

Introduction

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| Authority: | West Lothian Council |
| Case Study Focus: | 1+2 |
| Establishment: | St Ninian's RC Primary School |
| Learners' Stage: | Nursery – P7 |



About the School

St Ninian's is a denominational school situated in Livingston South. The school also serves pupils from parts of Livingston outwith its immediate catchment area. Strong links exist with St Margaret's Academy, the other associated primary schools and there are active and effective parish links through St Philip's RC Church in Dedridge. The school roll currently stands at 387. Alongside the English-speaking majority, other home languages currently represented in the school population include Polish, Malayam, Urdu, Romanian and German.

The nursery class has one teacher, three senior nursery nurses and two other nursery nurses. Meanwhile, there are four pupil support workers and 19.1 FTE teaching staff in the primary school.

Background

Progressing towards 1+2 Approach

While there is a significant minority of learners for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL), at St Ninian's, French is the second modern language for most pupils and Spanish the third.

Two part-time teachers who have an interest in modern languages, Julie Caskie and Jane Keegan, have been timetabled to teach them across the school for the past three years. Julie teaches French in P1 while Jane teaches French from P2 to P7. Jane is MLPS trained and is the Primary Modern Languages Network Leader for West Lothian. Julie, and the nursery staff, have received training in early years languages teaching.

In the nursery, as the children develop generic skills in their first language, they also begin learning French on an informal, responsive basis.

'These include taking part in conversations, developing listening, reading and writing skills and knowledge about language. All of these are relevant to learning other languages. Within modern languages at these stages teachers build on

children’s natural curiosity for sounds and words, and their strong desire to communicate. Activities include playing games, singing songs, carrying out simple instructions, and playing with simple poetry and rhyme. In this way the children begin to be enthusiastic, confident language learners from the outset.’ (St Ninian’s school handbook 2012-2013, p10)

In line with guidance in the Modern Languages Principles and Practice document, it is stated in the school handbook that:

‘By the end of Primary 7, the majority of children will have learned the skills necessary to:

- give a short presentation about themselves
- take part in simple conversations and transactions
- understand classroom instructions and personal information
- enjoy listening to a story, song or poem
- read aloud a simple text
- read and understand a short text
- write a few sentences about themselves and others.’ (ibid, p10)

In addition to Jane and Julie, some of the other practitioners are MLPS Spanish trained and there has been an extra-curricular Spanish club in the recent past. However, for the past two years, a parent volunteer with a Spanish degree and experience of Community Education has taught Spanish to P4-P7. To hook the children into Spanish as their second additional language, Hispanic culture is introduced through sport, fiestas and festivals. This approach tends to provoke curiosity in the Spanish language itself, at which point the children are taught about personal language, family and pets.

The parent volunteer has been struck by the childrens’ ability to make connections between languages.

‘Some do get a bit muddled with their French,’ she said, ‘but they realise right away how it can help them with their Spanish. One boy saw the word ‘la vaca’ for the first time and worked out it must be cow because “La vache is cow in French.”’

At the end of P7, the majority of pupils go to St Margaret’s Academy in Livingston. Staff permitting, members of the Academy’s Modern Languages Department provide additional French and Spanish input for P6 and P7 pupils and staff from both sectors work closely and collaboratively. As all students learn French and Spanish in S1 at St Margaret’s, this approach to cross-sector, collegiate planning supports primary-secondary transition and ensures greater continuity and progression in learning.

Aims of language learning approach

Frances Young, Acting Head Teacher at St Ninian’s, explains the aims of the language learning approach at the school:

‘The ethos of language learning ... is based upon fun, active learning which is enjoyed by all and is accessible to all ages and abilities of learner.’

Jane Keegan describes the main focus of the school’s approach:

‘It’s ... skills ... building the childrens’ skills from a young age and then you can see it when they get up, now that they’ve been doing it maybe three years ... they’re so much better, the difference is amazing.’

There is also a clear commitment to high expectations at St Ninian’s, in language learning as much as any other area of the curriculum.

‘Attainment and achievement across all areas of school life are celebrated. Examples this session have included ... winning SCILT’s European Day of Languages poster competition.’ (St Ninian’s Standards & Quality Report 2011-12)

Planning

In terms of planning, Jane and Julie refer to the extensive MLPS plans drawn up by the Local Authority Curriculum Support Tutor a few years ago. These plans include suggested contexts for each stage, a range of suggested resources and a variety of active learning strategies too. Using them as a starting point, *‘we have adapted it because I think we now do fewer topics but in more depth’ (JK)* which allows for progression as well as personalisation and choice.

Jane and Julie make the most of regular collegiate time to evaluate and plan learning experiences however, Jane does admit: *‘We have found it difficult to plan at Early and First stages as there are no Es and Os ... (and we) look forward to more guidance’.*

Click the links for the latest guidance from [SCILT](#) and [Education Scotland](#) on what learning in languages at Second Level might look like.

Implementation

Previously, class teachers in P6 and P7 taught French to their own classes. However, in the past three years, pupils at St Ninian’s have been learning French from P1. The school feels that one of the keys to successful implementation is motivating learners by keeping up the pace and variety of learning experiences.

View the [film clip](#) of a group of St Ninian’s children talking about why they enjoy learning languages.

‘We use lots of self-assessment and peer-assessment strategies and provide a balance between co-operative and individual learning tasks. There is a great focus

on interdisciplinary learning through literacy, numeracy, RE and social subjects.'
Frances Young, Acting HT

Using ICT both in and out of school has also been very successful. Jane explains how her learners rose to the challenge of the interactive interdisciplinary 'Passeport pour la Francophonie' resource :

'... the children love [the videos on the 'Passeport' website], they're difficult but I was working with P5 and ... they did OK with them. They really liked it, it was good.'
(JK)

Click the link to visit Education Scotland's ['Passeport pour la Francophonie'](#) site.

The same has proved true for extra-curricular ICT opportunities:

'I think GLOW works quite well ... Children like using it for languages and it's very busy even on Christmas Day ... and they're going on at home and that probably involves parents ... We're putting links to games [and] things like that ... they go home and try them out and they like posting their scores.' (JK)

Impact

Lifelong language learners

Multiculturalism and diversity is respected and celebrated at the school, as evidenced among other things by a commitment to gaining [Rights Respecting School](#) status. Languages are highly regarded and many of the youngsters can already see how useful an ability to communicate in more than one language will be to them in the future.

Listen to some St Ninian's pupils talking about their career plans on this [video clip](#).

'Pupils have become more aware of other cultures through learning languages ... Pupils are very positive about language learning and their confidence has increased greatly. We are able to approach language learning in much greater depth.' explains Frances Young, Acting HT.

Partnership working

Partnership working related to modern languages at St Ninian's has ranged widely in recent years. Some parent helpers have supported learning and teaching in class. At a local level, members of the Modern Languages Department at St Margaret's Academy, the cluster secondary school have visited the school regularly and have done some team-teaching.

The fact that Jane leads the regional Primary Modern Languages Network has proved helpful. Organising events and meetings for the network has provided Jane and her

colleagues opportunities to share examples of resources and to engage in professional dialogue and development with West Lothian colleagues and other educationalists, all of which influences ML practice at St Ninian's.

In recent years, St Ninian's has won the 'Rencontres Théâtrales' drama competition run by l'Institut Français and the European Day of Languages poster competition by SCILT, Scotland's National Centre for Languages.

Parental feedback

'Parents are very positive about our approach to language learning and feedback at parents' evenings is extremely positive.' Frances Young, Acting HT

St Ninian's has a blog on GLOW which has created a means of sharing learning with parents and the wider community. Language learning is one of the elements celebrated.

Feb
06
2013

La Famille Simpson

Primary 4, Primary 5

No Responses »

Well done to Primary 4/5 for excellent work on the Simpson family. Your writing and presentations were super!

Posted by Mrs Keegan at 12:23 pm

Tagged with: Modern Languages

Feb
06
2013

Primary 1 make Je m'appelle badges

Primary 1

1 Response »

Well done to both Primary 1 classes for making excellent badges in French. You are working really hard.

Posted by Mrs Caskie at 12:58 pm

Tagged with: Modern Languages

In addition, there are more formal opportunities for parental contact:

'We have drop in sessions at Parents' Night ... rather than appointments ... The parents come in ... and some of the activities that we use are out and the children show their parents what they're learning ... and we have a chance to chat to the parents, and if they have any questions or any issues ... A lot of them say "That's great! I didn't learn a language until I was at high school and I found it really hard," so a lot are very positive that the children are getting a chance to learn it.' (JK)

Challenges and Next Steps

Challenges

At a strategic, management level:

‘The challenges include staffing, timetabling, financial implications, MLPS training, coherence of learning and teaching, building confidence in staff and planning at Early and First Levels.’ Frances Young, Acting HT

At an individual level, Jane Keegan is MLPS trained but despite this, she admits that keeping up her language skills is an on-going issue. Thanks to Comenius funding, Jane was able to go on a week-long French immersion course in Lyon In October 2012. She enjoyed the experience immensely and believes that she benefited hugely from the extended opportunity to practise her language skills in authentic situations.

Click the link to the latest [Comenius immersion opportunities](#) for Scottish teachers.

Another challenge to maintaining language provision at St Ninian’s is that career commitments mean the parent volunteer teaching Spanish in P4-P7 will not be able to continue at the school next academic session.

Next steps

The next steps identified by Frances Young, the Acting HT include ‘developing progression of topics and skills and sourcing and funding new resources for learners and teachers.’

For the learning and teaching to be sustainable and to have the best possible impact, Jane Keegan envisages classroom teachers supporting her teaching by embedding languages in more everyday classwork. ‘Class teachers doing more follow-up would be a good next step,’ says Jane, ‘and you don’t need an awful lot of language skills.’

To facilitate consistency and transition, the West Lothian Primary and Secondary ML Networks have scheduled a joint meeting. Jane and Mairi Godley, ML Teacher at St Margaret’s Academy will attend the meeting. The aim is for cluster primary and secondary schools to work collaboratively on cross-sector planning.

Furthermore, Mairi hopes that there may be more opportunities for her and her secondary colleagues to go to cluster primary schools to work directly with P6 and P7 learners in coming years.