. It is made clear from research by Graham et al. (2017) that the ideal conditions for teaching languages in primary schools, and to ensure that pupils make progress, should include a minimum of one hour of contact time per week.

While time is a finite resource, the three main requests for additional support are (i) teacher professional learning, (ii) resources for primary languages and (iii) better transition from primary (Key Stage 2) to

secondary (Key Stage 3). Teachers stated that:

“Barriers at [our school] are teachers are expected to teach French when they cannot speak it themselves! [...] The staff are amazing and are willing, but you would never ask a secondary geography teacher to deliver Beginners German when she/he cannot speak German. There are not enough language teachers to deliver primary languages! This is the issue plus an overloaded curriculum.”

“Perhaps if curriculum time was specified that would be helpful or some kind of end of KS2 expectations like there are for English.”

“I would like to see the recommendations of the White Paper⁹ lived out in practice.”

“I’d like secondary schools to adapt their teaching to properly build on what my pupils can achieve. The secondary school most of our pupils move onto doesn’t differentiate their teaching at all in year 7. Their excuse is that not every school teaches the same high levels of French skills and knowledge that mine do. It it’s disheartening when they ask if I can just teach colours and numbers...”

⁹ Holmes, B. and Myles, F. (2019) White Paper: Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward. RiPL. [Online] Available at: www.ripl.uk/policy.

Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3¹⁰

When planning the curriculum for languages, four out of five responding schools reported that they only use the Key Stage 2 Programme of Study. Less than one in twenty schools stated that they use both the Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 Programmes of Study; this is surprising given that a language is statutory across the 7-14 age range.

After successive years of decreased contact between primary and secondary schools, the latest data reveal a positive increase in the percentage of primary schools who communicate with secondary schools about language education. Qualitative comments gathered from primary school teachers demonstrate a desire to establish and strengthen links with secondary schools for the purpose of providing language education. However, informal meetings remain the most prevalent form of contact between schools, and the transition from primary to secondary is unlikely to facilitate provisions for continuing primary languages for all pupils in Year 7.

Contact between primary and secondary schools

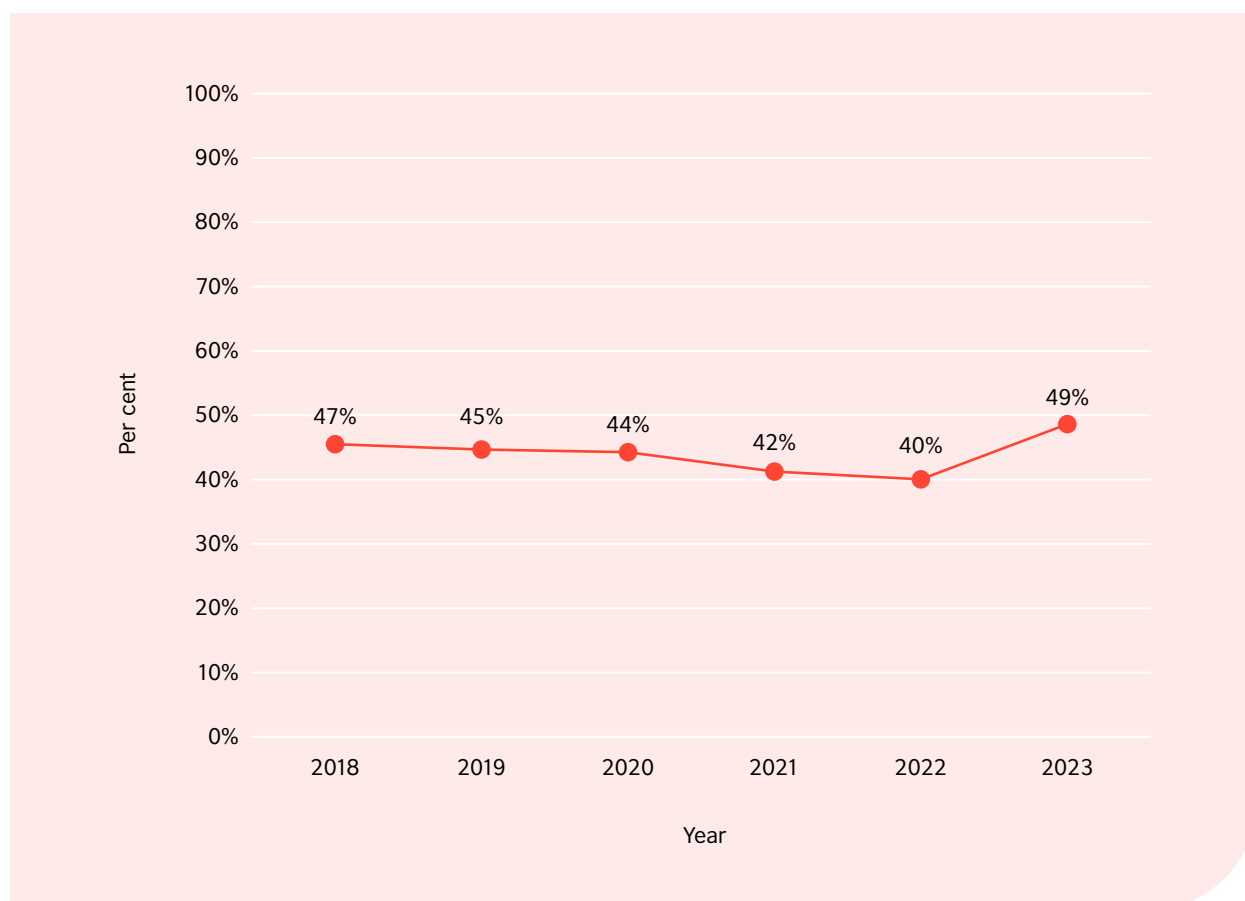


Figure 6: Percentage of primary schools in contact with secondary schools

¹⁰ The section on Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 was written by Dr Jayne Duff, Research Assistant at Queen's University Belfast.

Language Trends data demonstrate a positive increase in contact between primary and secondary schools in relation to languages. This year, 49 per cent of primary schools reported having contact with local secondary schools, reflecting an increase of 9 per cent from data collected in 2022 (figure 6).

Of the 49 per cent of primaries who reported contact, 33 per cent only have contact with one secondary school. The type of contact between primary and secondary schools remains largely the same as in 2022, with 53 per cent of primary schools relying on informal information exchanges and 30 per cent participating in network/cluster meetings.

Pupil progress data

The White Paper on Primary Languages Policy in England recommends that primary and secondary schools are supported and incentivised to work together in order to “develop and agree clear and structured programmes of learning which provide continuity and progression across key stages 2 and 3.” (Holmes and Myles 2019: 16).

When asked to reflect on how the language learning experience in KS2 has prepared the current Year 7 pupils for KS3 language learning in comparison to previous cohorts, 60 per cent of secondary schools said that there was little change. Only 9 per cent of responding secondary schools stated that Year 7 pupils were better prepared for language learning, while 23 per cent stated that they tend to be less prepared. Despite the projection of Language Trends 2019 to report on “year-on-year improvements in language learning outcomes for successive cohorts of pupils” (Tinsley 2019:10), secondary schools have continued to observe little change in pupil preparedness in successive cohorts since 2019 (figure 7).

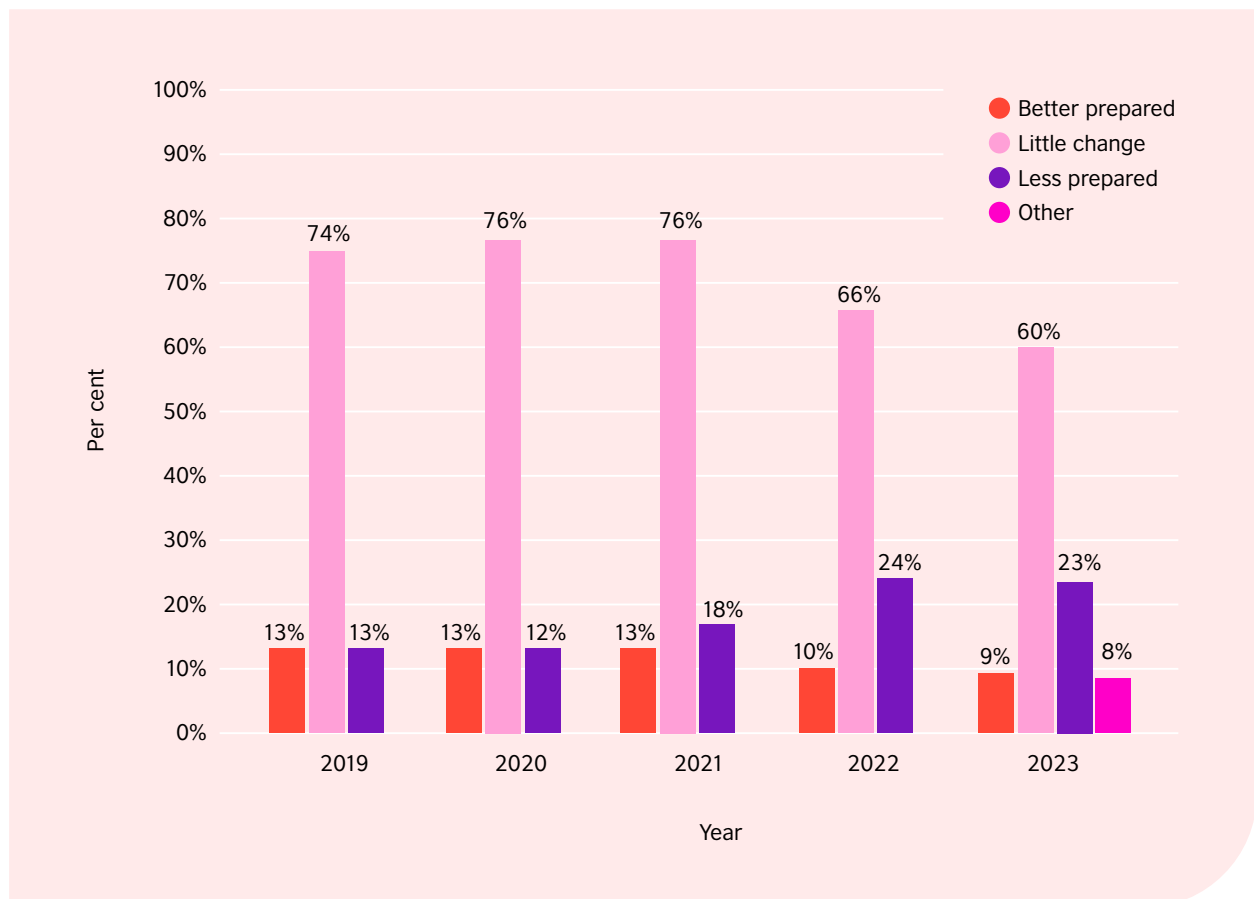


Figure 7: How prepared are current Year 7 pupils in comparison to previous cohorts?

Transition issues

Comments from secondary teachers make note of transition issues in languages education from KS2 to KS3:

“Some students tend to be better prepared but this varies between different primary schools.”

“We are an all-through school and the Y7s that come from our primary are well-prepared as they are taught by specialists. Y7s from other primaries are less prepared. Overall, literacy is lower than previous cohorts and therefore a second language is difficult.”

“Most of our feeder schools teach French and as a school we offer German and Spanish. The majority of pupils come with little if any of these languages.”

The number of state secondary schools who can accommodate the continuation of a primary language at KS3 remains consistent with previous data, with only 3 per cent of secondary schools enabling all pupils to continue with the language that they learned in KS2. Sixteen per cent of schools can accommodate a majority of pupils to continue with the same language, while just over two-thirds of schools facilitate the continuation of a primary language with some pupils. Comparable to last year, 7 per cent of schools report starting a new language with the entire Year 7 cohort (figure 8).

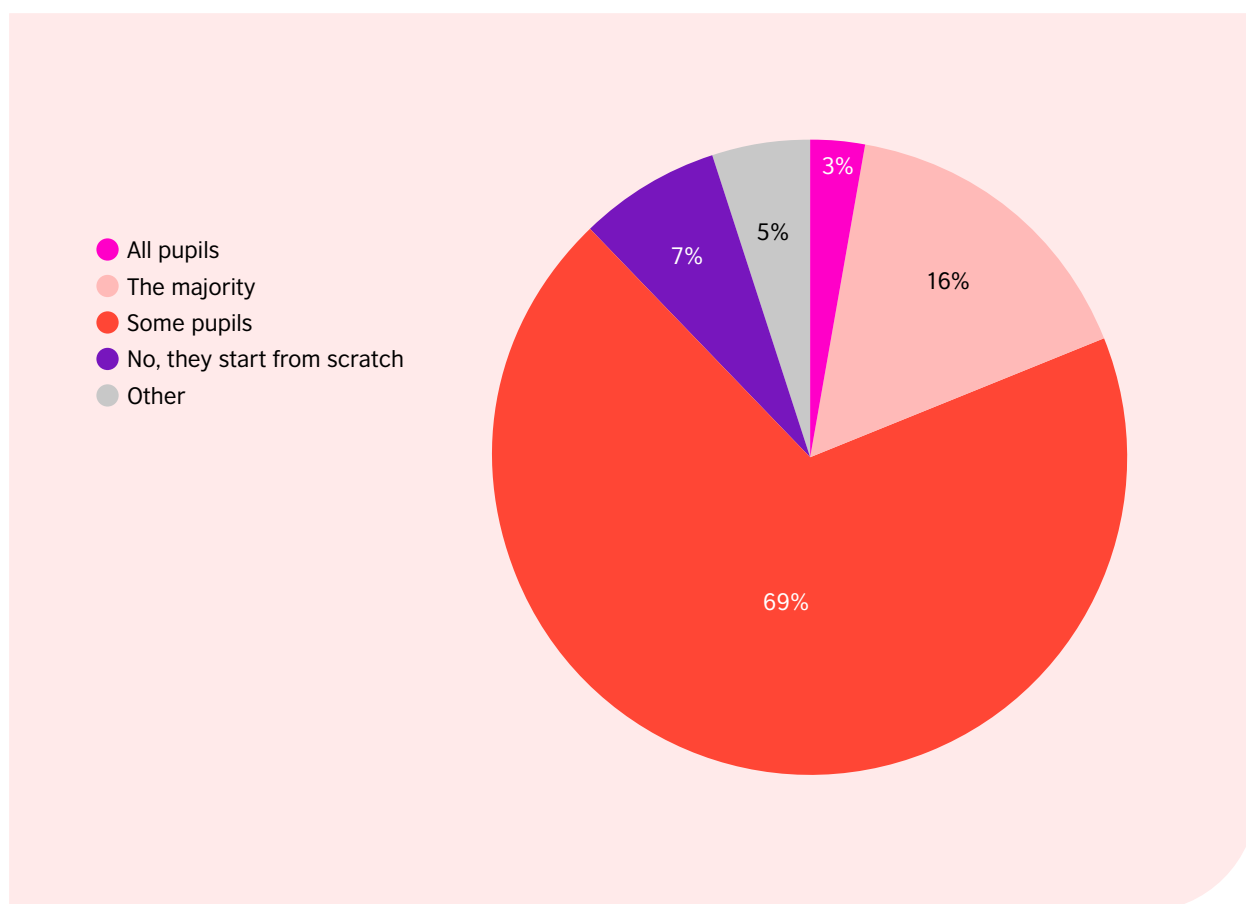


Figure 8: Do pupils in your school continue with the same language they learned at KS2?

A majority of schools (75 per cent) reported that they are unable to organise classes for pupils in Year 7 according to which language(s) they learned at primary school, presenting a key transition issue in the continuity of languages education. A small minority (15 per cent) noted that they could, in theory, accommodate such classes for Year 7 pupils.

Towards a collaborative approach

Last year's British Council Language Trends noted several expressions of desire by primary teachers to avail of CPD training, as well as the subject specialism of secondary language teachers. Yet, only 10 per cent of primary schools report that a local secondary school provides language teaching in their school, and even fewer (5 per cent) report that a local secondary school provides language training for teachers in their school. These figures remain largely consistent with the previous year's data. While it is positive to see these figures begin to grow from the pre-pandemic drop identified in Language Trends 2017, the recovering figures have yet to reach their previous range (figure 9).

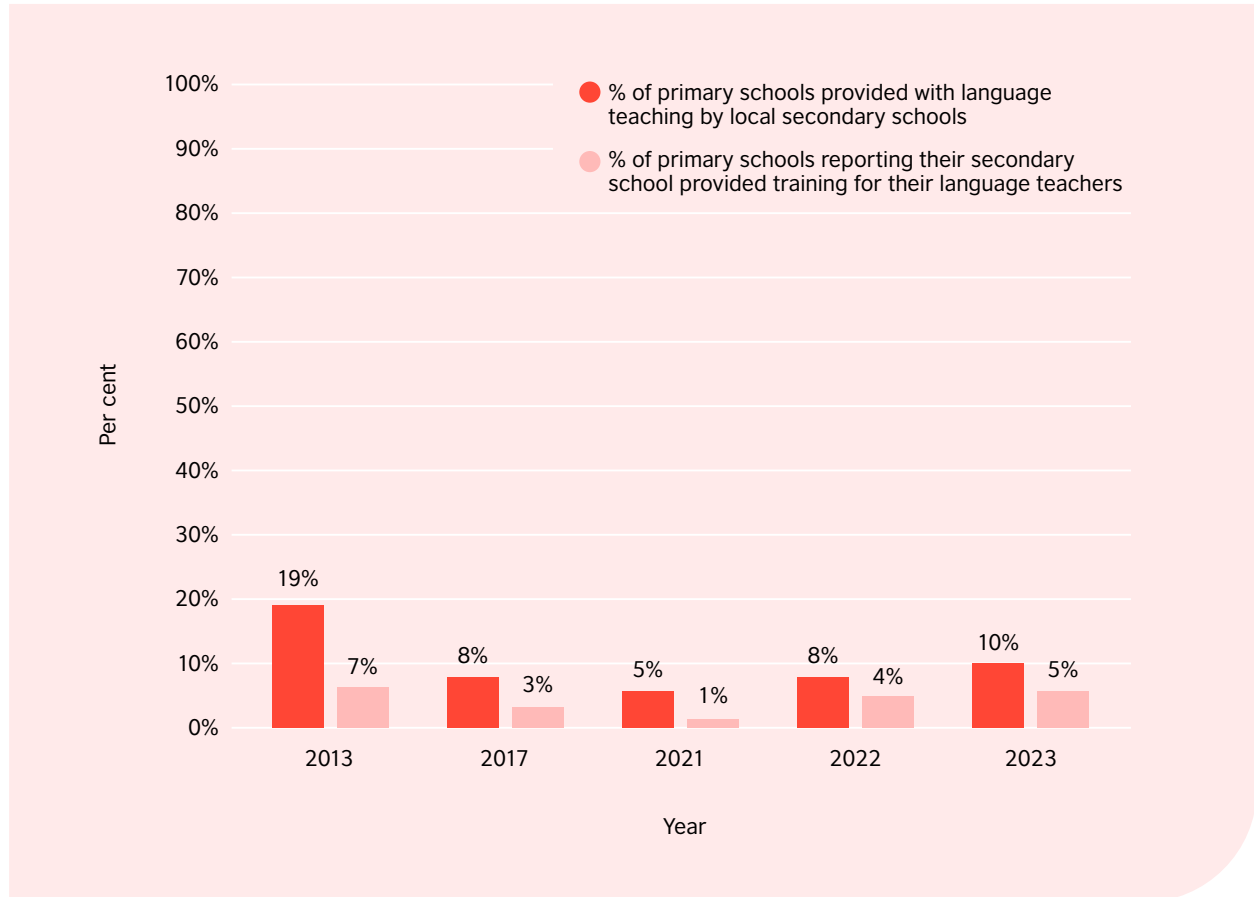


Figure 9: Changes in the percentage of primary schools receiving training and language teaching support from secondary schools

In qualitative comments, primary school teachers expressed a desire to establish and maintain contact with secondary schools:

“I initiated meeting with feeder school. She told me she had never been approached by primary schools to discuss this. We discussed my overview which was impressive for a primary school! Further discussion about what would be really helpful [...]. Was very happy with feedback. Arranging for her to come in and observe the kids. Very supportive.”

“Only just getting the ball rolling (again) - I will observe y7 lesson and take it from there. It's becoming more apparent that a whole feeder school policy and joint thinking needs to be in place for good transition to have any impact.”

Some primary school teachers have noted their frustration at trying to establish effective contact with secondary schools:

“We have tried to arrange masterclasses and collaborative planning - not taken off very well though.”

“We have met once with our feeder secondary and are trying to organise more with them. This is proving challenging.”

The comments and data collected from responding primary and secondary schools suggest that communication is lacking between colleagues, and there is a demonstrable lack of continuity between KS2 and KS3 languages education. This sheds a light on a key area of potential development and collaboration for future languages education policy.

Findings from secondary and independent school surveys

Profile of responding schools

A total of 586 state secondary schools and 155 independent schools responded, giving healthy response rates of 21 per cent and 28 per cent respectively. For state secondary schools, response rates from all regions were broadly comparable to the Language Trends 2022 survey, except for North-West London and South-Central England, where we saw responses drop from 115 to 36.

Region	Number of participating state secondary schools	As a percentage of survey respondents
East Midlands and the Humber	65	11%
East of England and North-East London	76	12%
Lancashire and West Yorkshire	56	10%
North of England	103	18%
North-West London and South-Central England	36	6%
South-East England and South London	139	24%
South-West England	46	8%
West Midlands	65	11%
TOTAL	586	

Table 6: Regional locations of participating state secondary schools

State secondary free school meal quintiles

The average percentage of children entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) in secondary education in England is recorded as 20.9 per cent in 2021/22 (up from 18.2 per cent in 2020/21).¹¹ Throughout children's language learning journey, there is strong evidence of a link between levels of Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME) and uptake at key transition points (Henderson and Carruthers, 2021).

The research team arranged schools in our sample into five quintiles based on publicly available FSME statistics:

	Free School Meals Entitlement
Quintile 1 – least deprived	0 – 10.8%
Quintile 2	10.9% - 16.4%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	16.5% - 23.2%
Quintile 4	23.4% - 32.5%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	32.6% and above

Table 7: State secondary, Free School Meals Entitlement quintiles

¹¹ For further education statistics, see <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

	Percentage participation in Language Trends
Quintile 1 – least deprived	26%
Quintile 2	22%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	18%
Quintile 4	16%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	18%

Table 8: Percentage of schools in each quintile responding to our survey

Each quintile ought to attract 20 per cent participation to give us a truly representative reflection of trends in language learning. There continues to be statistically significant overrepresentation of schools in Quintile 1 (least deprived). As is the case at primary level, the data which follow may present the situation for language learning in a more favourable light than the reality in some state secondary schools.

The ‘big 3’

The three most popular languages on the school curriculum in England are French, German and Spanish. The revision of GCSE specifications for first teaching in September 2024 focuses on these three languages; from 2018-2022, the work of the National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP) focussed on these three languages, and the new National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE) will be home to a German Promotion Project GIMAGINE with the aim of raising the profile of studying German in depth, up to GCSE and A-level. It is, however, acknowledged that NCLE will have a much broader scope than NCELP, setting out to increase languages uptake at GCSE by:

- levelling up opportunities for disadvantaged pupils;
- addressing the performance of boys;
- better recognising and supporting the rich diversity of languages in addition to English spoken by one in every five pupils.

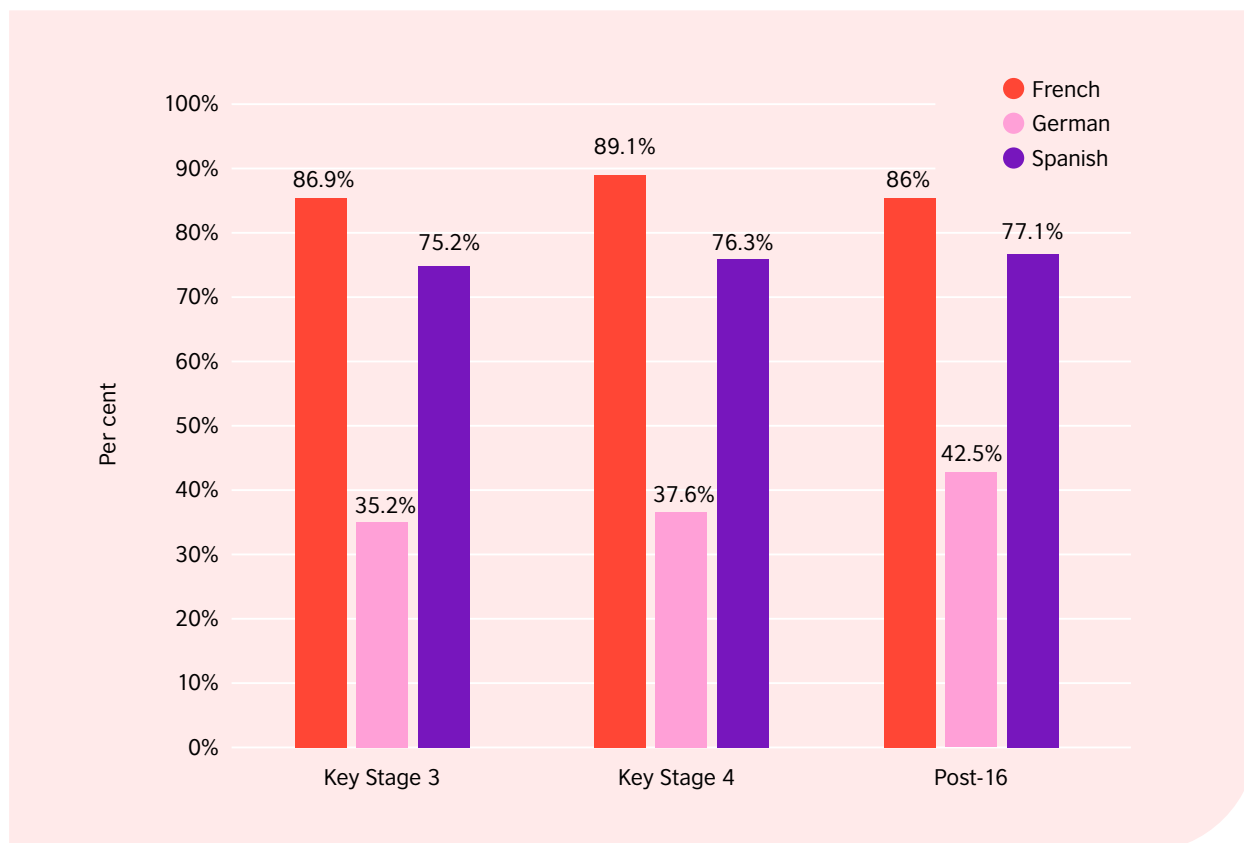


Figure 10: Percentage of responding state secondary schools offering each of French, German and Spanish

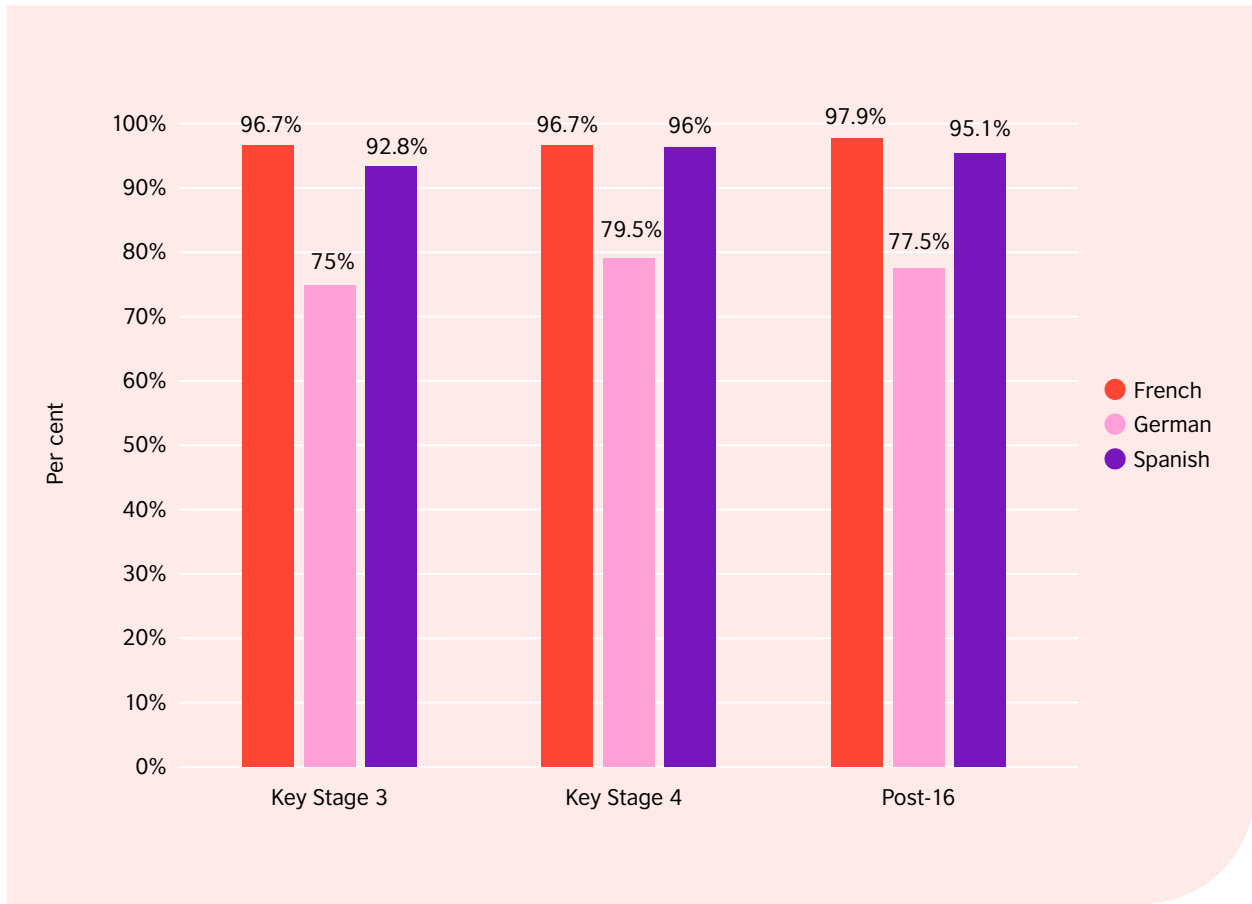


Figure 11: Percentage of responding independent schools offering each of French, German and Spanish

French continues to be the most popular language at Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14), taught in 87 per cent of responding state schools and 97 per cent of responding independent schools, followed closely by Spanish in 75 per cent and 93 per cent of state and independent schools respectively. German is much more secure in the independent sector.

Thirty-two per cent of responding state schools report that a small number of pupils in Year 7 are disappplied from language learning. The main reasons cited were, (i) pupils for whom English is an additional language, (ii) to receive extra support with literacy and numeracy and, (iii) pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The decision to disapply is invariably made by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator. There is perhaps scope in some schools to revisit the policy for disapplication, especially given that Modern Foreign Languages are one part of the curriculum where many Year 7 pupils are starting their studies from a similar base.

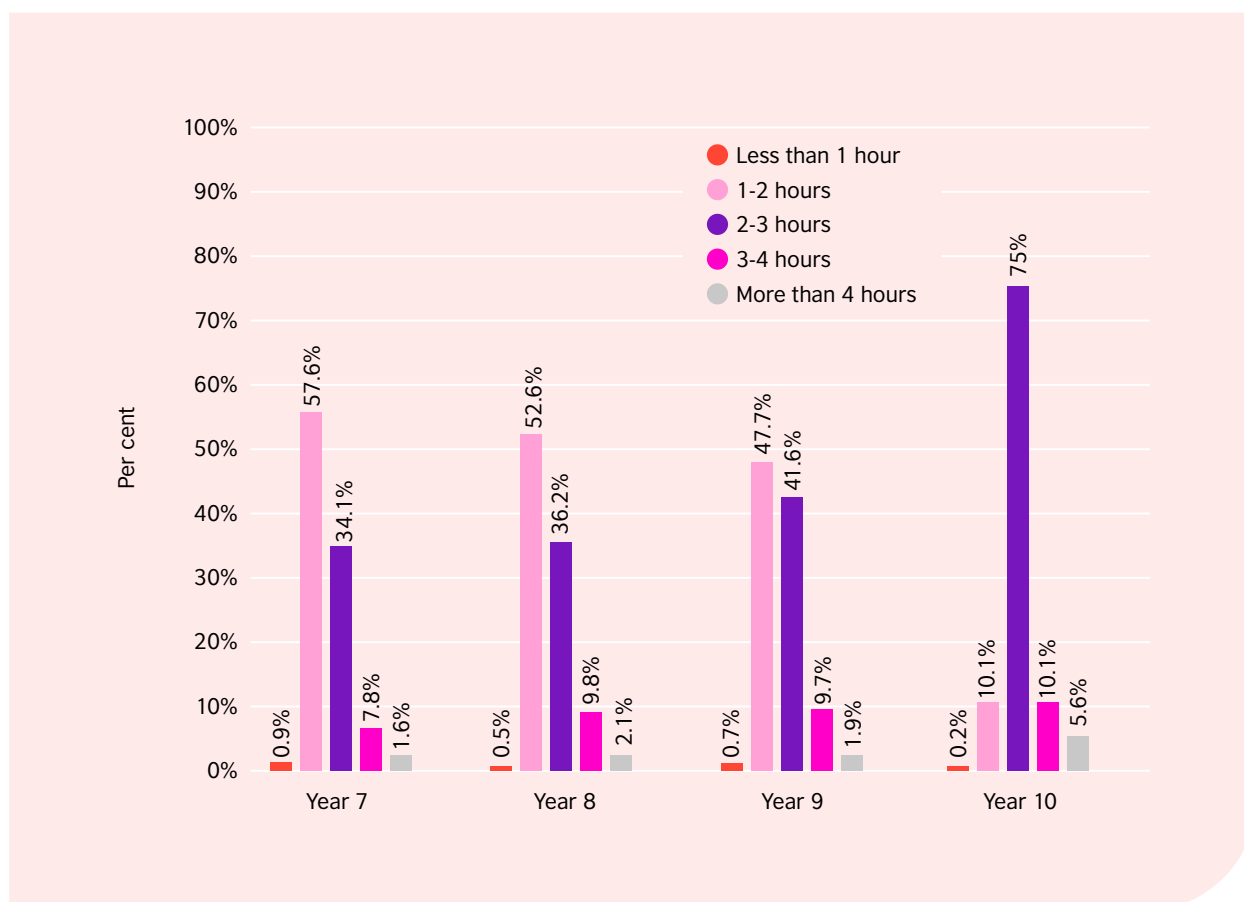


Figure 12: Weekly scheduled time for languages in Years 7-10

Time for languages

A majority of schools allocate 1-2 hours per week of language learning in Years 7 and 8, and this jumps to 2-3 hours in year 10, naturally to cover the requirements of the GCSE specification. A very small number of responding schools allocate less than 1 hour per week to languages education at Key Stage 3; it is difficult to see how the National Curriculum Programme of Study could be covered within this time frame.

Languages other than the 'big 3'

	KS3 full curriculum subject independent schools (n=155)	KS3 Extra-curricular activity independent schools (n=155)	KS3 full curriculum subject state secondary schools (n=586)	KS3 Extra-curricular activity state secondary schools (n=586)
Arabic	*	8	*	*
Chinese (Mandarin)	34	18	37	31
Italian	9	13	9	24
Japanese	*	7	7	17
Polish	0	0	0	10
Russian	7	11	*	8
Urdu	0	0	5	*
Latin	79	12	8	37
Ancient Greek	33	19	*	14
Other	*	*	7	23

Table 9: Raw numbers for teaching of languages other than French, German and Spanish at Key Stage 3 (* = less than 5, number hidden to protect identity of responding schools)

In the state secondary sector, Chinese (Mandarin) is the most popular language taught as a full-curriculum subject, after the 'Big 3'. This is perhaps an outworking of the Mandarin Excellence Programme.¹² In the independent sector, Latin occupies this spot. With the implementation of the new Latin Excellence Programme, which supports forty non-selective state schools to teach Latin at Key Stages 3 and 4, it will be interesting to track the positioning of Latin in the coming years. Three out of four state schools which offer Latin as a full curriculum subject at Key Stage 3 are in Quintiles 1 and 2, i.e., with a FSME figure better than the national average. Comparable to Language Trends 2022, the data continue to highlight a clear north/south divide: no responding state schools from the North of England offer Latin as a full curriculum subject at Key Stage 3, but seven offer Latin as an extra-curricular activity; there is thus a basis on which to build support for the implementation of Latin as a full curricular subject.

Ninety-two per cent of responding state schools and 88 per cent of responding independent schools reported that they make provision for pupils with home/heritage languages that are not taught in school to take exams in those languages.

Parents/Carers and Subject Choice

The parent/carer – pupil – school pedagogical triangle is widely cited in educational literature. While many studies have been undertaken to understand language learning from the teachers' and pupils' perspectives, less work has focussed on understanding the role of parents/carers in the decision making process specifically regarding languages and the associated study pathways. For teachers in England who teach in schools in areas of high social deprivation, their job is made more challenging as they have to convince both students and parents of the value and importance of learning a language in light of the current political climate.¹³

In our state secondary survey, we asked teachers to what extent do they engage with parents/carers around the choice of GCSE languages. Four in five teachers reported that they do engage with parents and common responses included the use of parents' evenings, subject choice booklets and generic careers' information evenings in order to promote the importance of choosing a language for GCSE. Some more novel approaches included:

"We also organise an annual 'Wine and Tapas' event to encourage parents / carers to support their children with preparing for the Speaking Exam (in Year 9)."

"We have videos online for parents to see options assemblies for every subject. We have an open evening followed by a parents evening the week options choices are due."

"We celebrate student success in languages through half-termly celebration breakfasts, have many enrichment activities that students can take part in, and we encourage the study of languages during parents' evenings and GCSE options fair."

Other schools reported that they engage with parents on a more regular basis in order to promote a positive ethos on languages from an earlier stage:

"We do a lot on this - regular information evenings and parents evenings, as well as written and phone correspondence."

"We engage a lot. We have an MFL item in every newsletter, we have parental meetings in Year 7 and Year 10 to inform them about how they can support their students. We run a number of trips and have parental information sessions for these trips."

"[We engage] a lot - face to face options meeting, social media presence, constant promotional activities."

The following case study, from Prince Henry's Grammar School in Otley, West Yorkshire, provides an overview of their approach to language learning and parent/carer engagement:

¹² See: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/languages/mandarin-excellence-programme>.

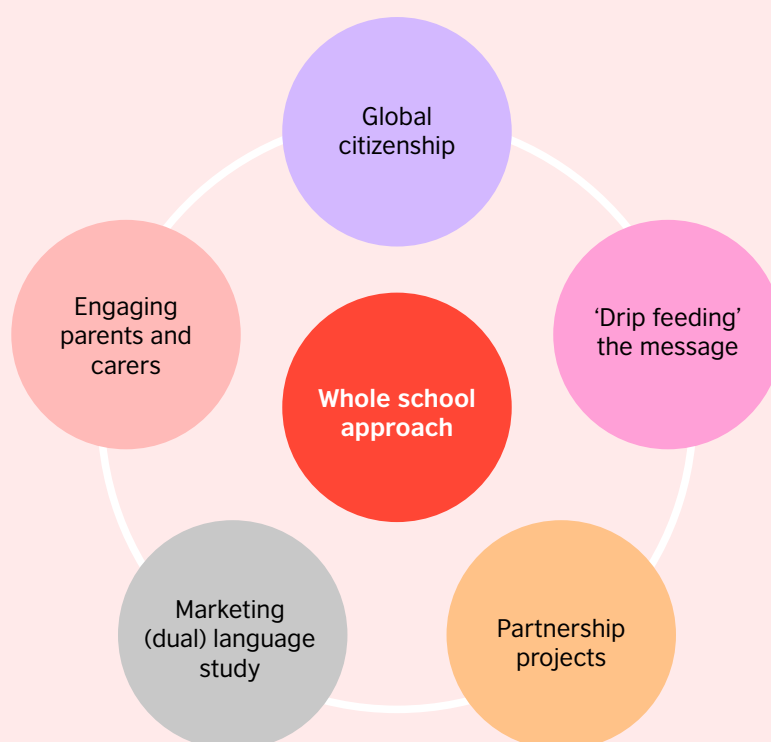
¹³ For further reading, see Martin (2020) Modern Foreign Language Learning: Exploring the Impact of Parental Orientations on Student Motivation. EdD thesis. University of Wolverhampton. [Online] Available at: https://wlv.aws.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/2436/623842/Martin_EdD_thesis_Redacted.pdf.

A whole school approach to promoting language learning

Prince Henry's Grammar School is a large 11-18 comprehensive school serving the town of Otley, West Yorkshire. The school held Language College status as part of the former Specialist Schools programme. Language learning continues to enjoy a special place within the curriculum, with all students learning French or Spanish in Year 7 and then taking up German as a second MFL in Year 8, together with a short course in Mandarin Chinese. Over 80 per cent of students are required to continue to study a language at KS4, with approximately 15 per cent choosing to study two.

Key to the school's commitment to language learning is engaging parents/carers from an early stage. The high profile given to languages is signalled even before students select the school, through the school prospectus and presentations delivered by members of the Senior Leadership Team at the Open Evening for prospective students and parents/carers. This 'drip feeding' of the message is picked up further at the Induction Evening for parents/carers as part of the transition process. The Year 9 Options Evening also gives prominence to the importance of language study. Parents/carers are also encouraged to take advantage of the school's own Community Education Programme, which offers courses at different levels in half a dozen different languages.

Whilst most students are required to study a language at KS4, staff still need to work hard to ensure that they are motivated to do so, and to maximise the numbers who choose to study German in addition to their first language. Central to this is an engaging, culturally-rich KS3 MFL curriculum with strong progression supplemented by opportunities to travel (e.g. Year 7 trips to France and Spain, Year 8 trip to Germany), and/or to work collaboratively with students through partnership projects (e.g. Year 9 class letter writing exchange with a school in Germany) and/or to engage with native speakers (e.g. part-time Foreign Language Assistants). Equally, language learning is presented as part of a wider whole school commitment to global citizenship, equality, and diversity.¹⁴



The British Council's 2021 report on motivation and influences at Year 9 sheds a light on key areas for future lines of research; the report shows that, although pupils from across different socio-economic contexts share positive attitudes to language learning, ABC1 parents in higher socio-economic groups are more likely to encourage their children to learn a Modern Foreign Language (O'Neill, 2021).

¹⁴ With thanks to Christopher Lillington, Assistant Headteacher of Prince Henry's Grammar School, for providing this case study.

Languages at Key Stage 4

For students across England, 2022 was the first year of summer exams since 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Centres and teachers determined grades in the summers of 2020 and 2021, respectively. Awarding Organisations were asked to implement an unprecedented package of support for students taking exams in 2022. As part of the package, Advance Information was made available for GCSE Modern Foreign Languages. Figure 13 shows GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2022. It is important to note that the data reflect entries, not numbers of candidates; therefore, candidates taking two or more languages are conflated in the data. It is also only worth considering this data against the overall GCSE candidature; in 2022 there were 622,350 16-year-olds in England sitting GCSEs.

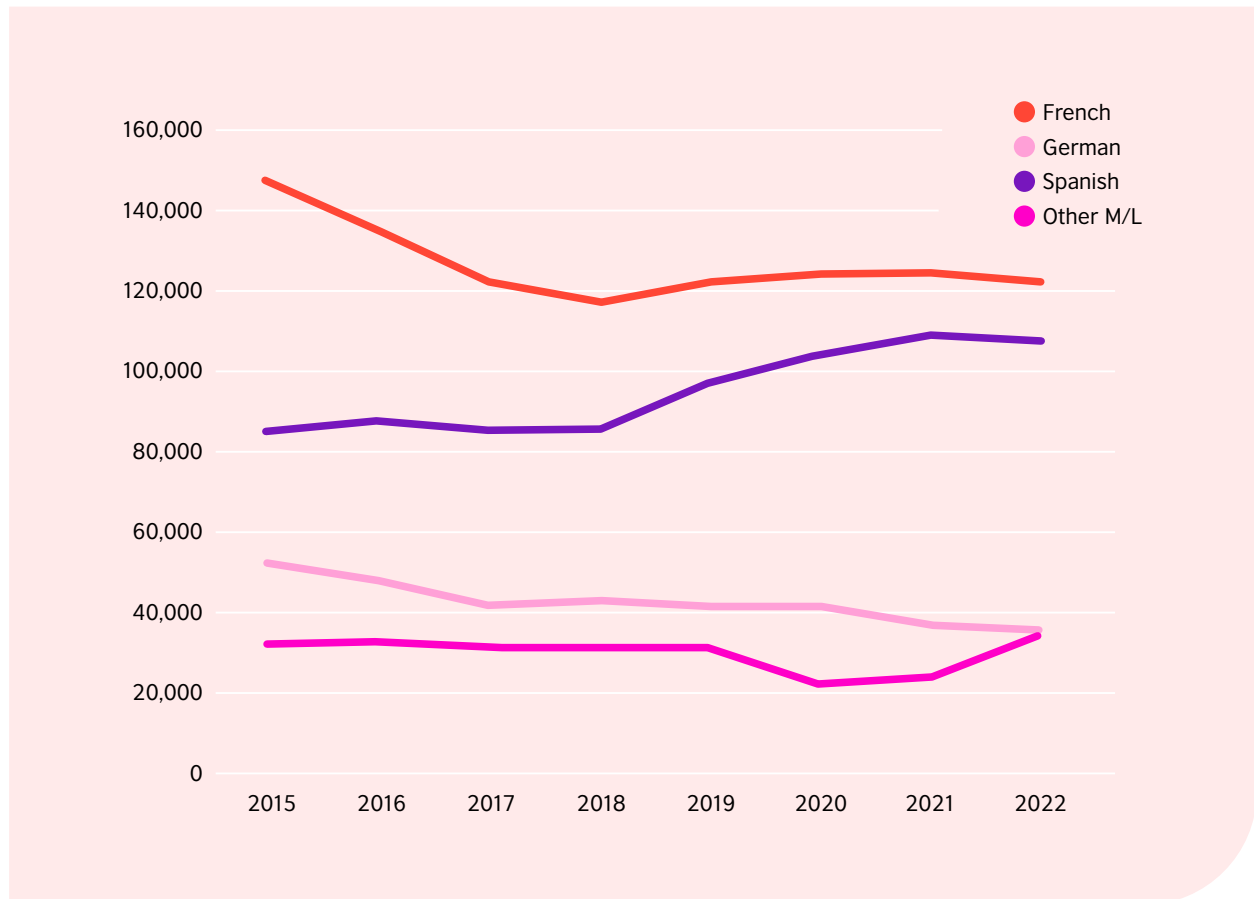


Figure 13: GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2022

	2005 baseline	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
French	251,706	147,356	135,401	121,095	117,925	122,803	124,404	124,739	122,746
German	101,466	51,986	47,913	41,762	42,509	41,222	40,748	36,933	34,966
Spanish	57,731	85,217	87,581	85,184	89,577	96,811	104,280	108,982	107,488
Other Modern	28,182	32,090	32,704	31,668	31,437	30,997	22,344	24,103	35,202

Table 10: GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2022 (Source JCQ)

With 35,202 entries for Other Modern Languages, it is a cause for celebration; numbers have exceeded pre-pandemic levels and are a reflection that more people are achieving certification for their language learning.

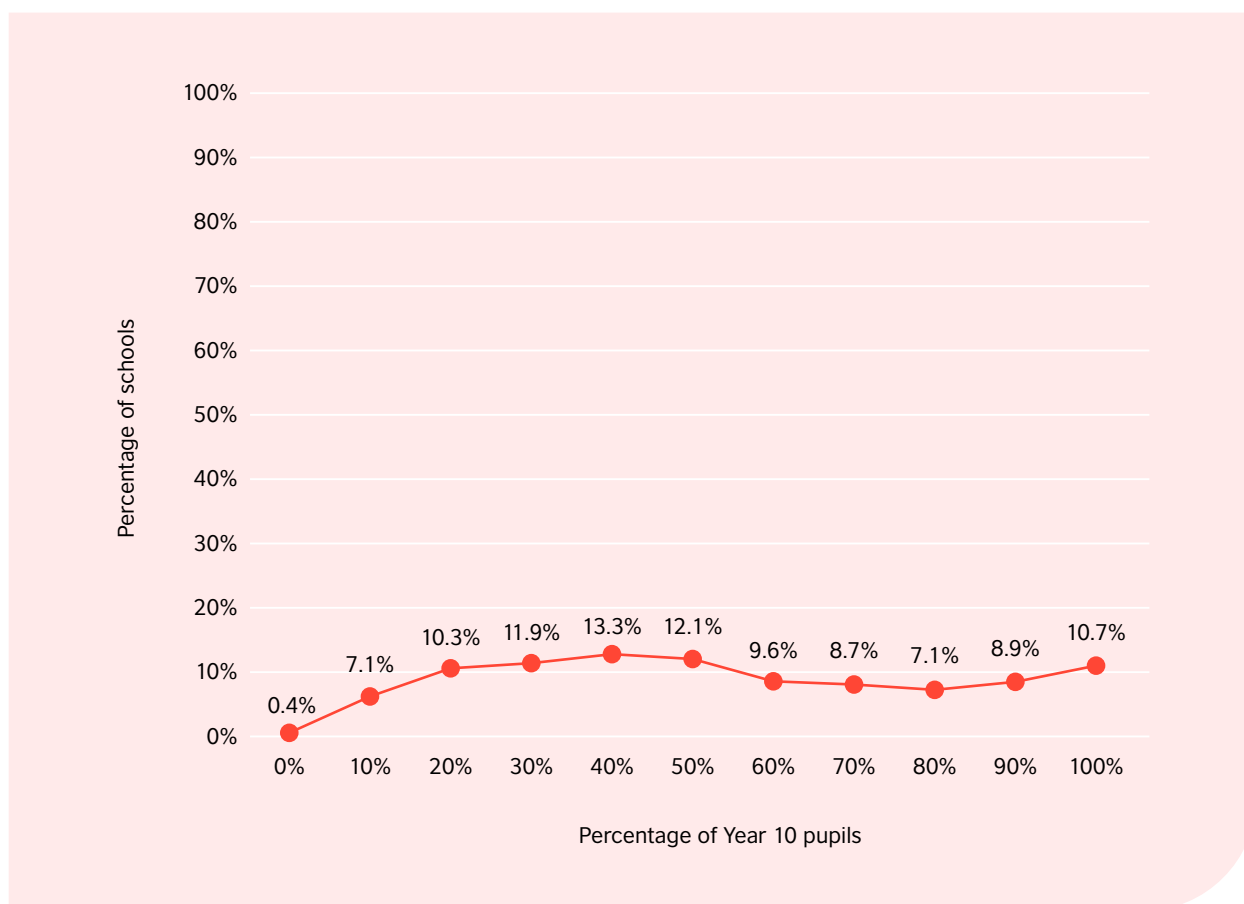


Figure 14: The percentage of Year 10 pupils in responding state schools taking a language for GCSE

Figure 14 shows that in just 10.7 per cent of responding state schools report that all of their pupils are taking a language for GCSE. Figure 15 shows responses to the same question from independent schools, where languages are much more secure at GCSE. As in 2022, our data confirm that there is still a considerable way to go for the government's ambition of 90 per cent of young people in Year 10 taking a GCSE in a Modern Foreign Language from September 2024.

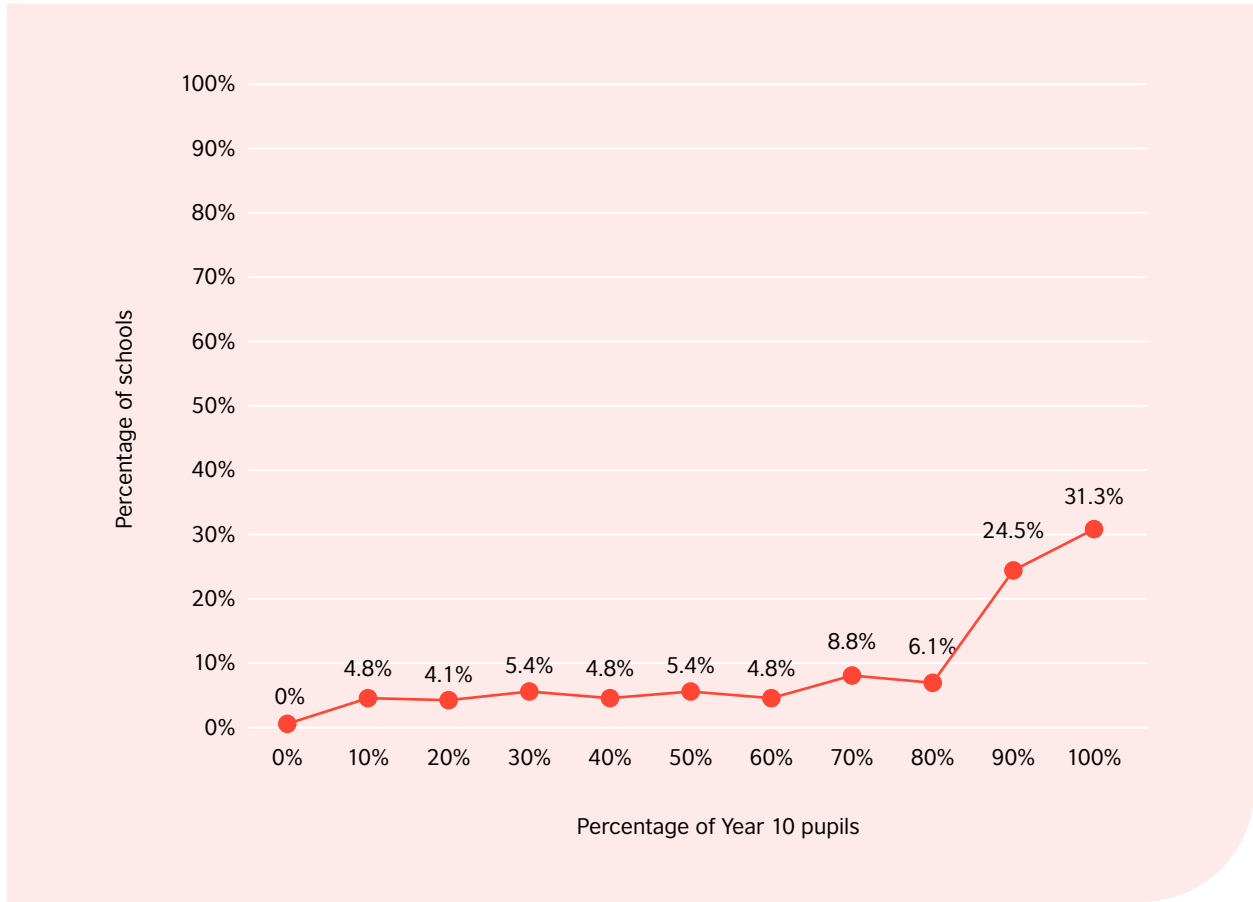


Figure 15: The percentage of Year 10 pupils in responding independent schools taking a language for GCSE

It is important to note that, although languages are compulsory in just 15 per cent of responding state schools (compared to 44 per cent of responding independent schools), teachers from state schools have reported a positive increase in figures; when asked how trends in language uptake at Key Stage 4 have changed over the past three years, more teachers told us in figure 16 that numbers are on the up:

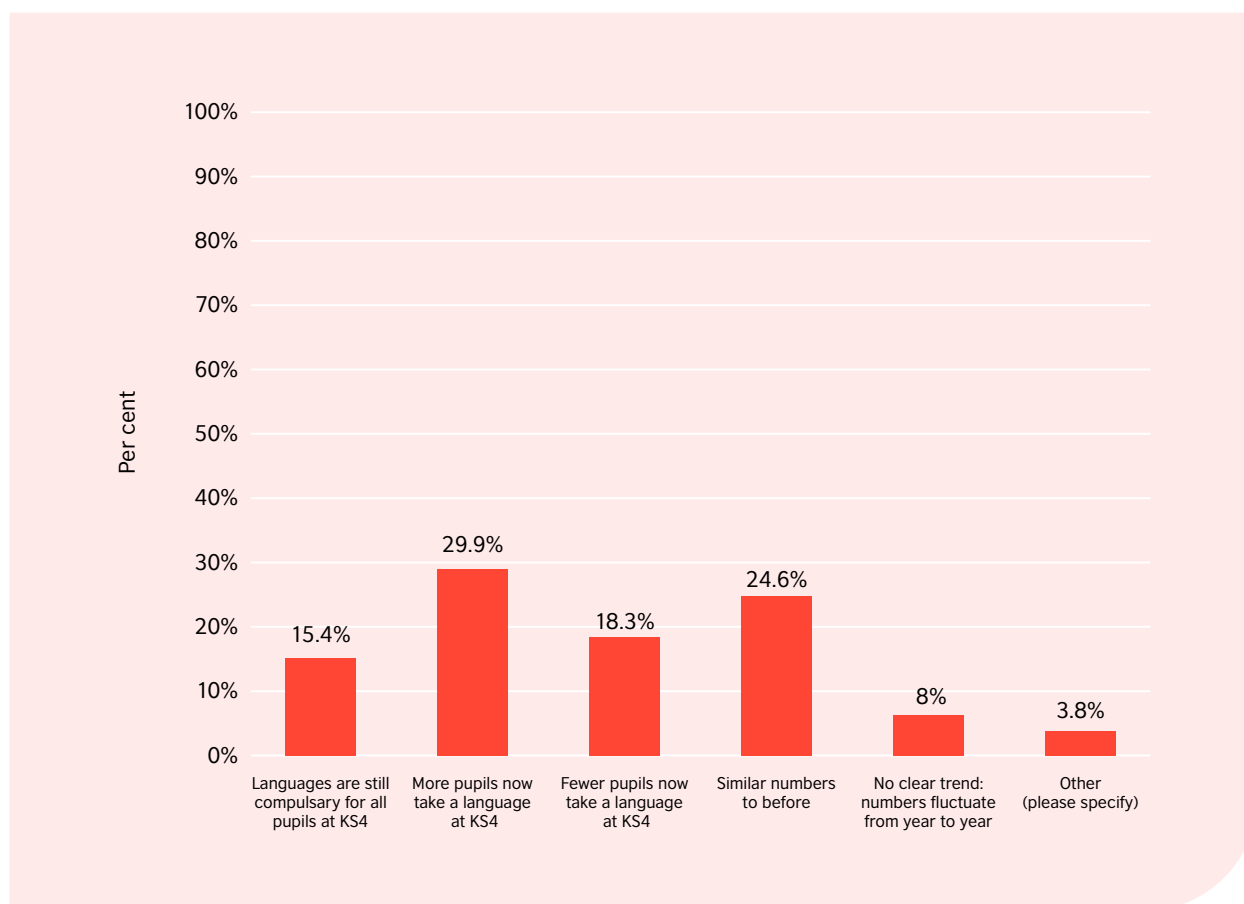


Figure 16: State school teachers' perceptions of language uptake over the past three years at Key Stage 4

The new GCSE in French, German and Spanish from 2024

When we ask teachers about the biggest barriers to them in delivering high quality language lessons, the top two reasons in both sectors are consistently, (i) the nature and content of external exams and (ii) the way external exams are marked and graded. It is thus refreshing to see that the development of new GCSE specifications is at an advanced stage. For first teaching from September 2024 for awarding in Summer 2026, the linguistic content of GCSEs in French, German and Spanish from Awarding Organisations in England will focus on the most commonly occurring vocabulary of each language, with 1,700 words at Higher Tier and 1,200 words at Foundation Tier.

We asked teachers in state schools if they thought the new GCSE will have a positive or negative impact on uptake: 63 per cent of teachers do not expect any change, 18 per cent of teachers think numbers will go up, 12 per cent do not know and 7 per cent of teachers think numbers will decrease. In planning for the new GCSE, teachers ranked the following predetermined list:

		Rank
Most Important	Teaching Vocabulary	1
	Teaching Phonics	2
	Teaching Grammar	3
	Teaching Culture	4
	Teaching through the Target Language	5
Least Important	Teaching through English	6

Table 11: Teachers' priorities in planning for the new GCSE from September 2024

Languages Post-16

Forty-five per cent of responding state schools have post-16 provision for languages and a further 7 per cent have local sharing arrangements. In the independent sector, 90 per cent of responding schools have post-16 provision.

Official exam data show that, for the fourth year running, Spanish is the most popular language at A-level, replacing the long-standing tradition of French being in the top spot. The diverging trends noted in the graph below would suggest that Spanish now has the highest A-level entries and it is predicted that this trend will continue in future cohorts. It is interesting to recall that French continues to be the most taught language in primary schools.

Entries for Other Modern Languages (i.e. languages other than French, German, Irish, Spanish and Welsh) plummeted in 2020, most likely due to students at Saturday schools and in community learning settings not being awarded a grade for their work during the Covid-19 pandemic. These entries are showing signs of recovery but remain far below pre-pandemic levels.

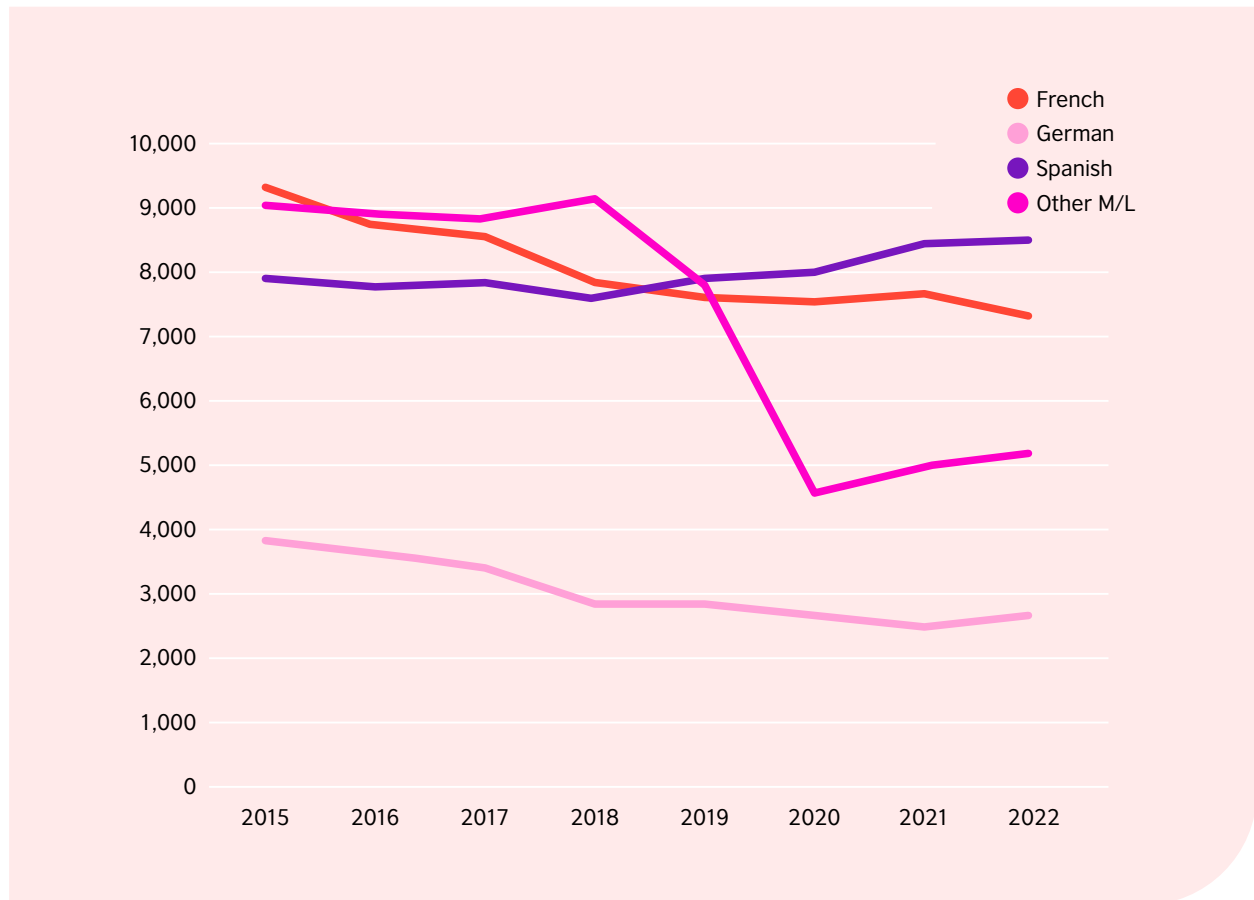


Figure 17: A-level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2022

	2005 baseline	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023
French	12,716	9,332	8,753	8,539	7,874	7,607	7,557	7,671	7,347
German	5,481	3,791	3,617	3,422	2,859	2,864	2,666	2,507	2,646
Spanish	5,601	7,941	7,774	7,813	7,591	7,932	8,033	8,433	8,496
Other Modern	6,249	9,039	8,884	8,862	9,091	7,762	4,606	4,985	5,171

Table 12: A-level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England (Source JCQ)

In the current financial climate, state schools in particular find it challenging to run A-level classes with low numbers. We asked teachers what happens in their school when only a few pupils choose to study a language. Figure 18 shows that in one in three schools, classes simply do not run and young people's language learning journey is thus interrupted. Several comments in the 'other' category stated that classes run regardless of small numbers:

"We actively facilitate this option and support the running of small groups for those pupils."

"They run anyway, with usual timetabled hours."

"Classes run even with one student."

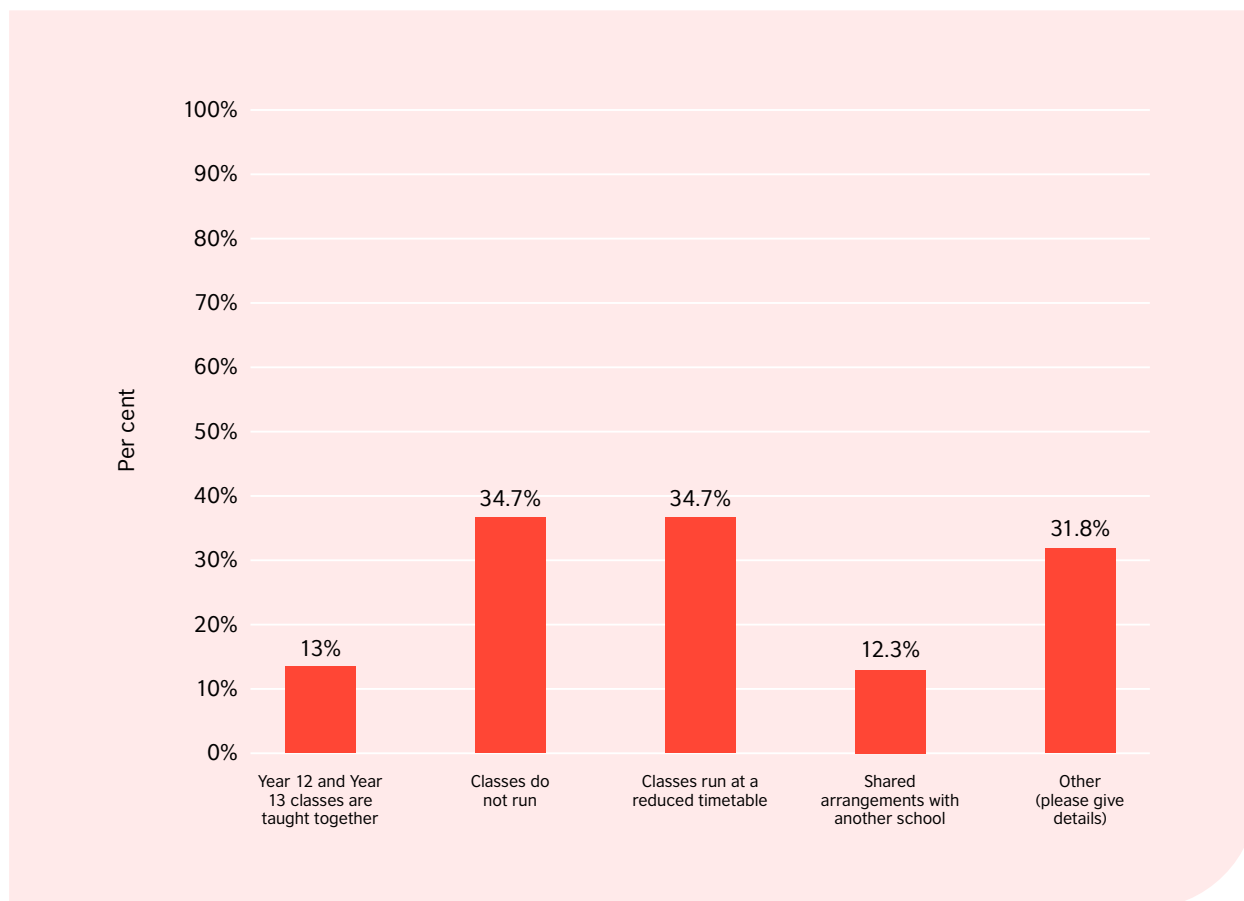


Figure 18: Arrangements when only a few pupils want to study a language for A-level

We also asked teachers how individual languages have fared at A-level over the past three years. In figure 19, we can see that Spanish is increasing in one in five schools which offer it. French and German are both more likely than Spanish to be discontinued, but there is good news given that one in three schools told us that take-up is stable in French and Spanish.

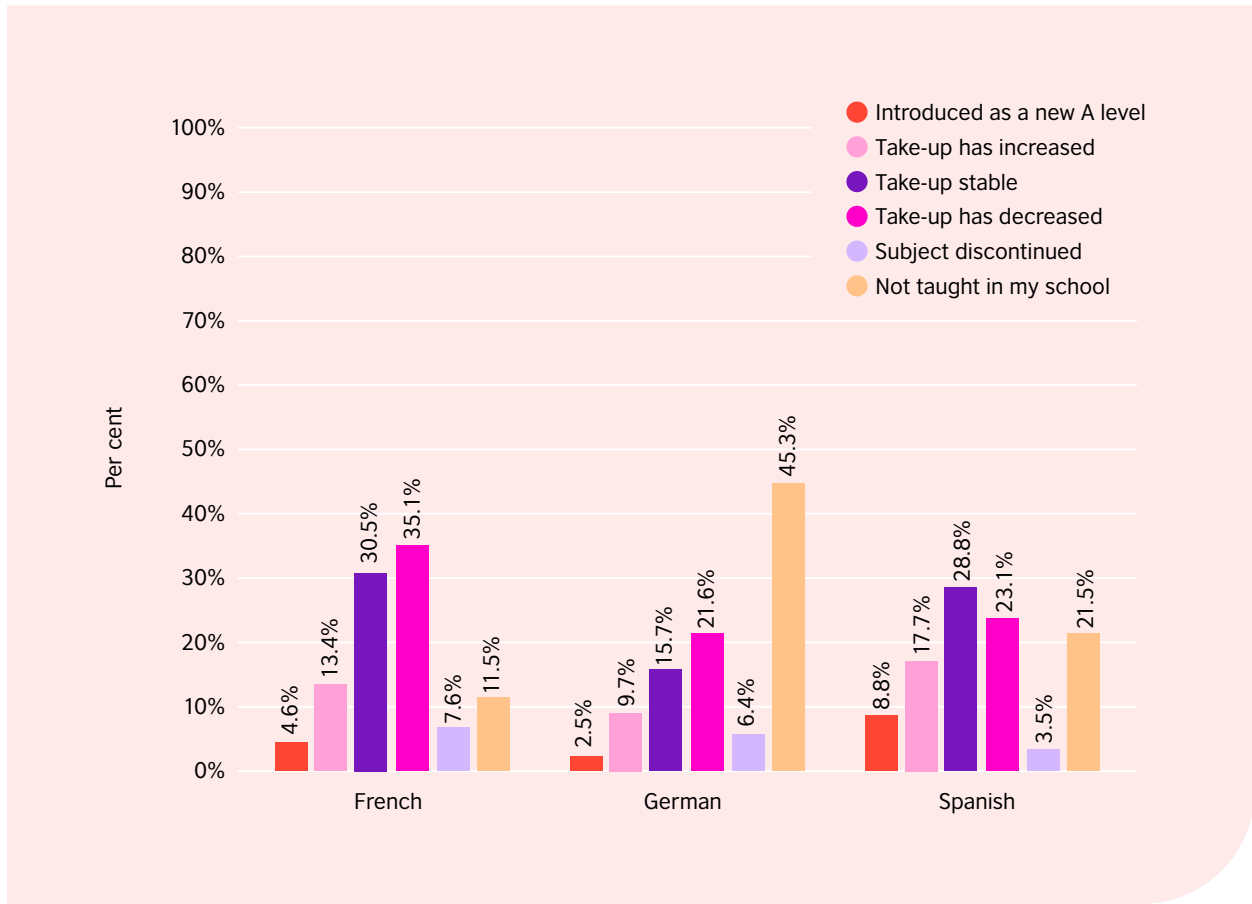


Figure 19: Teachers' perceptions of changes in take-up and provision in post-16 languages over the past three years

International engagement

	State schools			Independent schools		
	2018	2021	2023	2018	2021	2023
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	31%	31%	28%	41%	42%	40%
We host language assistants	23%	21%	22%	50%	69%	63%
None	11%	38%	36%	3%	11%	9%

Table 13: International engagement in state and independent schools

One in five state schools and half of independent schools told us they engage with cultural institutes (e.g. Confucius Institute, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Consejería de Educación), and just under one in ten schools take part in British Council international opportunities, for example the International School Award.¹⁵

Following the UK's decision to leave the European Union, access to Erasmus funding for international mobility of teachers and pupils has ended. A similar enterprise is the Turing Scheme, the UK government's programme to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world.¹⁶ We asked state secondary teachers if they had heard of and/or accessed the Turing scheme. Figure 20 reveals that there is considerable work to be done to raise awareness of the Turing scheme and thus provide more opportunities for international engagement. In Language Trends England 2022 just 16 out of 769 state schools reported having applied for Turing funding; it is positive to report that, in 2023, the figure stands at a comparatively

¹⁵ The British Council International School Award supports schools in fostering an international ethos throughout the school and embedding it within the curriculum. See: <https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/accreditation/international-school-award>.

¹⁶ See: <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/>.

healthier 27 out of 586 schools. In our data set there is no evidence of any independent schools having been successful in accessing Turing funding.

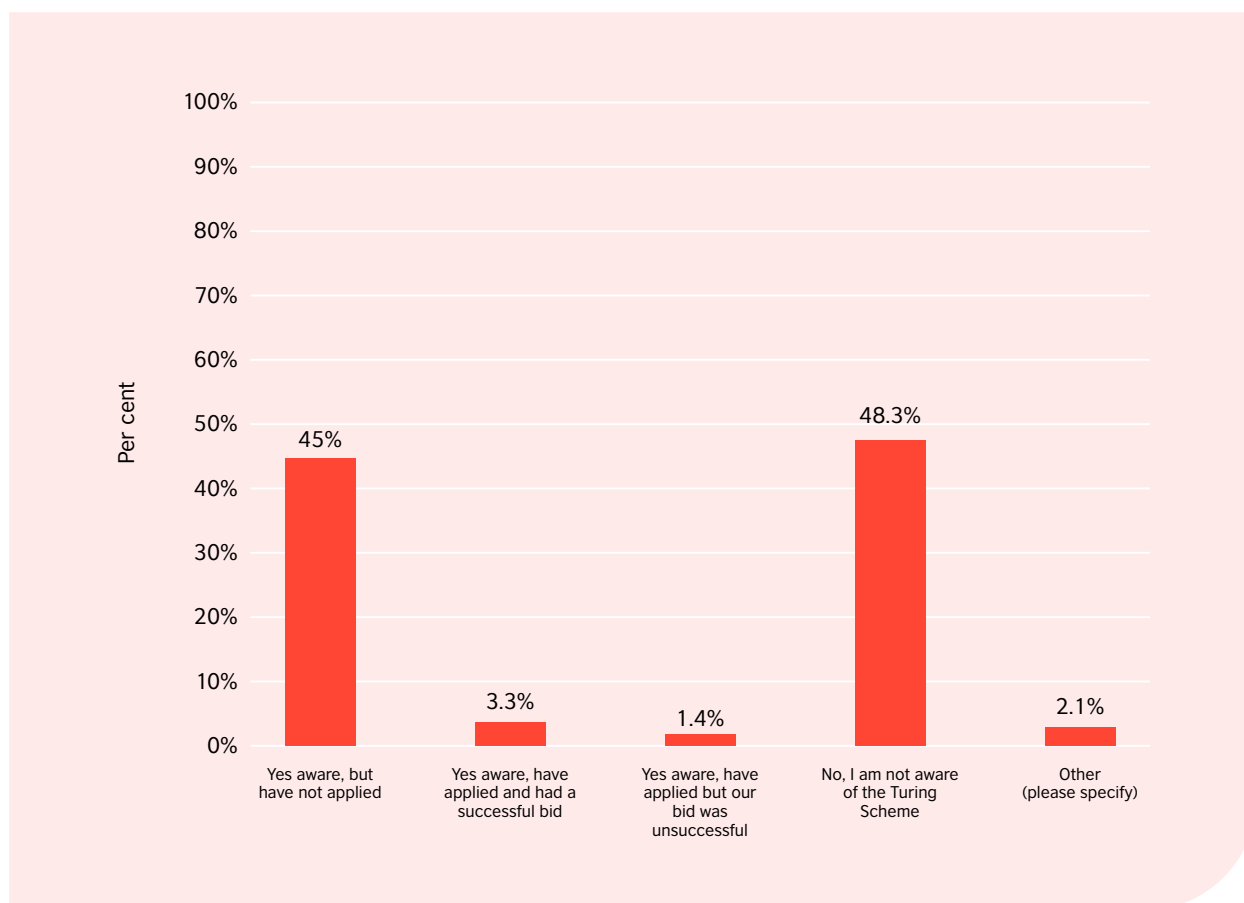


Figure 20: State secondary school teachers' awareness of Turing funding

Independent schools in focus

Independent schools, which do not receive funding from government, share many of the same opportunities and challenges of teaching languages in the state sector, as has been reported above. There are, however, some issues that are distinct to independent schools and this section is intended to elucidate such issues.

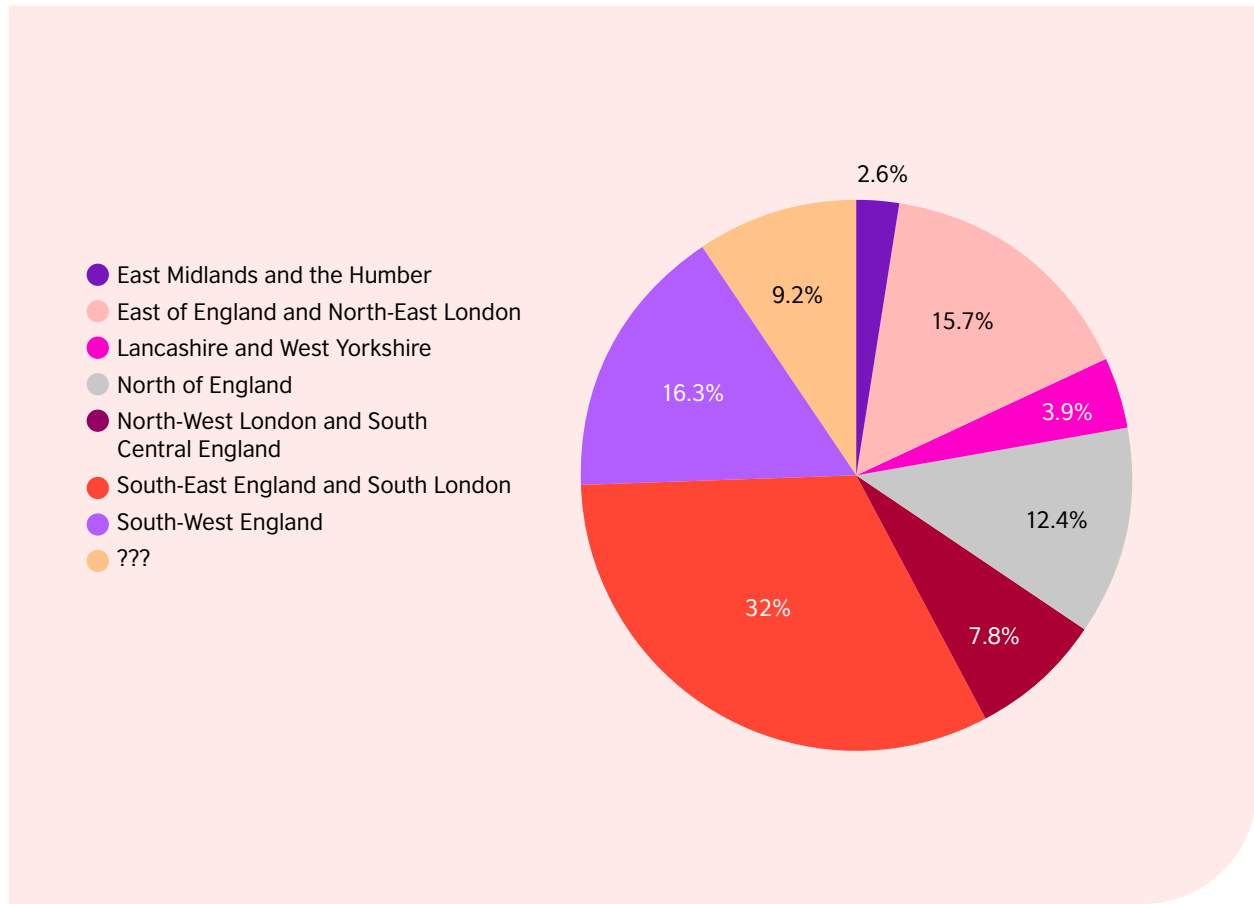


Figure 21: Geographical location of responding independent schools

Figure 21 shows that almost one in three independent schools responding to our survey is located in south-east England and south London. In one out of three responding schools, some pupils are admitted using the Common Entrance (CE) assessment.¹⁷ Half of schools admit pupils using their own Entrance exams; only one in ten of these schools assess a Modern Foreign Language or an ancient language as part of the assessment.

The majority of independent schools allocate 1-2 hours of curriculum time to language learning at Key Stage 3 and 2-3 hours at Key Stage 4. Figure 22 shows that there is variation across the sector with a significant number of schools allocating more than 2 hours at Key Stage 3.

¹⁷ See: <https://www.iseb.co.uk/assessments/common-entrance/>.

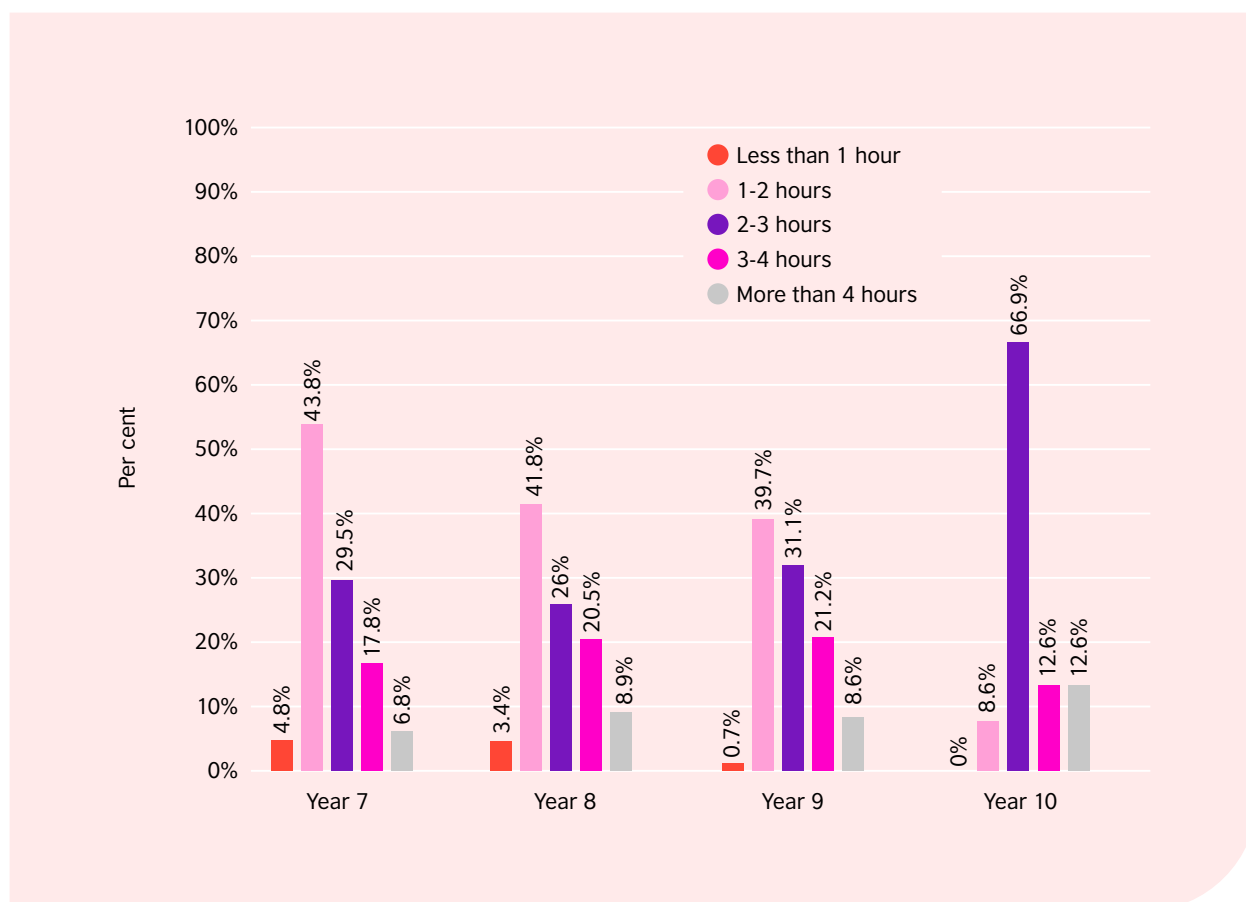


Figure 22: Time for languages at Key Stages 3 and 4 in independent schools

Half of independent schools report that pupils must take a language for GCSE. Independent schools are also much more likely than state schools to employ a Language Assistant, either through the British Council or privately. Figure 23 shows that French is the most popular language for Language Assistants, but in the other column we saw evidence of schools with Dutch, Italian, Japanese and Russian-speaking Language Assistants.

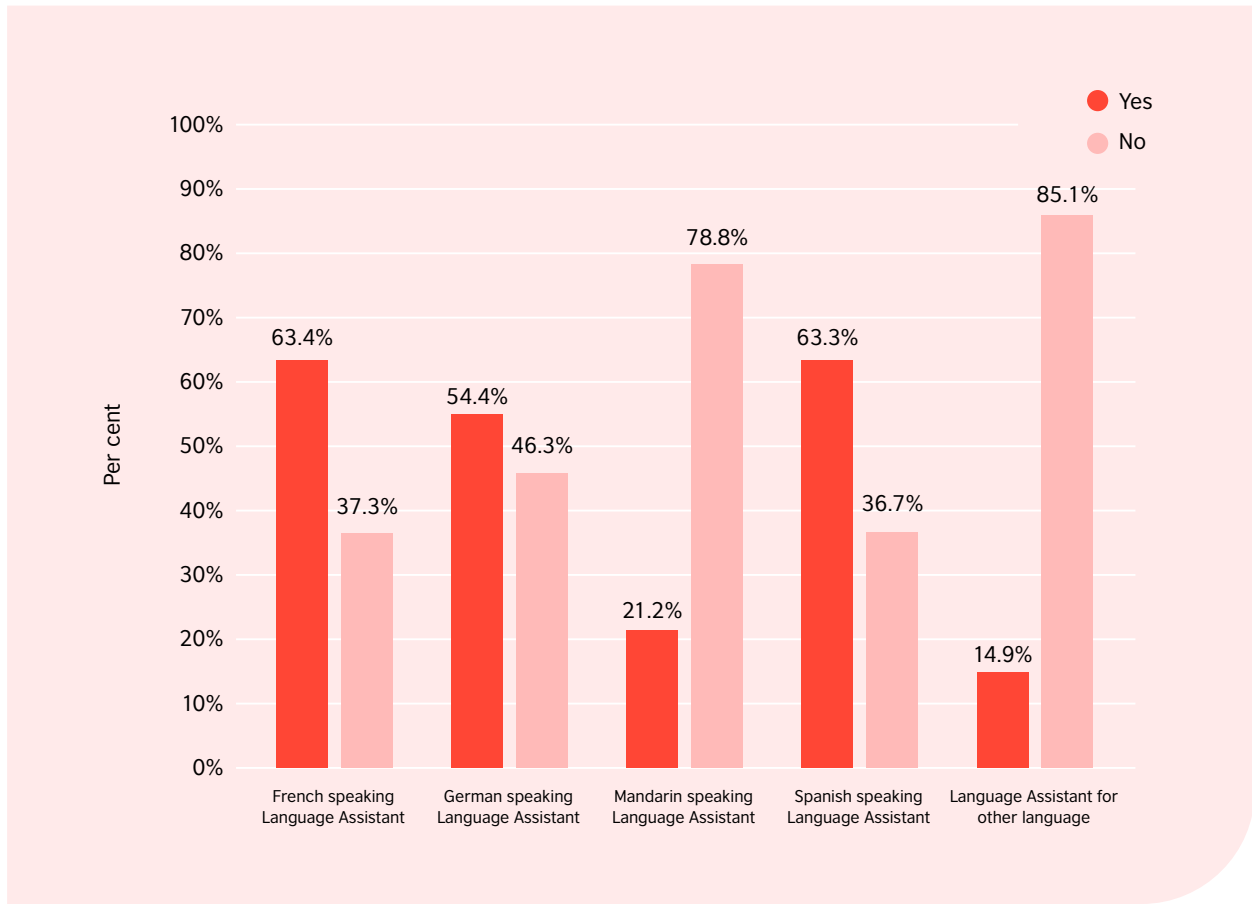


Figure 23: Language Assistants in independent schools

Eighteen responding state schools reported having previously taught the now discontinued Cambridge Pre-U qualification.¹⁸ Teachers reported that this has left a particular gap for Mandarin in that the only alternative is to enter A-level Mandarin. There is a perception, and we stress a perception, that this puts non-native Mandarin learners at a disadvantage:

“Mandarin is now in a precarious position as Pre-U was the ‘go to’ qualification for non -native speakers.”

“We have had to switch to A Level. This is regrettable, especially for Mandarin, where the Pre-U seemed to be the best post-16 exam for non-native speakers.”

¹⁸ Cambridge Pre-U was a post-16 qualification that prepared learners with the skills and knowledge they needed to succeed at university. The last examinations in the majority of subjects were in June 2023.

Conclusion

At primary level, the response rate indicates that there is a timely opportunity to incite participation from a wider geographical area of schools, as well as a wider cohort of pupils within the various FSME quintiles. The profile of respondents from primary schools largely reflects a positive disposition to teaching primary languages, with nearly all responding schools (99 per cent) meeting the statutory requirement to teach a language as part of the curriculum. The data collected consequently reveal a positive approach to primary languages education, with 82 per cent of schools reporting that they have taught languages for at least the past five years, and several teachers also commented on practices to encourage inclusivity for EAL pupils.

However, the data from responding schools also hints at areas with room for improvement; consistent with Language Trends England 2021 and 2022, responding primary teachers reported that the constraints of time and lesson length inhibit pupil progress. As in 2022, communication, collaboration and continuity remain issues that require attention in the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. A third point of consideration for future research concerns access to funding and raising teacher awareness surrounding the rich diversity of resources that they could freely avail of.

French, German and Spanish remain the 'big 3' curricular languages; with planned revisions to the GCSE specifications in these languages to take place from 2024, there are exciting times ahead in the study and research of future language trends in England. In comparison with independent school figures, German numbers are lower in state secondary schools by around 40 per cent at Key Stages 3 and 4, and 35 per cent at post-16; consequently, we hope to report on the positive effects implemented and supported by the new NCLE and its GIMAGINE project in future Language Trends research.

The data and comments collected in this report reflect both the positive practices and gaps in the language education of young people at primary and secondary level, shedding a light on key areas where there is room to better support teachers and pupils.

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