

Evaluation visit to Hillside Primary School, Dundee

Title of the project: Embedding French language and culture into the life of the school

Aims of the project:

To introduce a programme for language learning which would enable all staff to introduce and embed the French language into the day-to-day life of the school from P1 to P7. To create a positive ethos around language learning and build children's confidence and cultural awareness.

Discussion of self-evaluation paper: key messages from the school

Background

The school roll at the time of the visit was 298 which included enhanced provision for 20 children with ASD. Before the pilot session, the school's only trained MLPS teacher taught French to her own P7 class and was timetabled to deliver MLPS to pupils at P6. This provision continued throughout the pilot. All other classes began French as beginners. The school was supported in its pilot by Le Français en Ecosse (LFEE) who provided sound files and training, in each of three blocks, in advance of using new material.

The programme and planning sheets were provided by LFEE and SCILT. The school followed a prescriptive programme initially, followed by some flexibility at a later stage in the pilot. The school is now keen to adapt the programme to improve links with study in other areas of the curriculum. As the pilot did not begin at the start of the session, it continued into session 2013-14. In August 2013, changes in staffing meant three class teachers and the new DHT had not been involved in the pilot the previous session. Only one of the new members of staff had been MLPS trained.

Resources/methodology

Staff used mainly resources and planning provided by LFEE and SCILT. The methodology hinged on embedding use of the language into the life of the school. Initially, the emphasis was on oral/aural work and recognition of French words in print, as would be experienced by new learners.

French was used across the school as part of daily routines. This included lining up, taking the register, saying the weather and practising songs while tidying up or during art activities. Where staff were confident, they moved between French and English throughout the day.

There were also whole-school activities such as 'Day with a Difference: French Day' and presentations of French language learning at assembly. French was included in other areas of the curriculum where appropriate, such as French songs in music lessons, consolidation of numbers and colours for physical education games and numeracy activities. Aspects of French culture were introduced through the study of French artists in art, and a social comparison of Dundee and Lyons.

Children's experiences and achievements

The school found that children were very enthusiastic and keen to learn. They were proud of their learning. They wanted to use their French and often asked the French for more words and phrases. They particularly liked Tidou the puppet and interacted well during activities involving him.

Staff note that children at the early stages interacted more readily and with no inhibitions. They feel that, overall, children's confidence has grown. They recognise that the main focus was on oral/aural work at the early stages but that children were exposed to the written word through displays, flash cards, labelling and some games.

Support for learners

Staff feel that children were supported by the large range of resources and activities, including classroom and school displays. Visits from French speakers from LFEE further helped them in their learning.

Successes of the pilot (from the self-evaluation)

- The very good resources and twilights gave staff the confidence to deliver the programme and ensured all staff were 'on board'. Teachers felt comfortable with what they were to teach.
- The reinforcement of vocabulary as part of the life of the school helped children retain it. As an introduction to language learning, the programme has made children enthusiastic, confident and interested in learning more French. The school felt that the content was appropriate in terms of the topics and pace for children at P1/P2 in particular.
- Children were sharing their learning with their parents.

Issues arising (from the self-evaluation)

- The pilot had introduced all of P1 to P5 to French at the same time. In future, understandably, staff would want individual programmes for each stage, with content that enabled staff to build on prior learning.
- Staff would like to have a structured P1 to P7 overview with topic vocabulary and resources available for each year group at the start of the year. This would facilitate the planning of relevant, meaningful learning in context.
- For P3 to P7, they would want greater progression, more content and a faster pace of learning. Of course, since all children were beginners at the start of the pilot, this was not possible but would be important in future.
- The school saw scope to involve the wider community. They would like e-twinning with a French school for example and access to secondary colleagues through joint projects involving peer and buddy support systems. The school is aware that they need better transition arrangements for modern languages so that children do not repeat learning at S1.

Overall evaluation by Education Scotland based on evidence during the visit

Class teachers were not all convinced of the value of the project at the start but all have shown great commitment to the aims of the project and to the training. They have grown in confidence through the training and through supporting each other. Resources such as sound files and cue cards have helped them retain that confidence. They have expressed a readiness to work outwith a prescriptive programme and to integrate the language more into other areas of the curriculum. They recognise that more training and support will be necessary to make this possible. Not all teachers are confident enough to use the language for all general classroom interactions but all are using French for aspects of daily routine such as lining up and checking attendance.

Across the stages, children were engaged in their learning and were very willing to contribute to lessons. At P2, children were able to identify attractions in Scotland and in France and to say, in French, which country they were in. Lessons at P1/P2 lasted for 15 to 20 minutes which was ample time at that stage to allow some new language to be introduced and practised. At P3, children worked well together on a number game which included recognising the written word. Across the stages, children benefited from a variety of tasks, including groupwork activities, games and songs to engage them in their learning. The range of topics covered was limited but now that teachers are gaining in confidence and children are able to build on their knowledge, this will be extended in future. Teachers are already keen to see where new themes might be introduced across the curriculum .

Children at P7 were following the school's MLPS programme. They were keen to share their language learning. They had learned within a range of traditional themes such as numbers 1-100, dates, times, weather and aspects of French culture. They were able to talk about themselves using simple sentences and could understand personal information spoken in French. With support, they could understand a longer piece of writing in French containing personal information in extended sentences. They had begun to write paragraphs in French.

Overall, across the school, children were enthusiastic in their learning and demonstrated good pronunciation and confidence in using the language. They were developing good skills in understanding the spoken word. Children were keen to learn other languages as a result of their experience and were beginning to see links between French and English. The whole-school events such as Day with a Difference and French assemblies have helped to reinforce French culture and make the language more alive. The school is keen to develop this further and staff have ideas for e-twinning, school challenges and word of the month for example. Parents are very positive about their children learning French through the project.

Now that a start has been made, staff recognise the scope to challenge children more in their learning by introducing more language and in particular, making more use of reading and writing activities. Grammar will be made more explicit to help children generate new language. These are areas which teachers will develop as they become more confident in their own language skills. Where teachers use the language to reinforce another area of the curriculum, such as numeracy, teachers should ensure that children's knowledge of the language is sufficient to make the

work meaningful and at the correct level of difficulty for that curriculum area. In future, teachers will also have to plan to assess children's learning in French as they progress through the school.

All children have had the opportunity to learn French. All, including those in the enhanced provision, are very proud of their learning and are keen to continue. Therefore, thanks to the hard work of staff, the pilot has achieved its original aims. By starting all of P1 to P5 at the same time, teachers have been able to support each other in the learning process. However, in future, it will be important to provide different types of activity, based on different themes, as children build on this work and move through the stages. The school's challenge now is to build on the work they have already done.

The school has engaged in some sharing with the cluster schools and the secondary school and sees the potential for buddies through GLOW. They envisage many opportunities for embedding the language further in the work of the school.