

Introduction

Authority:	Renfrewshire Council
Case Study Focus:	Progressive planning for first additional language from Nursery – P7
Establishments:	Houston Primary School
Learners' stage/s:	Nursery – P7



About the educational establishment and the learners

The school serves the village of Houston. The school roll currently stands at 425 and there are nineteen classes, none of which are composite. In addition, there are 80 children who attend the nursery class. Houston Primary School is an associated primary school for Gryffe High School.

Background

Progressing towards the “1+ 2 Approach”

Prior to 2006, French was taught at P7, P6 and the Nursery classes. It was also offered to the children in the rest of the school as an optional out-of-school activity called “Le Club Français”.

“When the children went on to begin their French studies at P6, it was noticeable that there was a group of children who were very proficient speaking French and another group who didn’t have French at all.”

- Headteacher

With equality of opportunity in mind, the school decided to introduce French from P1 to P5 classes in 2006.

At this point, there were two members of staff with degrees in French and four who were MLPS trained. Support was offered to other teachers in the form of sound files and other materials. In some cases, teachers arranged to swap classes so that one taught French, while the other teacher taught PE or music.

Since then, the school has progressed to the stage where fourteen teachers have attended a Primary Language Learning (PLL) course organised by the local authority in French or Spanish. With the support of the SMT, some members of staff have also participated in an exchange to Lyon and language immersion programmes in France and Spain.

Spanish has been offered at P5 as an extra-curricular activity. The school plans to include it more formally as an integral part of the curriculum at P5 in the next session.

“In Houston Primary school we have offered a modern language from primary 1 to all pupils, regardless of ability, for the last eight years. We believe it is essential to begin language learning at this important point in a child’s development. Modern Language learning is an integrated component of the learners’ experiences. In line with the government’s recommendations we are preparing for the introduction of Spanish, at Primary 5 next session, as our second modern language which has been agreed with Gryffe High School.”

- Principal Teacher

Planning and Implementation

Curriculum

The school is one of the six schools in Renfrewshire that have piloted a progressive framework created by the local authority which outlines the skills development that can be expected as learners progress through the primary stages. This framework allows for flexibility and teachers can plan and choose the materials and activities that are most appropriate to all their learners’ needs.

“Pupils with additional support needs learn French too. There is a child in primary six for whom a light comes on when he has French. When he was introduced to it he loved it. Materials were adapted for him and he embraced it. It became a real medium for his learning through the different topics. It also supported his language development.”

- Headteacher

Learning and Teaching

The aim of the learning and teaching is to develop children’s skills and confidence in listening and talking, reading and writing, in the target language. A wide range of strategies is employed to embed modern languages more fully across the curriculum, making links where appropriate and relevant. Daily routine, classroom organisation, use of the outdoor environment and interdisciplinary learning activities provide interesting opportunities for children to demonstrate their skills in a meaningful context.

[See videos of some learning in action at Houston Primary School](#) (YouTube)

[See some examples of displays to celebrate and support learning](#) (Flickr)

To broaden cultural awareness at all stages, the children are given opportunities to explore the culture of countries where French and Spanish are spoken. They investigate, for example, landmarks, food, festivals and celebrations, the arts, the education system, the Euro and trade.



Resources

The school uses a wide variety of active, stimulating and inclusive activities and resources such as songs and games, interactive IWB activities, websites, Power Points, sound files, CDs, DVDs. Teachers make good use of resources from other areas of the curriculum such as number fans. They also use puppets, flash cards, big books, toys, musical instruments, AV devices such as recordable pegs, talking tins, microphones, and dictionaries to improve the learning experience. Use of effective ICT underpins learning and teaching at Houston Primary School and teachers make use of blogs to communicate with their partner school in France.

Contextualised Learning

The teachers have integrated French into various interesting and relevant contexts for learning. This includes P2 learning about Blanche-Neige in French as part of their work on fairy tales and P5 learning about the planets in French. A good example of this approach is a P6 project “A la boulangerie”.

Learners used their numeracy skills to participate in various activities that required them to use weights and measures in the target language. They advertised their boulangerie throughout the school and baked items to sell to other pupils and to the community. They also used their IT skills to create designs for their cake bags.



Progression

To monitor language progression, teachers use ongoing assessment and gather evidence to demonstrate individual progress in learning. Progress in languages features on school reports to parents.

The school strives to ensure that all four skill areas are developed and that learners move from basic word level towards more independent use of the language, with sentences and paragraphs. For example, in the nursery, the words for colours are introduced. By the end of P7, children will recycle these words accurately in sentences with the correct adjectival agreement.

“Colours will appear the whole way through [the school], but it’s the way they are used that is different and it’s monitored very closely at school level.”

- Principal Teacher

Access Education Scotland’s [Guidelines on a 1+2 approach to language learning](#).

Partnership

A French native speaker in the local community helps lead the language learning in the nursery school along with the nursery staff. Parents too are very supportive. They take part in open afternoons and events. For example, in the nursery children learn a French Christmas song and sing it as part of the Christmas show. Parents help their children practise the song at home.

A [school blog](#) also ensures that parents can see the learning that has taken place in all areas of the curriculum including modern languages. Additionally, information about language learning is shared with the wider community in the local magazine.

Houston Primary School has a strong partnership with the local secondary school

“The secondary school is very complementary of the work that has been done in the primary. We have a good partnership with our secondary school where they always speak highly of our pupils and their ability in a modern language. They offer French and Spanish at S1 and we have started Spanish as our L3 to provide continuity for the pupils. Modern languages are discussed as part of our transition group and in previous years secondary staff have visited the primary.”

- Primary PT

Gryffe High says:

“We work closely with Houston Primary in terms of discussing experiences and outcomes to ensure progression from primary. Every year the school also holds a P7 transition day in June which allows pupils to experience a little of what they will be doing in September. This year, for the first time, modern languages are involved. Hosting a French/Spanish food event, pupils will be able to use some of the French language they have already learned and experience a language in a realistic and engaging context. This should make them more comfortable in the transition and confident in their French but also show links between languages.”

Staff from primary and secondary schools also plan to work together next session to deliver joint language workshops that explore globally celebrated events such as the French 'Mardi Gras' celebrations and the Mexican 'Day of the Dead'.

“These stimulating and engaging inputs will increase cultural awareness as well as offering new vocabulary for primary pupils.”

- PT Modern Languages, Gryffe High School

International Links

The teachers have developed an interesting link with a primary school in Lyon. This has resulted in one of the Scottish teachers shadowing a colleague in Lyon. This was followed by a reciprocal visit to Houston Primary School by two French teachers who were very impressed not only by the school's creative approaches to learning and teaching, but by the quality of the learners' ability in French. As a result of this partnership, the school has developed a [blog](#) where children regularly exchange information and photographs with their French counterparts.

Impact

“Our pupils are really motivated to take part in modern language activities as they are planned to be active, interactive and linked to curricular areas making the learning relevant for them. We use many IT resources and websites to bring the learning to life. AifL also plays a role where we encourage the children to reflect on their language learning activities and they often work in learning groups, pairs and trios. They are also given opportunities to present work covering the four main skills of listening and talking, reading and writing and we regularly film and record tasks.”

- Principal Teacher

Children in P5 said:

- “When I go to France I can talk to people.”
- “I like French because it’s a different language.”
- “It’s fun!”

“The confidence in talking and listening can be evident from Houston Primary pupils and they generally appear confident in using the language for themselves, for example in paired speaking activities and using classroom language.”

- Teacher at Gryffe High

Challenges and Next Steps

Challenges

The headteacher is very supportive of modern languages, but staffing is a challenge and requires to be considered every year:

“When you have 19 classes and staff wish to move around and experience different stages in the school, you don’t tie the strongest French speaker necessarily into P6 or P7. So, once classes are structured for other reasons as well, there are many factors, deciding who is a good team, who work well together. Then, [the Principal Teacher] and I sit down together and decide how French is going to be delivered. Where we had two non-French speaking teachers in P7 we had to come up with a plan to ensure that the children’s experience was a quality experience and the teachers at the same time were learning, so they can eventually take over.”

Next Steps

The next step in development is to look at planning for L3 and to develop smoother transition to support the pupils at P7 - S1.

The school will start this by introducing Spanish as an L3 with children at Primary 5. They plan to explore a cultural context to link it with other subject areas while ensuring that there is still progression in language and skills development.

Houston Primary School will also continue to be part of the Renfrewshire languages pilot. The pilot will continue next year with more schools being invited to join, following authority training for staff in French, German and Spanish.