



# Language Trends England 2024

Language teaching in primary,  
secondary and independent  
schools in England

Survey report by Ian Collen and Jayne Duff

[www.britishcouncil.org](http://www.britishcouncil.org)

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# Introduction

The British Council is pleased to present the results of Language Trends England 2024.

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.<sup>1</sup> Later this year there will also be the launch of the inaugural Language Trends Scotland. 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.

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

## Headline findings for 2024

Our headline findings for 2024 include:

- The 'top four' primary languages are French, Spanish, German and Latin; although French remains the most taught language in 64 per cent of responding state primary schools, this figure has declined by nearly 10 per cent since 2023;
- Decreases in international engagement in both state primary and state secondary schools;
- One in four teachers are telling us that they perceive more pupils to now be taking a language at GCSE;
- Recruitment of qualified teachers of languages is an issue in over sixty per cent of all state and independent schools;
- One in four teachers expect the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish from September 2024 to have a positive impact on pupil numbers;
- Most state secondary schools support pupils to take examinations in home, heritage and community languages.

<sup>1</sup> 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 England Requirements to Study a Language

In England, many state secondary schools 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 GCSE in English language, English literature, mathematics, the sciences, a language (ancient or modern) and geography or history.<sup>2</sup> The government's ambition for 90 per cent of pupils to study an EBacc subject combination at GCSE level by 2025 is currently on track for those studying English, maths, science, and humanities subjects; however, this is not the case for languages. According to statistics from the 2022/2023 academic year, thirty-nine per cent of pupils were entered into the full EBacc. While eighty-six per cent of pupils entered four or more EBacc components in 2022/23, nearly ninety per cent of those pupils did not take a language GCSE.<sup>3</sup>

To achieve the government's ambition of 90 per cent, reforms to French, German and Spanish GCSEs 'to make the subjects more accessible and attractive for students' will take place in September 2024 for awarding in Summer 2026 (Department for Education, 2022), underpinned by the MFL Pedagogy Review (TSC, 2016). 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 spoken and written modalities. Any words on examination papers outside of the prescribed list will be glossed and explained. Although these reforms have been recommended by an expert panel and frequency-informed wordlists have the potential to improve outcomes for students (Marsden et al., 2023), implementing this new approach, which uses vocabulary frequency to determine word lists, has been constructively criticised by academics such as Milton (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 significantly different experience to that taken with a Northern Irish or Welsh Awarding Organisation. Indeed, recent research emphasises the lack of cohesion in languages education legislation and increasingly divergent language policies between the nations of the UK due to devolution (Ayres-Bennett and Humphries, 2023).

Several new language initiatives and programmes were launched in 2023, including the Languages Gateway.<sup>4</sup> Described as 'a one-stop shop for all things languages in the UK', this new online gateway brings together opportunities, resources and information for learners, teachers, researchers, policy makers and families (Languages Gateway, 2023). Its mission is to facilitate access to and increase awareness of existing opportunities and information, as well as foster links between different sectors to enhance and encourage language learning across the UK.

In 2023, the Department for Education awarded £14.9 million to the Institute of Education at University College London, the British Council and the Goethe-Institut in order to establish a new National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE, 2024). The overall mission of the NCLE is to provide high quality language teaching and opportunities for **all** pupils in state-maintained primary and secondary schools in England. NCLE will build on the work of the former National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy (NCELP), whose DfE funding ended in March 2023, and take account of the lessons learned from the NCELP pilot project with a revitalised focus on 'priority setting, principled practice and practice-led research' (NCLE, 2024).

NCLE aims to improve learning opportunities and increase the uptake of languages at GCSE

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

<sup>3</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/key-stage-4-performance>.

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

through its nationwide language hubs programme. The programme brings schools together with the aim of improving the standards of languages education and increasing pupil numbers through a collaborative and collegial approach. The first phase of the Lead Hub School recruitment commenced in September 2023. At the time of writing, there are 15 hubs with 19 lead hub schools, and each hub has up to 7 partner schools and 5 primaries. In their mission to address a lack of opportunities for disadvantaged pupils, it is stipulated that 'at least 25% of partner hub schools must either be within an Education Investment Area or have acknowledged disadvantage levels' (British Council, 2024). In order to address the steady decline in German language learning over the years, NCLE has also set up The German Promotion Project, GIMAGINE (British Council, 2024). This project aims to raise the profile of German studies to GCSE and A-level, develop promotional material, widen opportunities for studying and highlight the German language and culture (NCLE, 2024). The GIMAGINE project will be available in all four nations of the UK; for example, the Goethe-Institut is actively recruiting German Expert Mentors (GEMS), teachers with several years of experience teaching the language who will be prepared as professional development trainers to strengthen the quality of teaching the language across the UK. A further key strand of the NCLE includes a specific focus on home, community and heritage languages (HHCL). In addition, Oak National Academy, an independent public body which aims to support great teaching, is partnering with The Cam Academy Trust to develop resources for Key Stage 2 French and Spanish and Key Stage 3 French, German and Spanish.

Existing programmes continue to promote the uptake of languages, such as the Mandarin Excellence Programme. Currently, there are 80 schools involved in the Mandarin Excellence Programme, an initiative first funded by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2016 that aims to encourage Mandarin fluency in young learners (IOE, 2023). Following the success of the scheme, the Department for Education has announced an expansion that will recruit an additional 21 schools by September 2024 (Government press release, 2023). 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 through the Latin Excellence Programme (Martin, 2022).

For several years, *Language Trends England* has found that there remains work to be done in rebuilding international connections at primary and secondary level, as well as overcoming timetabling issues at primary level that hinder the amount of time spent on language learning, with some learners spending less than 30 minutes on languages. In 2022, research by Ayres-Bennett et al. underscored the importance of investing in languages education

in the UK and found that languages are key to overcoming trade barriers and fostering business relations worldwide; in particular, the study found that investments in UK languages education could return more than the investment cost, meaning that the benefit-to-cost ratios are estimated to be at least 2:1 for promoting Arabic, French, Mandarin and Spanish in education. A more recent report (Ayres-Bennett, 2024) has made policy recommendations that call for collaborative approaches between policy makers and the languages education community to promote a clear, cohesive and aligned message about the value of languages in wider society.

This reiterates the recommendations made in a landmark study funded by the British Academy on Language Provision in UK Further Education (Collen et al., 2023); this study advocates for 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.

## Research outline

The British Council commissioned Queen's University Belfast to conduct research for *Language Trends England 2024*. 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.

The principal guiding research question of the study was, 'what is the current situation for language teaching and learning in state primary, state secondary and independent schools in England?'. As with previous series of *Language Trends*, the methodology undertaken involved using questionnaires to survey schools. The surveys were developed in late 2023 in consultation with an Advisory Panel of 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 conducted from early January until March 2024. Using a database of publicly available email addresses signposted for the Head of Modern Foreign Languages or Headteacher, we invited schools to participate via email. For a second year, we also distributed the survey links via social media. After data sets had been cleaned and duplicates removed, a total of 1,324 schools participated (up slightly from 1,316 in 2023), comprising 603 state primary schools, 601 state secondary schools and 120 independent schools. Table 2 shows the 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. The comparison of response rates must be considered with caution given that the links were distributed on social media, making it difficult to calculate an exact response rate.

Response rates	Primary (603)	State (601)	Independent (120)
	10%	21%	22%

Table 2: Response rates

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.

# Findings from primary schools

## Profile of responding primary schools

The *Language Trends 2024* survey arrived by email to 6,260 primary school inboxes on our email distribution list. However, the link was also shared via social media, making it difficult to calculate an exact response rate. A total of 603 state primary schools responded (an increase of nearly 30 schools from 2023), providing a response rate of 10 per cent.

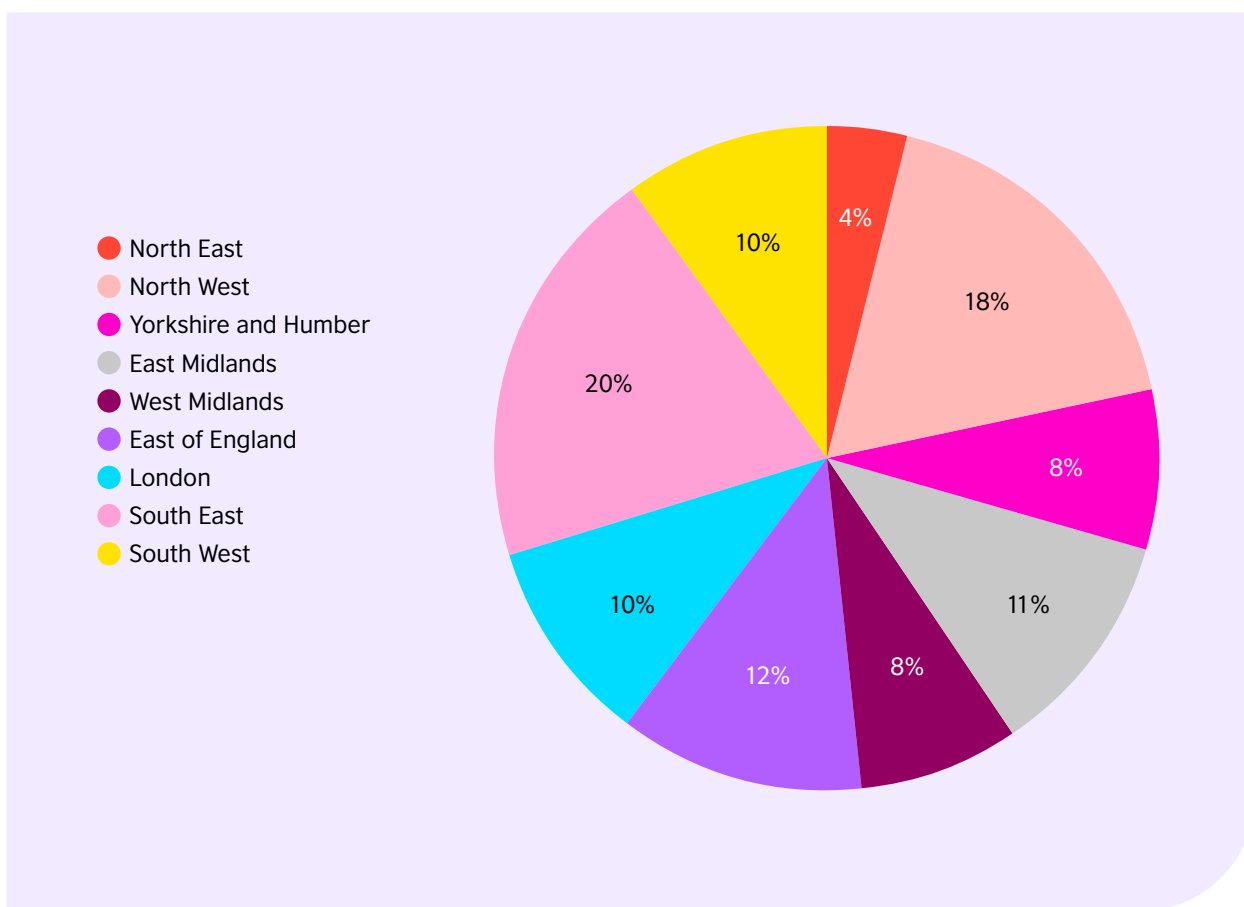


Figure 1: Location of responding state primary schools

The Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME) data indicates the socio-economic profile of a school. In England, the UK government funds free school meals for children aged 4 to 16 if they live in a household that receives income-related benefits (such as universal credit) and has an annual income of less than £7,400 after tax. In England, the current FSME average for state primary schools is 24 per cent, up from 21.6 per cent in 2022.

Using the raw data from the Department for Education’s 2023 school census, published in June 2023, the research team calculated the FSME quintiles for state primary schools in England:

1 – least deprived	0-10%
2	10.1%-16%
3	16.1%-23.9%
4	24%-35.8%
5 – most deprived	35.9% and above

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

A truly representative sample of primary schools in England should have 20 per cent of responding schools in each quintile. Continuing the trend highlighted in *Language Trends 2023*, table 4 shows that half of respondents are in Quintiles 1 and 2, suggesting that these schools are located

in less deprived areas of the country. The profile of responding schools has become slightly more balanced since 2021, however 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:

Quintile	Percentage participation in Language Trends
1 – least deprived	26%
2	24%
3 – around FSME average	20%
4	18%
5 – most deprived	12%

Table 4: Participation in the survey by quintile

## Languages on the primary curriculum and assessment

Forty-three per cent of respondents told us that they were a languages co-ordinator in their school. The remaining respondents were mainly school Principals/Headteachers or Senior Leaders. Most responding schools are meeting the statutory requirements to teach a language (modern or ancient) within curriculum time; ninety-nine per cent of responding schools have taught a language in the 2023/24 school year, the same figure as in 2023. Over 80 per cent of schools have been teaching languages for more than five years, and only one per cent began to teach languages in the 2023/24 school year.

One quarter of responding schools told us that there has been an impact on allocated/dedicated languages time due to pupils spending extra time on literacy and numeracy. Teachers commented that:

*“The timetable across all subjects is incredibly tight, but languages often falls off due to staffing issues in a small school setting with only 4 teachers, which includes the individual who delivers languages.”*

*“Our curriculum is not evenly structured; we spend less time teaching languages compared to other subjects, such as English, mathematics and science.”*

*“Sometimes, but we try to rotate interventions so the same children aren’t missing lessons.”*

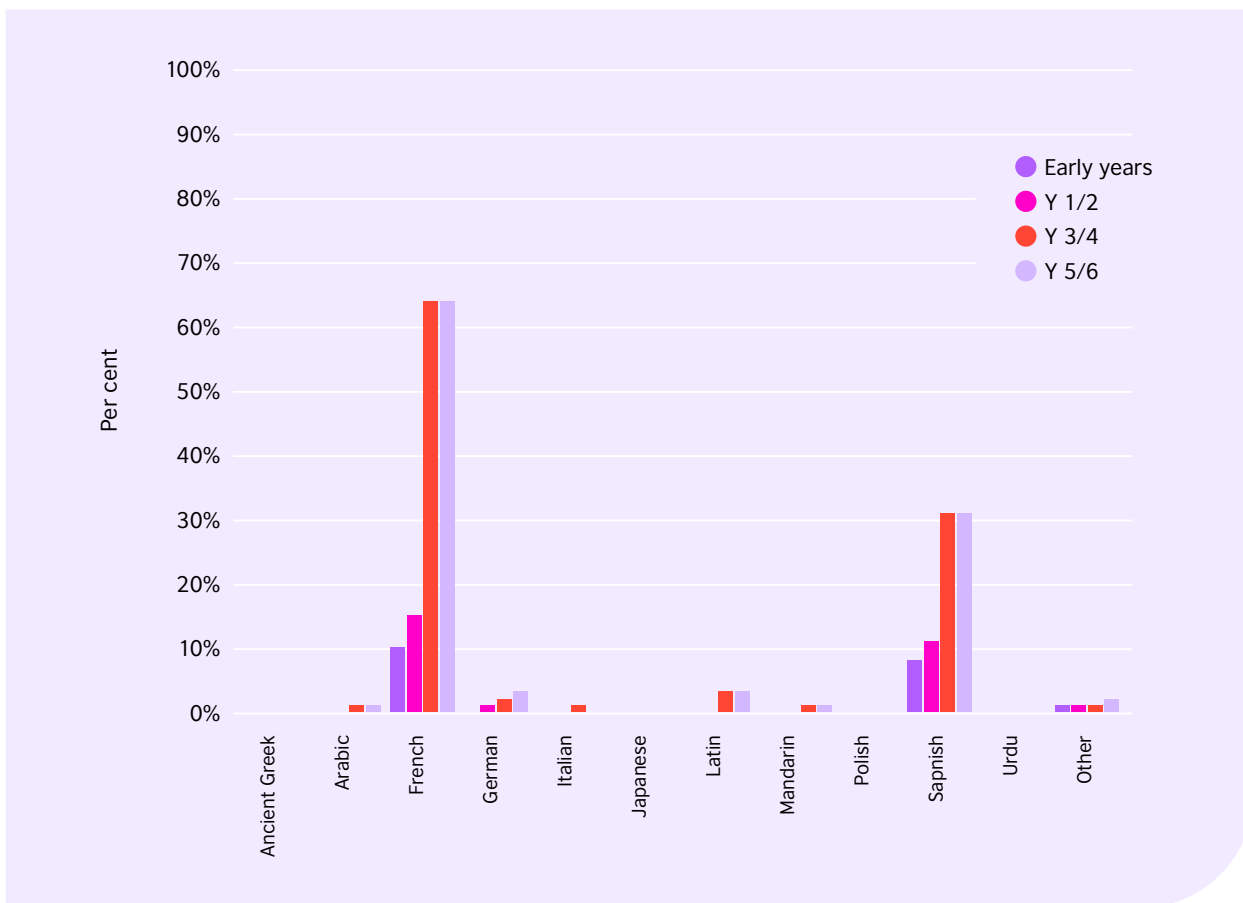
French continues to be the most taught language in responding primary schools (taught in 64% of schools at KS2). Building on last year’s trend, we see Latin appearing for the second year in the ‘top four’ languages being taught. For the first time, we asked schools teaching Latin if all children in the Key Stage have access to the subject; of the three per cent of schools teaching Latin, just over half told us that all

children in KS2 learn Latin. The remaining schools commented all children regardless of key stage learn Latin, and one school said only specific groups access Latin learning:

*“Specific groups, and it’s based around root words and understanding of English now rather than speaking Latin.”*

The data set contained some evidence of the teaching of Italian, Arabic and Mandarin in one per cent of schools. Between one and two per cent of schools reported the teaching of British Sign Language and Hebrew in the ‘Other’ category.





	Ancient Greek	Arabic	French	German	Italian	Japanese	Latin	Mandarin	Polish	Spanish	Urdu	Other
Early years	0%	0%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	0%	1%
Year 1/2	0%	0%	15%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	11%	0%	1%
Year 3/4	0%	1%	64%	2%	1%	0%	3%	1%	0%	31%	0%	1%
Year 5/6	0%	1%	64%	3%	0%	0%	3%	1%	0%	31%	0%	2%

Figure 2: Which languages does your school teach as part of the school day?

Two-thirds of schools told us that language teaching is provided by a classroom teacher the majority of the time; language teaching is also provided by a specialist language teacher based in the school (28 per cent) or a peripatetic specialist teacher (10 per cent). Of the responding 596 state primary schools currently teaching languages, only 15 reported that a languages teacher from a local secondary school provides language teaching in their school.

### Resourcing

To deliver the Key Stage 2 Programme of Study, state primary schools require a bank of resources to support their language teaching. Figure 3 shows that, since the findings of *Language Trends 2023*, there is an increased reliance on commercially produced resources (75 per cent in 2023, 79 per cent in 2024), a slight decrease in resources provided by cultural institutes (14 per cent in 2023, 11 per cent in 2024), and nearly a 10 per cent decrease in resources produced in schools (49 per cent in 2023, 40 per cent in 2024). Figures for resources produced by the British Council remain stable. In the ‘other’ category, teachers commented that they use the following resources: Hackney education resources, The Language Gym, Primary Languages Network, KAPOW, Light Bulb Languages, local Language Hub, Rachel Hawkes’ Scheme of Work, Language Angels, Twinkl, and specialist resources that teachers themselves have created.

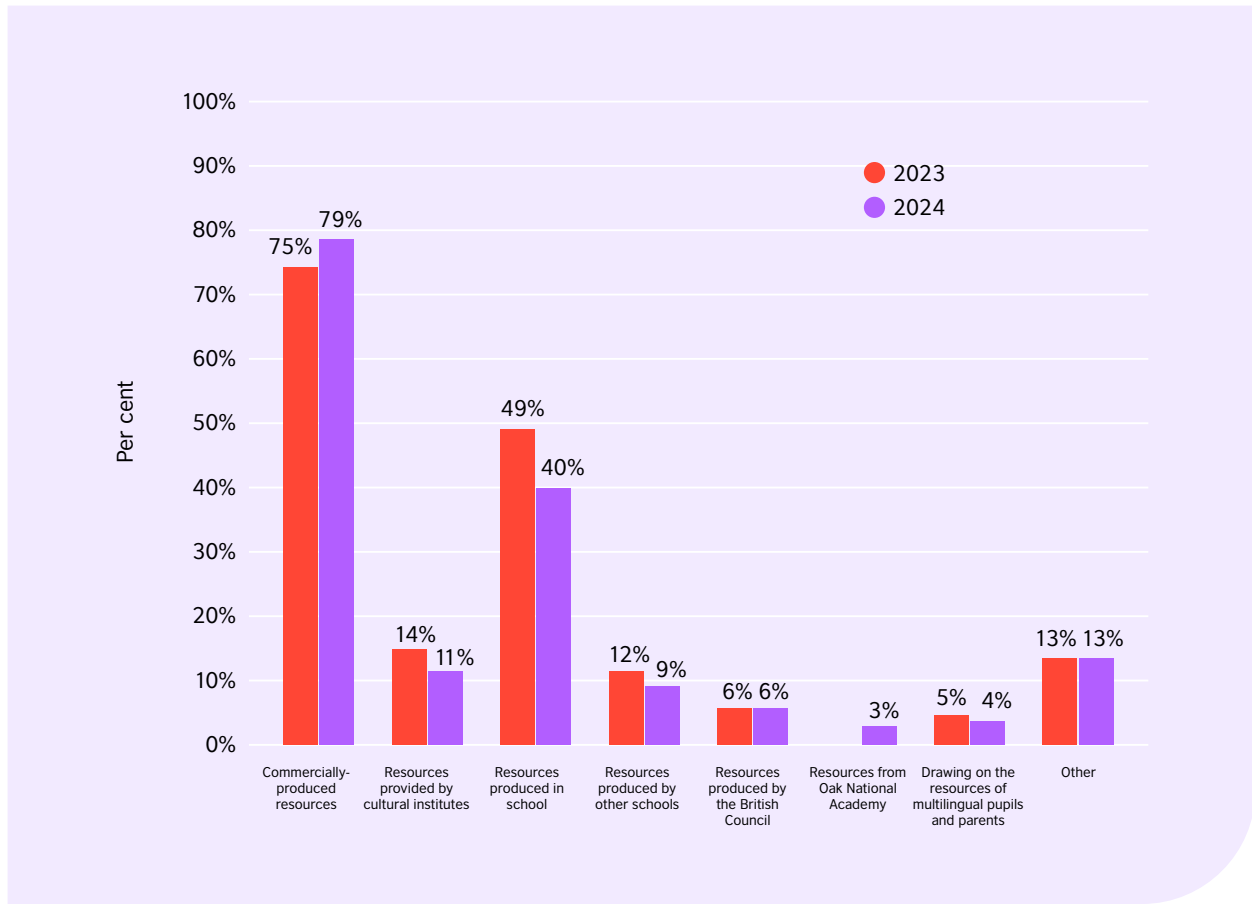


Figure 3: Which resources do you use for language teaching?

All respondents were asked if they had received funding in the 2023/24 school year for the development of primary language resources. Just over eighty per cent of schools did not receive funding in the 2023/24 school year, an increase of 10 per cent since *Language Trends 2023*. Under the ‘other’ column, three teachers commented that they receive a small budget of around £100 from the school budget, while the remaining commented that funding is available when needed from the school or they receive a small budget from their school.

The survey asked teachers to specify what resources would be helpful in an ideal world. After conducting a word frequency count on the resulting data, the most popular suggestion was specialist teachers, followed by more books. Other suggestions included access to free online resources, learning games, videos of native speakers, and funding. Some teachers commented the following:

*“Funding for online subscription to provide independent learning at home and at school.”*

*“Additional resources through Oak National Academy so that non specialists could teach French.”*

*“Access to solid, video lessons spoken by a native speaker, in line with National Curriculum and OFSTED guidelines, and child-focused, fun and accessible to all.”*

*“Headsets for pupils to practise speaking & listening.”*

Respondents were asked if they use apps to help their pupils with language learning. Just under a third of respondents commented the names of apps they use, the most common of which included: Language Angels, Duolingo, Kahoot, Linguascope, Lightbulb Languages, Linguagenut, Twinkl, Wordwall, and Primary Languages Network apps (Planet Languages).

### English as an Additional Language

Over four-fifths of responding schools have pupils for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL), reiterating the findings of *Language Trends 2023*. The most recent school census, carried out by DfE, recorded 20 per cent of pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English; this figure is slightly higher for primary schools, with EAL pupils identified in 22 per cent of state primary schools.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2022-23>.

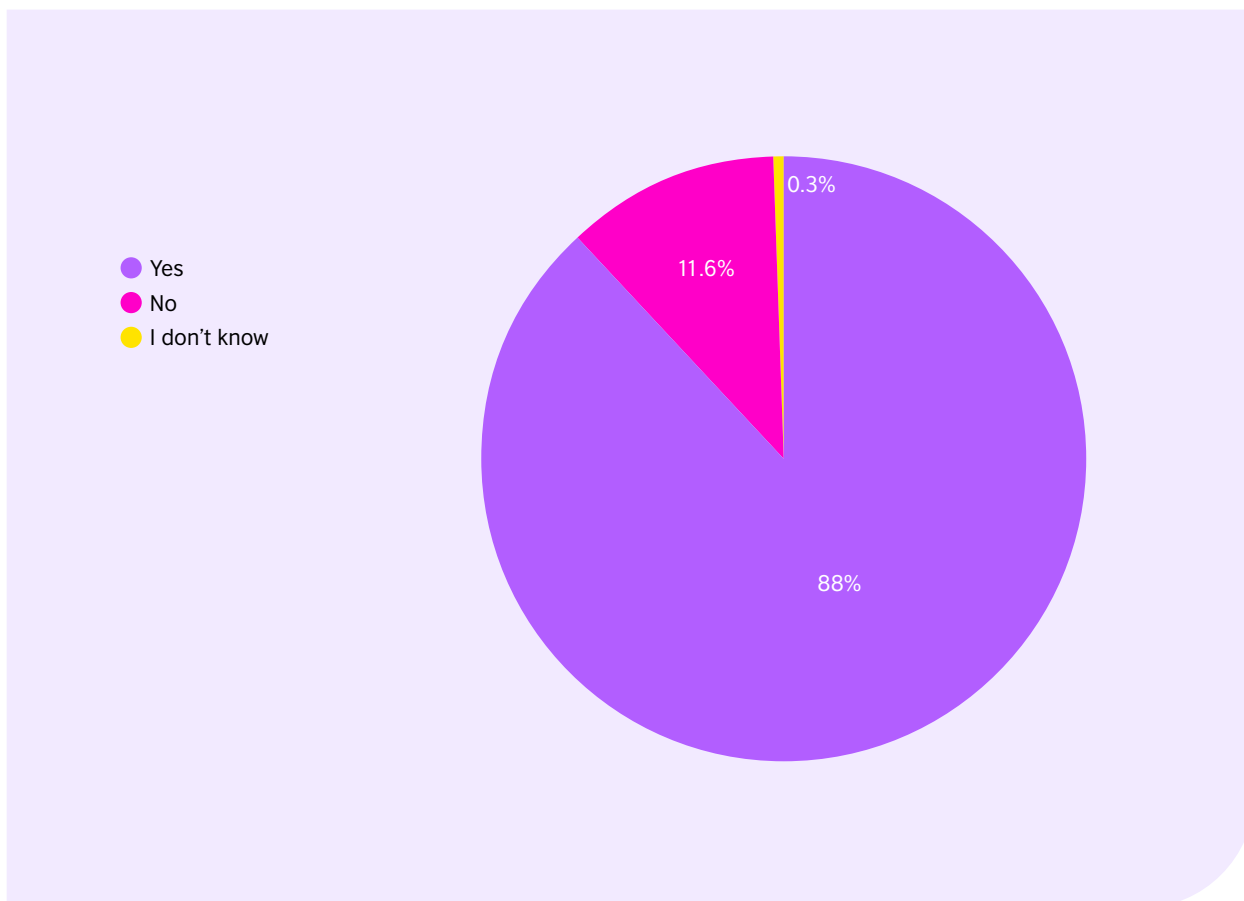


Figure 4: Do you have pupils in school for whom English is an Additional Language?

For the first time, the research team calculated the average percentage of EAL pupils in each of the FSME quintiles shown in table 4. Table 5 shows that quintiles four and five have, on average, the most EAL pupils and higher percentages of EAL pupils than the DfE average in state primary schools.

Quintile	Average Percentage of EAL Pupils per quintile in our data
1 – least deprived	10.6
2	10.4
3	15.9
4	25.7
5 – most deprived	33.3

Table 5: Average percentage of EAL pupils in each quintile

Teachers were asked how they integrate, if at all, pupils’ home languages into the curriculum; eighty per cent of survey respondents commented on how they integrate pupils’ home and community languages, the majority of which were overwhelmingly positive comments that reflect on how teachers encourage children to be language detectives:

*“We use our language detective skills to look out for cognates, not just with English, but also with other home/heritage languages.”*

*“We buy in books with their language into our library. Some books with their language and English, where appropriate, we use multi-lingual signage and displays. Where appropriate and with their permission, we may use their skills as a resource.”*

*“We have a weekly spotlight on a language each week throughout the school. This includes home languages.”*

*“Reminding children to look for similarities with home languages as well as English, regular lesson for mother language day, when introducing numbers asking for volunteers to count in home language.”*

The comments made by teachers emphasised celebrating and sharing the different home and community languages spoken by pupils, encouraging a plurilingual approach to integrating all pupils in the classroom.

## International engagement

The Language Trends series has been mapping international engagement in state primary schools over the past few years. Prior to both the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's decision to leave the EU, international engagement at primary level was reasonably healthy.

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	35%	27%	19%	18%	19%	20%	15%
Online / digital links with schools outside the UK	-	-	-	-	-	14%	11%
British Council events/resources	-	-	-	-	-	-	7%
Involvement in international projects	22%	16%	10%	8%	10%	10%	7%
Connecting classrooms through Global Learning	-	-	-	-	-	-	4%
Host a language assistant	5%	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%	2%
None	46%	51%	61%	64%	67%	62%	66%

Table 6: Longitudinal data relating to international engagement in state primary schools

The data in table 6 show an increase in schools with no reported international engagement, from 62 per cent in 2023 to 66 per cent in 2024. Schools' reported involvement in international projects, and their online/digital links with schools outside the UK, have both decreased by 3 per cent between 2023 and 2024, while 15 per cent of schools reported having one or more partner schools abroad (compared to 20 per cent in 2023). These decreases suggest that state primary schools need significant support in re-building their international engagement for pupils and teachers. For the first time, we included two new options: British Council events/resources, availed of by 7 per cent of responding schools, and connecting classrooms through Global Learning, used by 4 per cent of responding schools.

In terms of promoting language learning via engagement with outside organisations, only 5 per cent of respondents have links with universities, and 1 per cent have links businesses. Seven per cent of schools engage with Cultural institutes, including the following: Confucius Institute, Classics for All, Cervantes Institute, Consejería de Educación, Goethe-Institut, Institut Français, Italian Consulate, and Japan Foundation. Nine per cent of responding state primary schools have links with the Association for Language Learning (ALL).

## Barriers and additional support for primary language lessons

Building on previous iterations of Language Trends, we asked teachers an open question on the most significant barriers that they face in delivering high quality primary language lessons. Reiterating the responses in Language Trends from 2021, 2022 and 2023, the majority of respondents cited time constraints as impeding the progression of language lessons, followed by teacher knowledge of languages. Other significant barriers that teachers commented upon include a lack of teacher confidence, specialist teachers and funding, as well as concerns about accessing CPD due to time constraints and the workload. Teachers noted the following of the barriers they face:

*“Expertise and costs - we only have two classes so we have to buy in or train in house (which has not proven successful in the past).”*

*“Funding for specialist language teachers. Upskilling class teachers is needed but difficult to fit into the INSET schedule.”*

*“Lack of teaching time coupled with lack of skill on the part of the teaching team.”*

*“Leadership not valuing the subject and workload for staff too high for them to access CPD.”*

*“Not being able to speak the language ourselves and children struggling with their own languages grammar, let alone that of a different country's language.”*

One teacher summated the three overarching concerns highlighted in the comments made by the teachers:

*“Staff confidence [and expertise] in languages. Lack of funding to support. Jam packed National Curriculum.”*

For the first time, Language Trends asked state primary schools if they would welcome a language-specific list of minimum vocabulary and grammar to be covered in Key Stage 2. The majority of schools (80 per cent) responded yes (figure 5).

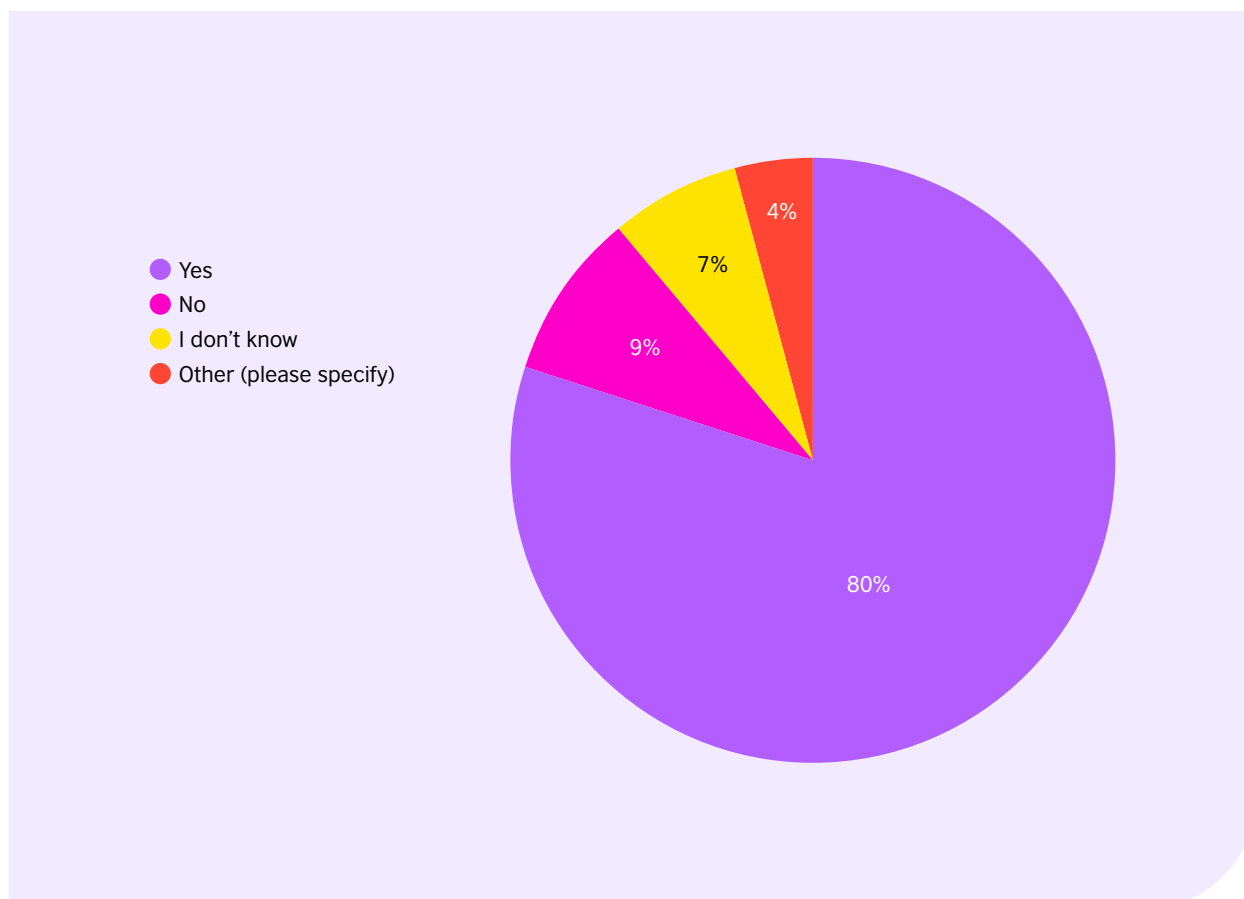


Figure 5: Would your school welcome a language-specific list of minimum vocabulary and grammar to be covered in Key Stage 2?

Respondents from state primary schools had the opportunity to comment the additional support that they would welcome for the development of language teaching:

*“Opportunities for projects to support languages in the curriculum - more accessible funding for schools to take part in international projects. Losing access to Erasmus+ has been debilitating for us. The government’s new Turing programme is nowhere near as easy to access as well as there is a lack of concerted efforts to encourage language learning from a young age from the government.”*

*“Support for classroom teachers to improve their language skills without adding to teacher workload (where there is no MFL specialist in school) - teacher- specific language courses etc.*

*“Funding for establishment of national language hubs within local authorities - these schools*

*would be ambassadors for best-practice in MFL and support other schools to raise standards in language learning within their areas.”*

*“It would be useful to have a model scheme of work which includes minimum vocabulary and grammar. At the moment, we are just choosing what we feel will be most useful and appropriate. We feel that it would be helpful to have a non-statutory scheme of work/ model curriculum which could be adapted by individual schools if they had the expertise to do so. Funding is also an issue as is lack of availability of high quality CPD.”*

*“Ideally I’d like to make contact with local secondary language departments for help, support and guidance, and for us to be able to explain how much detail we go into during our French lessons if that would be helpful for them as to where to start.”*

*“We would like some support with finding a partner school in a Spanish speaking country to strengthen our language learning & develop an international link.”*

The comments made by respondents emphasise a need for funded or free training that will not exacerbate teacher workload, adaptable schemes of work, links with partner schools in target language and more communication with local secondary schools to work collaboratively on pupil learning journeys.

# Transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3

In England, language learning is compulsory across the 7-14 age range. We asked schools to tell us about how they plan their curriculum for primary languages, with 82 per cent of respondents following the DfE Key Stage 2 Programme of Study, while six per cent of respondents do not follow a DfE Programme of Study. Echoing the findings of *Language Trends 2023*, only 4 per cent of schools follow both the Key Stage 2 and 3 Programmes of Study. In the 'other' category, respondents commented that they use the following: Language Angels, Kapow Primary French, Rachel Hawkes Scheme of Work, Sentence Builder Scheme, Hackney Scheme of Work, Primary Languages Scheme; some schools commented that they create their own bespoke programme of study.

## Contact between primary and secondary schools

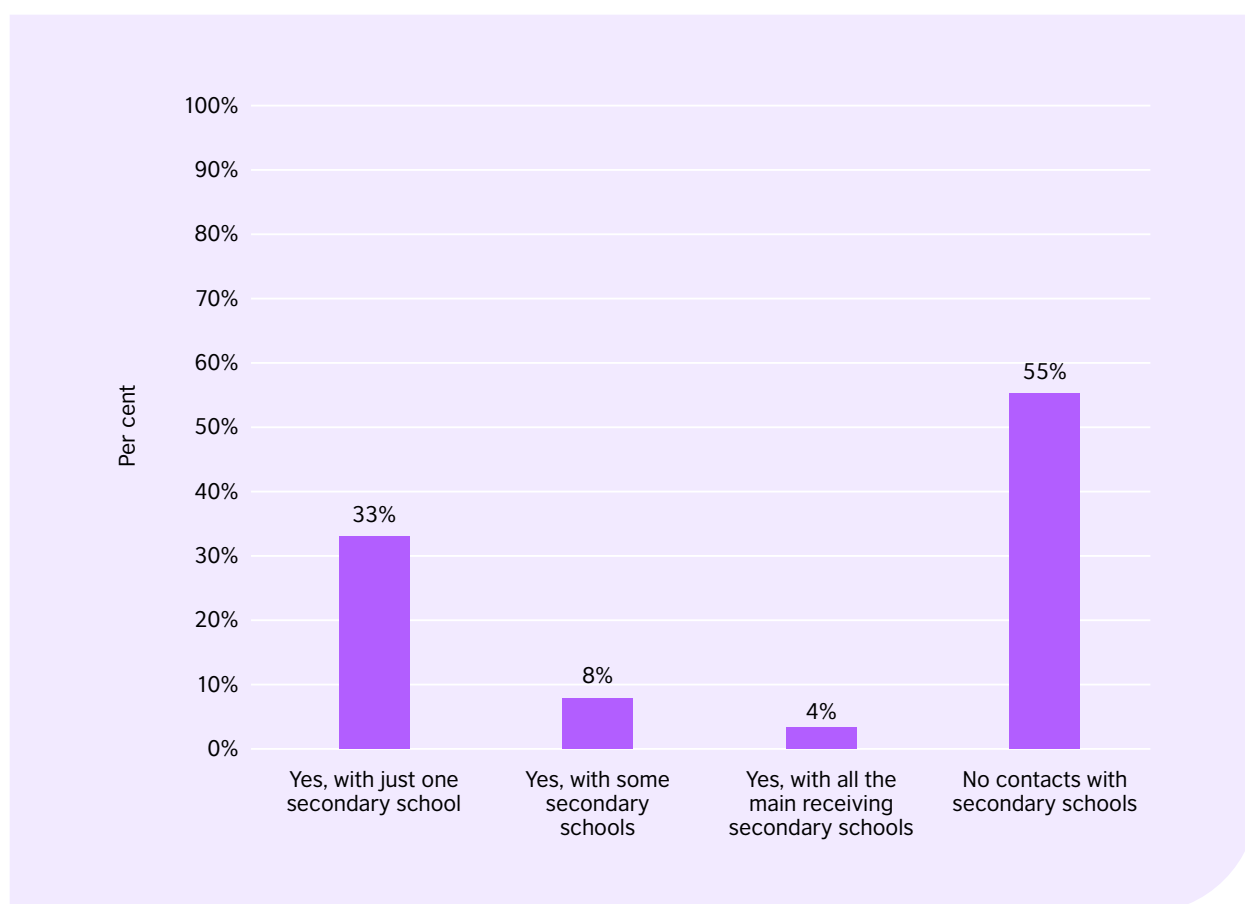


Figure 6: Primary schools were asked 'Do you have contact with your local secondary school in relation to language learning?'

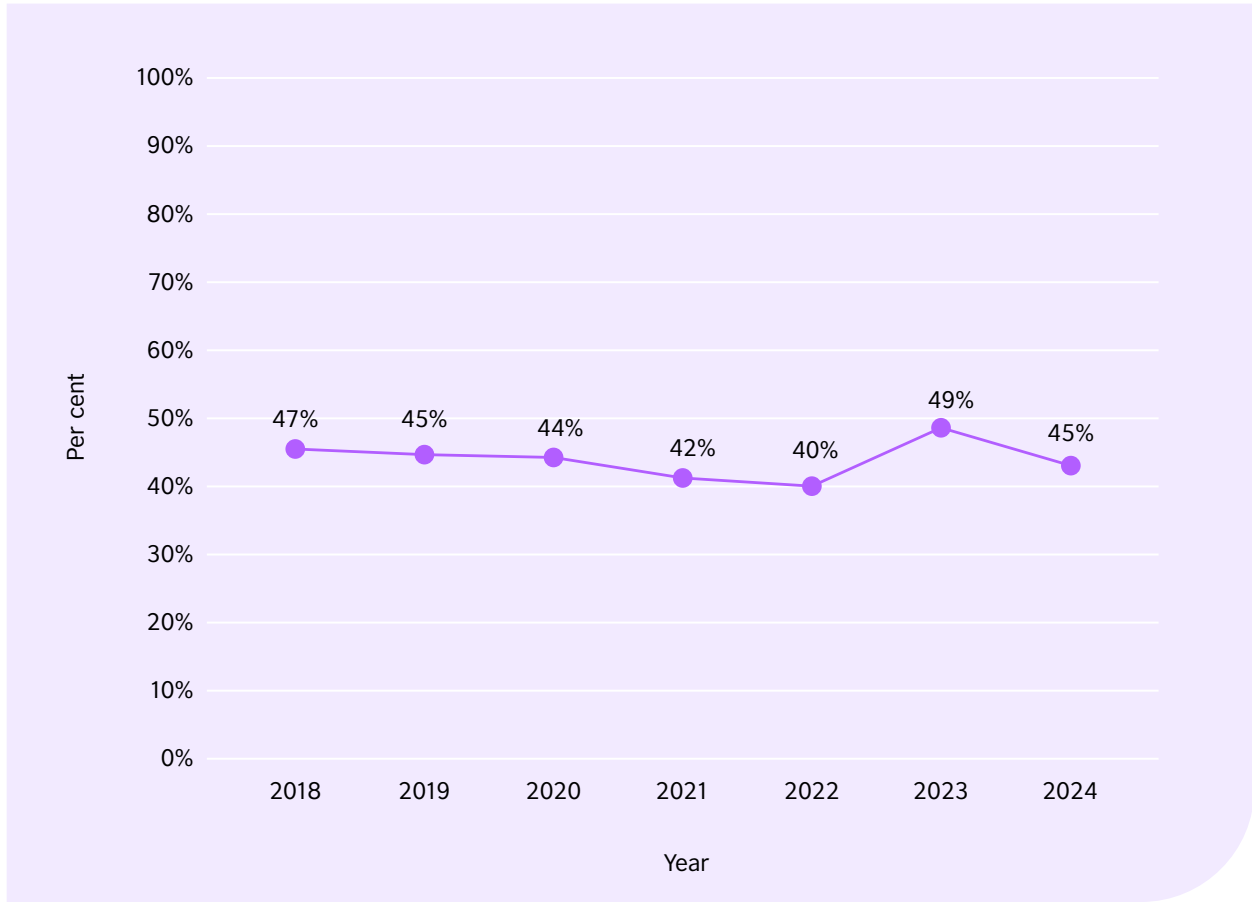


Figure 7: Percentage of primary schools in contact with secondary schools 2018-2024

The number of primary schools reporting contact with secondary schools remains relatively stable, with a slight decrease of 4 per cent in the 2023/24 school year, resulting in 55 per cent of primary schools reporting no contact whatsoever with a local secondary school in relation to language learning. Of the 45 per cent of primary schools who do have contact, figure 6 shows that a third of respondents have contact with one secondary school, the same figure as reported in *Language Trends England 2023*.

The type of contact between primary and secondary schools remains consistent with previous findings of *Language Trends England*. Of the 45 per cent of primary schools reporting contact with a secondary school, just over half exchange information on language teaching informally (55 per cent in 2024, 53 per cent in 2023) and just under a third of responding schools participate in network/cluster meetings (31 per cent in 2024, 30 per cent in 2023). Twenty seven per cent of primary schools reported that they provide information on pupil progress in language learning at the point of transfer to Key Stage 3.



## Pupil progress data

In 2019, the White Paper on Primary Languages Policy in England found that, despite the statutory requirement for all state primary schools to teach an international language from ages 7 to 11, the anticipated strengthening of collaboration between primary and secondary schools has not yet manifested (Holmes and Myles, 2019: 6). The paper recognised the need for supporting transition arrangements that allow primary and secondary schools to collaboratively work together and ‘provide continuity and progression across key stages 2 and 3’ (Holmes and Myles, 2019: 16). With the establishment of the NCLE and its language hubs, there is a re-energised and conscious effort to help improve transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 that aspires to address the concerns outlined in the White Paper.

As with previous iterations of *Language Trends England*, state secondary schools were asked to think about their current Year 7 and how well their language experience in Key Stage 2 has prepared them for language learning in Key Stage 3 in comparison to previous cohorts. The data collected from responding state secondary schools in 2024 largely echoes the figures reported in *Language Trends England 2023*, with 62 per cent of state secondary schools stating that there has been little change (compared to 60 per cent in 2023). With 20 per cent of schools reporting that pupils are less prepared (compared to 23 per cent in 2023), the establishment of the NCLE and its language hubs is thus timely, and it is hopeful that Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 transition can be better facilitated and supported in the coming years.

In the other comments, teachers noted the following:

*“Their knowledge of English vocabulary is poorer. They know Tier 1 and technical Tier 3 words, but not useful Tier 2. This makes learning vocabulary more challenging as they do not know the cognates.”*

*“It’s really difficult to gauge prior learning as we have so many feeder schools all offering different languages and at varying qualities. We also have to allocate languages based on school banding and not on prior learning.”*

*“Variety of levels. It is excellent to aim to teach MFL in KS2 but there is a need of actual funding. More MFL teachers and more funding are needed for an effective KS2 MFL program”*

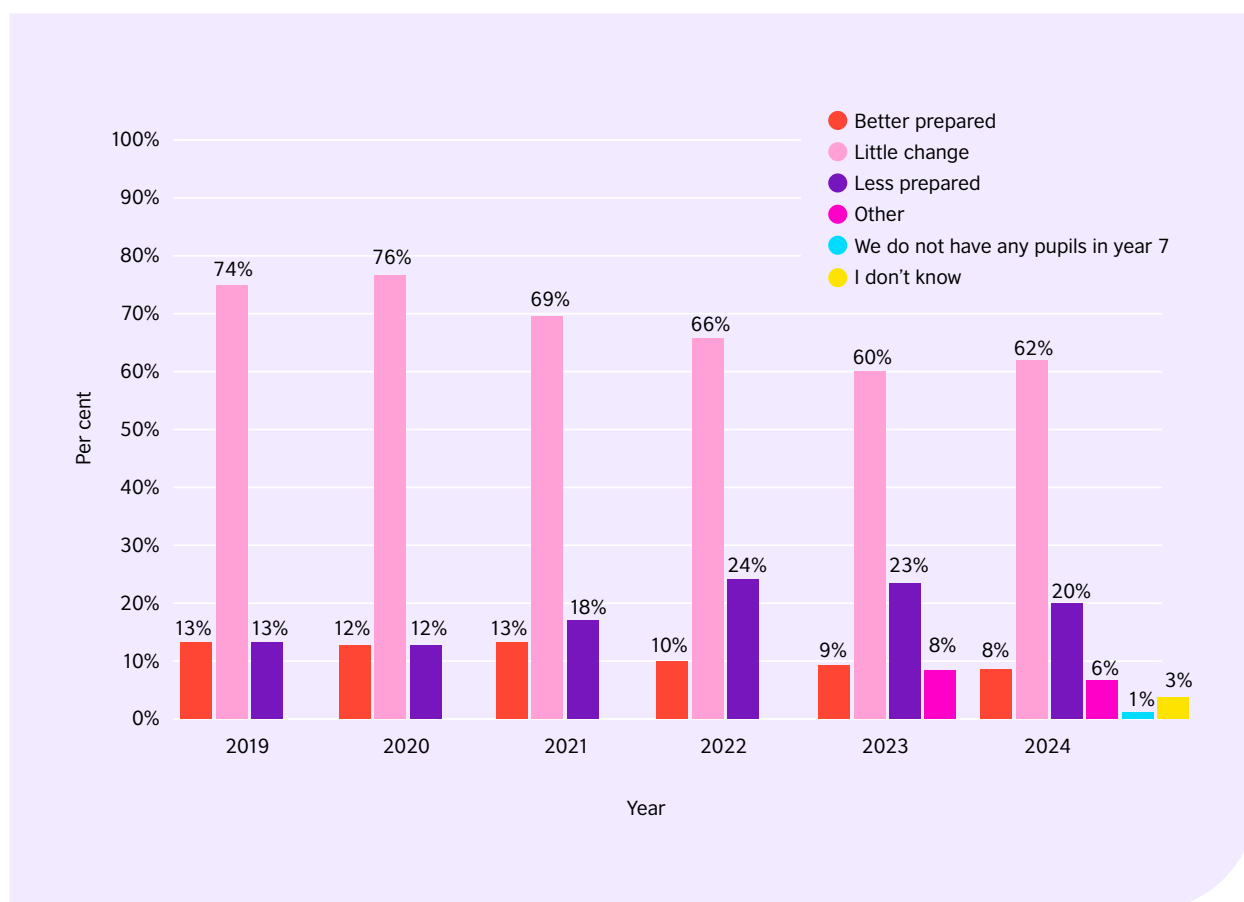


Figure 8: Thinking about your current Year 7 pupils, how well has their language learning experience in Key Stage 2 prepared them for language learning in Key Stage 3, in comparison to previous cohorts over the last 5 years?

## Key Stage 2 to 3 transition challenges

State secondary schools were asked if pupils in their school can continue with the same language they learned at Key Stage 2. Consistent with findings from the last two iterations of *Language Trends England*, some pupils can continue with the same language they learned at Key Stage 2 in over two thirds of responding schools. As figure 9 shows, there has only been a one per cent change since 2023 in the number of schools who can accommodate all pupils (2 per cent in 2024), the majority of pupils (15 per cent in 2024) or no pupils (6 per cent in 2024) to continue with the language that they previously learned. In 'other' comments, teachers noted the following on the continuation of a primary language at Key Stage 3:

*"Some continue a modern language, others start from scratch, all start Latin from scratch."*

*"Some pupils continue with the same language although there is no local coordination whatsoever. We have 20+ feeder primary schools all of which operate independently of us."*

*"They can choose whether they continue with it or swap to a different one. It is their choice."*

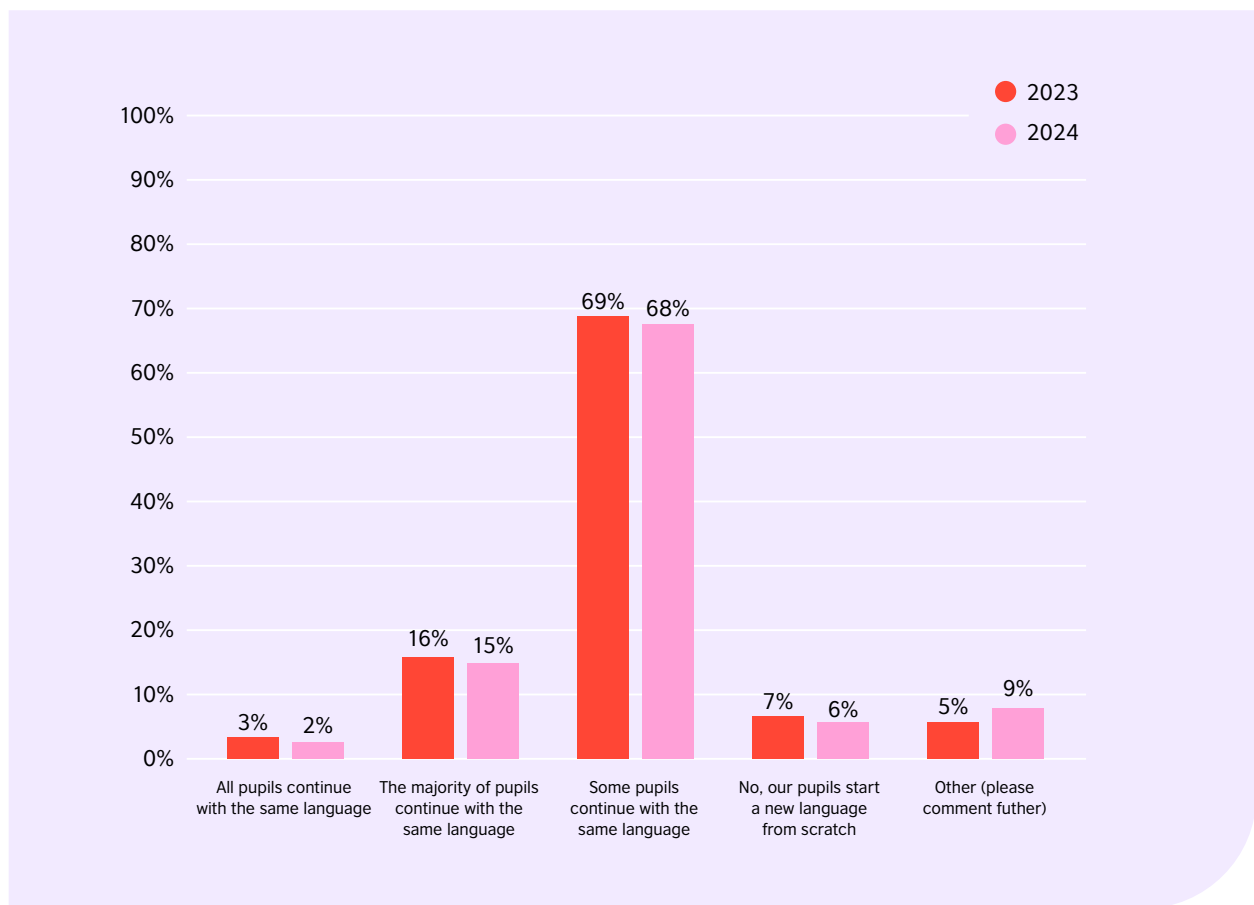


Figure 9: Do pupils in your school continue with the same language they learned at Key Stage 2?

The survey asked state secondary schools if they could organise classes for Year 7 pupils according to which language(s) they learned at primary school, and the majority of respondents said no (75 per cent), the same figure as reported in 2023. Only 14 per cent of state secondary schools responded that they could, in theory, organise such classes for Year 7 pupils, reiterating similar findings from *Language Trends England 2023* in which 15 per cent responded yes.

## Aspirations for future collaboration

Since 2023, 3 per cent less of responding schools have been provided with language teaching by local secondary schools in the 2023/24 school year; the number of primary schools reporting that their local secondary school has provided training for their language teachers remains the same as in 2023, staying at 5 per cent in 2024. From previous iterations of *Language Trends England* we know that both primary and secondary school teachers have expressed a desire to strengthen communication and exchanges of pupil information at the point of key stage transition (*Language Trends England 2023*). Although the data highlight that there is a long way to go towards strengthening collaboration between state primary and secondary schools, comments made by primary school teachers demonstrate a conscious effort being made by both sectors to bridge the transition gap, as well as extending language learning support:

*“Year 9 pupils teach Spanish to our Year 5 pupils for short sessions which build up to a qualification for them.”*

*“A secondary school has provided enrichment opportunities for our pupils such as leading language sessions, writing letters to our pupils.”*

*“Teacher from local secondary school is going to deliver some lessons as CPD for staff.”*

*“The secondary schools receive the child’s report (grade emerging, expected, exceeding) and effort mark. The pupil’s folder contains details of learning objectives covered so they can show this to their new school.”*

*“We have a contract for a secondary teacher from KS3 to teach some of our French sessions and support our teaching alongside our subject lead.”*

*“We work with a languages teacher at the local secondary school to ensure that we review the curriculum we offer and to support CPD moving forwards for our staff.”*

As there is no system wide and cohesive approach to the transition between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, some primary teachers expressed particular challenges in establishing and maintaining contact with a local secondary school:

*“Early days but I have been the one to make contact. I’ve arranged to visit YR7 lessons and observe ex pupils but secondary teachers have not yet made it in to see YR6 lessons. I’ve met with leads which was great and been given copies of their vocab books, text book or scheme used. I share some of the things we’ve done and our bank of sentence builders. But still feels like token gestures at the moment.”*

*“Our local HS used to provide specialist language staff to work with us for an afternoon a week, but this has not happened for 18 months.”*

*“I send information but don’t often get a response.”*

With re-energising efforts by the NCLE underway, including a focus on transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, as well as resource development by Oak National Academy, we hope to report further on positive trends in future volumes of *Language Trends England* as key stakeholders work together towards implementing a collaborative and inclusive approach to language learning.

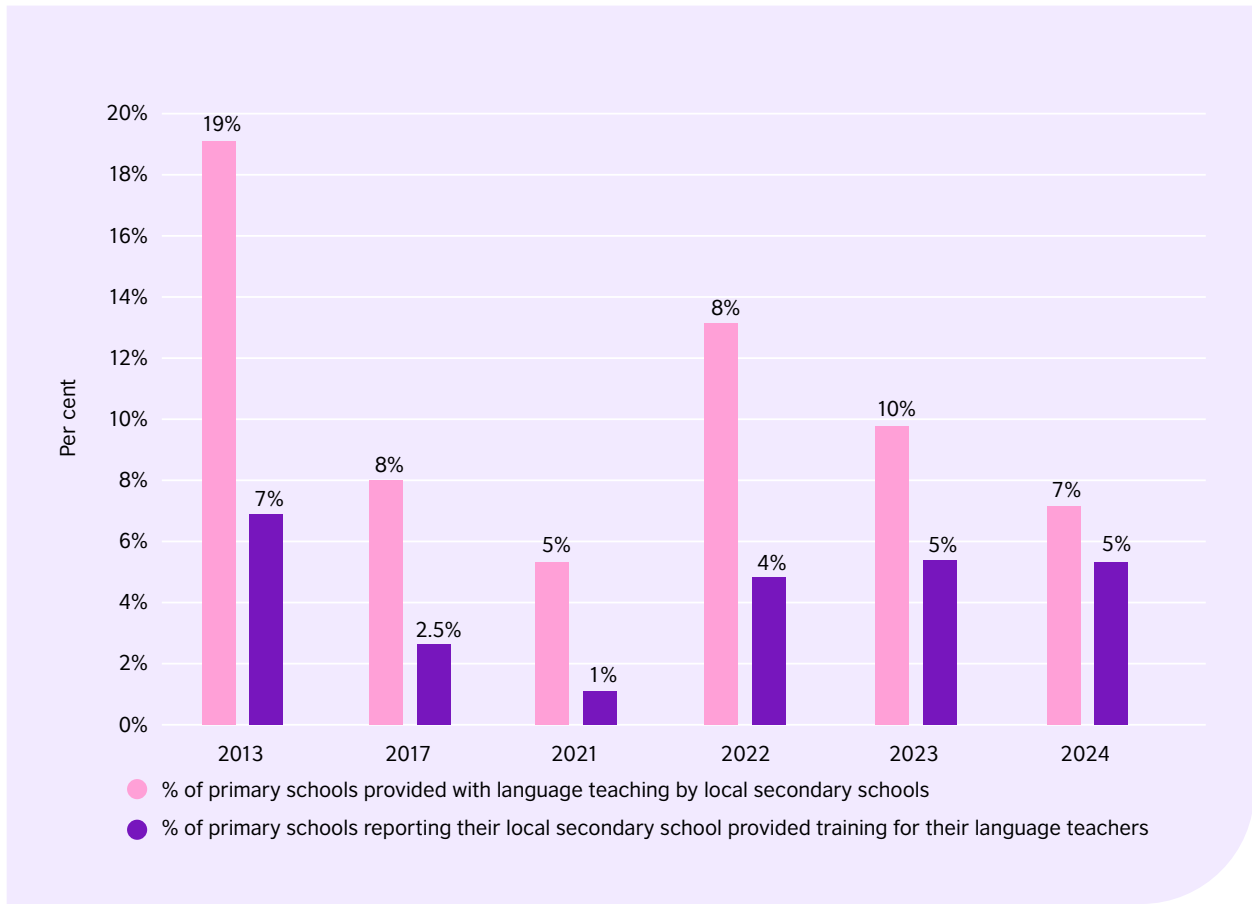


Figure 10: Changes in the percentage of primary schools receiving training and language teaching support from secondary schools over the years

# Findings from secondary and independent school surveys

## Profile of responding schools

Compared to 2022, there are now 29 fewer state secondary schools and an additional 14 independent schools open in England. Just over 80 per cent of secondary schools in England are academies or free schools, accounting for 80.2 per cent of secondary school pupils. Academies are not obligated to follow the National Curriculum, though in practice most do.

A total of 601 state secondary schools and 120 independent schools responded, giving response rates of 21 per cent and 22 per cent respectively. In a change to recent iterations of *Language Trends*, data this year are reported based on the nine government regions of England, to which state schools are now aligned through Regional Department for Education Directors (rather than the previous eight Regional Schools Commissioners):

Region	Number of participating state secondary schools	As a percentage of survey respondents
East Midlands	47	8%
East of England	62	10%
London	75	12%
North East	36	6%
North West	80	13%
South East	126	21%
South West	61	10%
West Midlands	63	11%
Yorkshire and the Humber	51	9%

Table 7: 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 in the 2022/23 school year is recorded as 22.7 per cent, up from 20.9 per cent in the previous year.<sup>6</sup> We know from recent research that there is strong evidence of a link between levels of Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME) and uptake (or lack thereof) at key transition points (Henderson and Carruthers, 2021).

The percentage of pupils with FSM had been increasing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with increases each year from 2018. The continuing year on year increase in the number and rate of pupils eligible for FSM reflects the continuation of the transitional protections (as any pupil gaining eligibility for FSM after 1 April 2018 is protected against losing free school meals until March 2025). There is an increasing number of pupils who are FSM eligible as pupils flow on to free school meals when becoming eligible, but transitional protections mean pupils do not flow off in similar quantities.

<sup>6</sup> For further information on government statistics relating to FSME, see: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

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

	Free School Meals Entitlement (FSME)
Quintile 1 – least deprived	0 – 12.5%
Quintile 2	12.6 – 18.4%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	18.5 – 25.4%
Quintile 4	25.5 – 34.9%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	35% and above

Table 8: State secondary, Free School Meals Entitlement quintiles

	Percentage participation in Language Trends
Quintile 1 – least deprived	31%
Quintile 2	20%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	19%
Quintile 4	16%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	13%

Table 9: Percentage of schools in each quintile responding to our survey

Compared to last year, our data show fewer responding schools in Quintile 5 (most deprived), down from 18 per cent. Our previous research has shown that schools in areas of social deprivation are less likely to offer a range of languages on the curriculum, so it is concerning that fewer schools in Quintile 5 are choosing to participate in our research; we want all schools to participate in Language Trends, so that we have a broad and balanced report. Thus, the statistically significant overrepresentation of schools in Quintile 1 (least deprived) means that the data which follow may not be truly representative of the social spectrum.

## English as an Additional Language

An EAL student is someone who is either British born, but has grown up speaking another language at home, or has come to the UK from another country and does not speak English as a first language. The status of having EAL is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration. England's school system is a linguistic powerhouse with over 90 languages spoken and one in every five pupils has EAL. Research by the Education Policy Institute found that by the end of secondary school in 2022, late-arriving pupils with EAL were 16.6 months behind their peers, though this gap has been narrowing in recent years.<sup>7</sup>

From state secondary schools responding to our survey, the average of pupils with EAL is 16 per cent, so just less than the national secondary school average of 18.2 per cent. When we break this down by quintiles, we see that those areas of social deprivation are more likely to have more pupils with EAL.

	Percentage of EAL pupils in each quintile in our data
Quintile 1 – least deprived	12.1%
Quintile 2	9.7%
Quintile 3 – around FSME average	16.9%
Quintile 4	21.7%
Quintile 5 – most deprived	27%

Table 10: Percentage of EAL pupils in each quintile in our data

Later in the report, we find out about support which schools provide for Home, Heritage and Community Languages.

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://epi.org.uk/executive-summary/>.

## French, German and Spanish

An internationally connected Britain needs more and better language skills. In our increasingly globalised economy, language skills and intercultural understanding add value and widen opportunities for individuals, communities and society. England is home to a rich tapestry of languages, but French and Spanish are the most frequently taught languages in instructed settings in schools; the GIMAGINE project at the Goethe-Institut seeks to redress the decline in German, which in the early 2000s was the second most frequently taught language, after French. Given German is a strategically important language to the UK, particularly with regard to business and industry, a reversal of the decline would be most welcome.

In both the state and independent sectors, our data indicate that French is consistently the most *offered* language at all key stages, but we know from previously cited examination entry data that Spanish is the most popular language in terms of pupil numbers at A-level. As we have found in previous years, where state schools offer German, they tend more often than not to be in Quintiles 1 – 3.

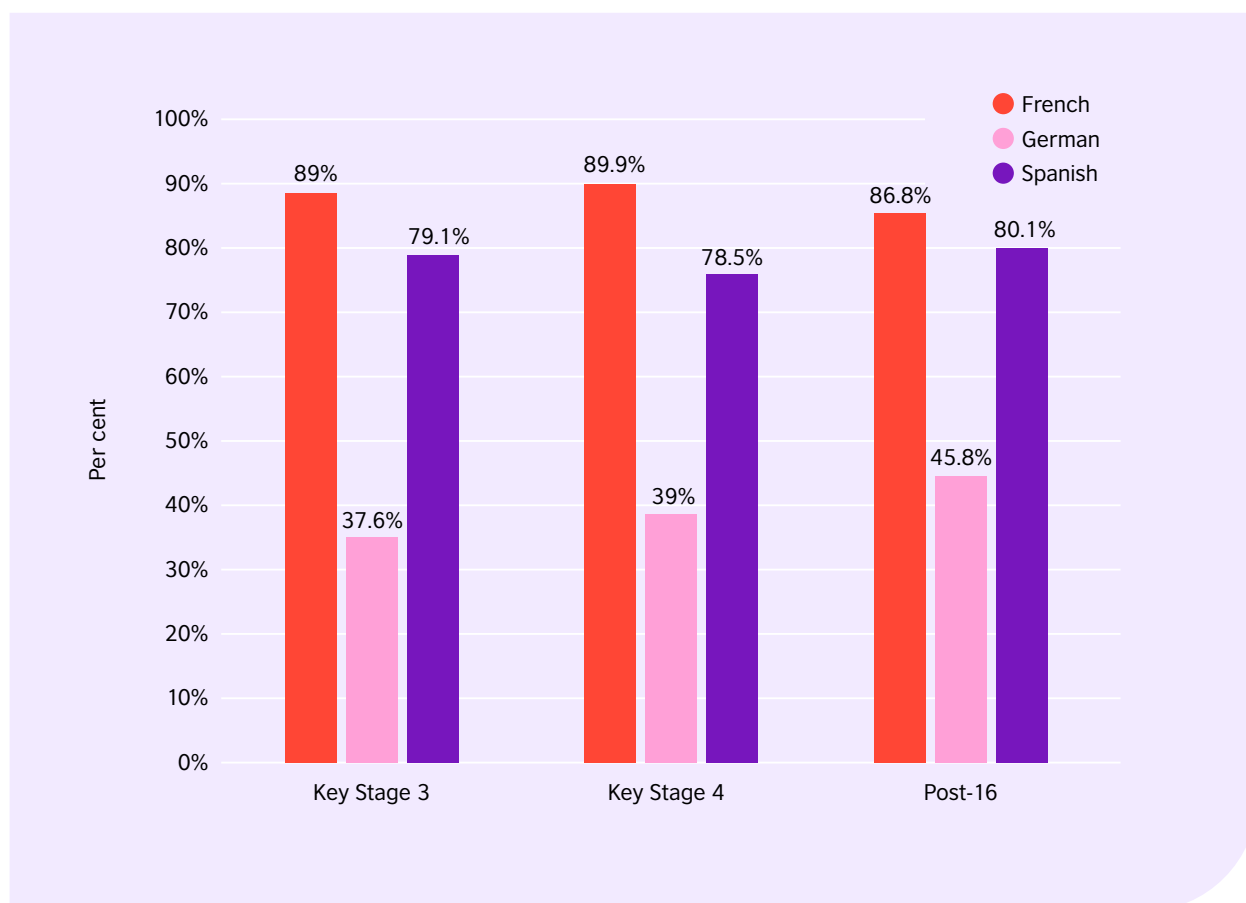


Figure 11: Percentage of responding state secondary schools offering each of French, German and Spanish

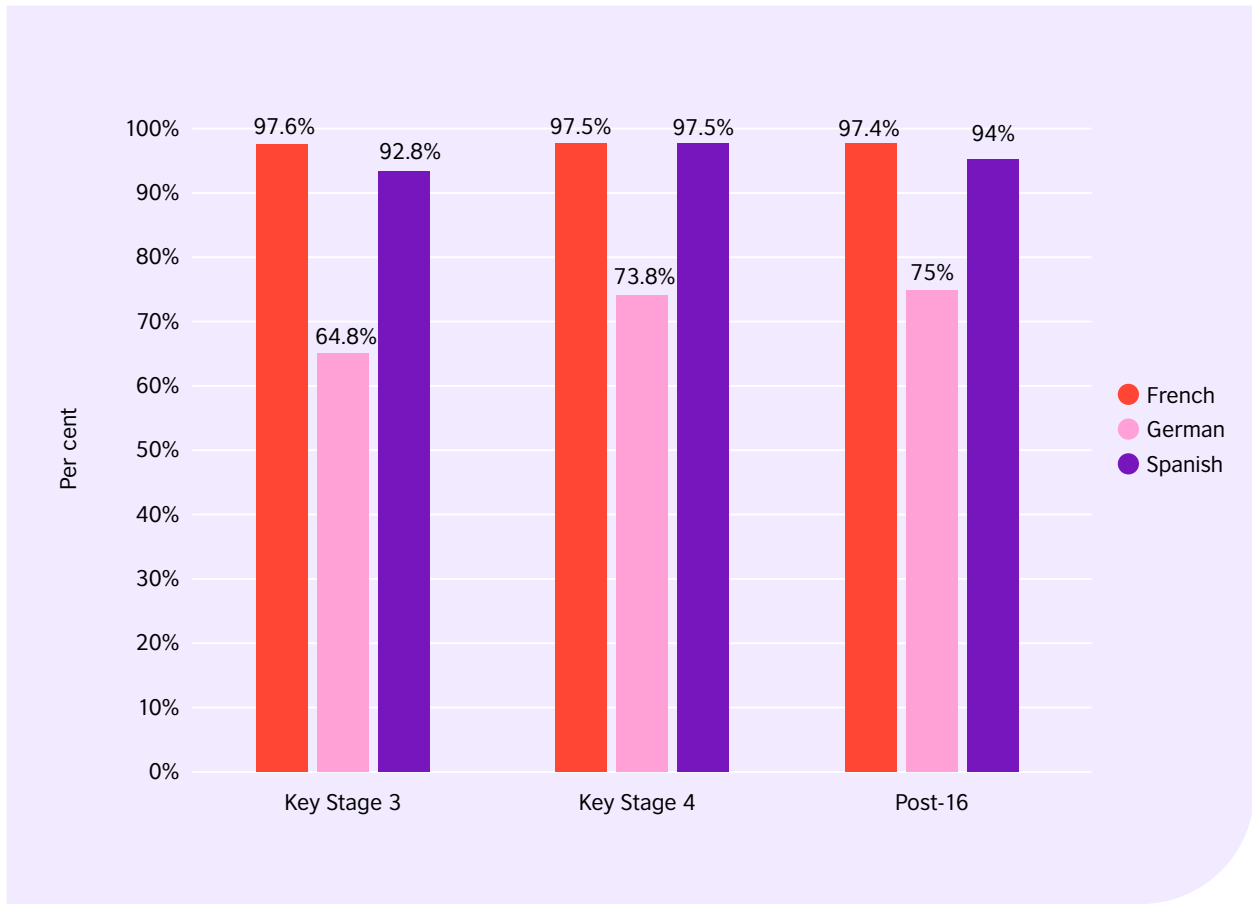


Figure 12: Percentage of responding independent schools offering each of French, German and Spanish

Figure 12 shows that German continues to be much more secure in the independent sector. Seventy-six per cent of independent schools told us they regularly communicate with the Goethe-Institut, compared to 15 per cent of responding state secondary schools.

### Harsh grading impacting French, German and Spanish

As reported in previous *Language Trends*, the government recognised harsh grading in some MFL subjects as a reality and made an adjustment to GCSE French and German in 2020 (delayed to 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic). Recent research by FFT Education Datalab (2024) found that fewer pupils achieved grades 9-6 in French, German or Spanish compared to English and Maths, and grade 3 is the modal grade in Spanish (compared to 5 in French and German). There is growing evidence that the grade adjustment in 2022 to French and German is not enough. In qualitative comments, teachers often cite grading as a barrier to uptake:

*“We teach French or German to everyone but there is a possibility that we may no longer offer German from September 2024 onwards, as the GCSE cohort is so skewed to independent schools and is so small, that our students are at a disadvantage. This year German GCSE grades were all 1-2 grades lower (at higher tier) than for*

*French, with a totally mirrored French/German cohort. The case has been identical in other local state schools. I have written to various organisations (as has our headteacher) about this concerning, unfair situation, but we have received no reassurance or any indication that there is a willingness to investigate.”*



## Language Assistants

Language Assistants in England work in the classroom with teachers or on their own with small groups. They spend up to a year helping students improve their confidence with foreign languages and increase their cultural awareness. Language Assistants may be employed through the British Council or privately.

	State Secondary Schools	Independent Schools
French Language Assistant	22%	68%
German Language Assistant	11%	53%
Mandarin Language Assistant	3%	19%
Spanish Language Assistant	22%	68%
Language Assistant for another language	1%	13%

Table 11: Percentage of schools with language assistants

Around one in three state schools employs a language assistant (some schools employ more than one), but independent schools are much more likely to employ a language assistant.

## Languages other than the 'big 3'

	KS3 full curriculum subject independent schools (n=120)	KS3 Extra-curricular activity independent schools (n=120)	KS3 full curriculum subject state secondary schools (n=601)	KS3 Extra-curricular activity state secondary schools (n=601)
Arabic	*	*	*	8
Chinese (Mandarin)	31	16	34	33
Italian	8	14	9	24
Japanese	*	7	6	16
Polish	*	0	0	6
Russian	9	6	*	5
Urdu	0	*	5	5
Latin	65	5	29	38
Ancient Greek	22	17	*	12
Other	*	*	*	26

Table 12: Raw numbers for teaching of languages other than French, German and Spanish at Key Stage 3 (\* = less than 5 but more than 0, exact number hidden to protect identity of responding schools)

Table 12 shows languages other than French, German and Spanish. Comparison with previous years needs to be drawn with caution due to the profile of responding schools.

This year we note an increase in the number of state schools reporting Latin as a full curriculum subject at Key Stage 3 (29 schools in 2024, compared to 8 in 2023). Whilst this is not statistically significant, the increase may be because of the introduction of the Latin Excellence Programme,<sup>8</sup> which seeks to re-balance access to Latin by opening up the opportunity to study Latin for students in 42 non-selective state school across England. The Latin Excellence Programme is managed by Future Academies Trust and there are currently 40 secondary schools and two middle schools involved in the project.

8 See: <https://latinexcellence.org/>.

## Languages at Key Stage 4

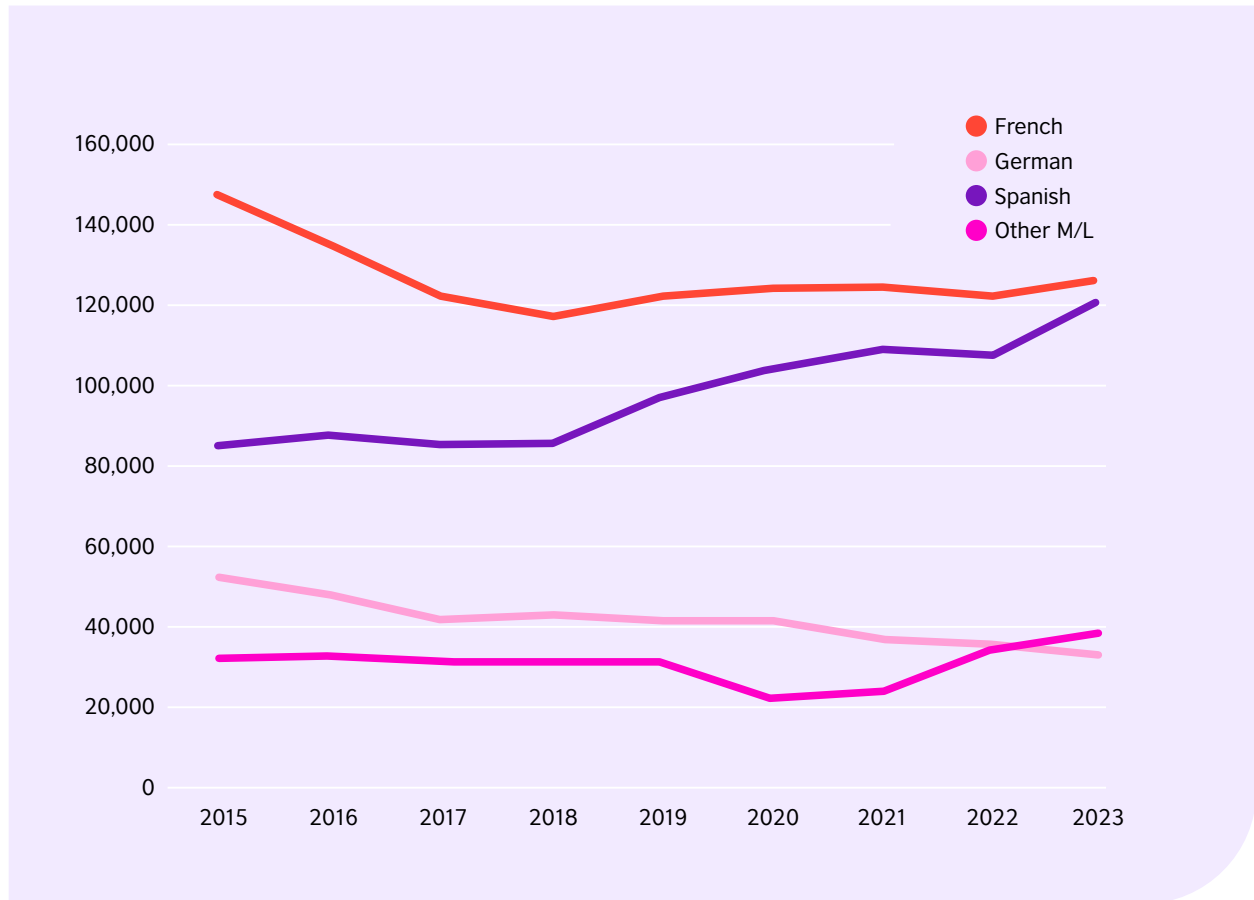


Figure 13: GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2023

	2005 baseline	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>French</b>	251,706	147,356	135,401	121,095	117,925	122,803	124,404	124,739	122,746	125,151
<b>German</b>	101,466	51,986	47,913	41,762	42,509	41,222	40,748	36,933	34,966	33,677
<b>Spanish</b>	57,731	85,217	87,581	85,184	89,577	96,811	104,280	108,982	107,488	120,198
<b>Other M/L</b>	28,182	32,090	32,704	31,668	31,437	30,997	22,344	24,103	35,202	38,429

Table 13: GCSE Entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2023 (Source JCQ)

We asked teachers about their perception of uptake at Key Stage 4 over the past three years:

	2023	2024
Languages are still compulsory for all pupils at KS4	15%	17%
More pupils now take a language at KS4	30%	25%
Fewer pupils now take a language at KS4	18%	20%
Similar numbers to before	25%	25%
No clear trend: numbers fluctuate from year to year	8%	9%
Other (please specify)	4%	4%

Table 14: Teachers' perceptions of language uptake at Key Stage 4

Whilst figures are still far off the government's ambition of 90 per cent of pupils taking a language for GCSE, it is good news that one in four teachers are telling us that they perceive more pupils to now be taking a language than before. Although there is a slight decrease in the number of teachers reporting that more students are taking a language at KS4 between 2023 and 2024, this may in part be due to the subject recovering following the Covid-19 pandemic. The research team note that in this year's data set, there is a more notable evidence of compulsion compared to what we have seen over the previous few years:

*"Students were previously made to take a language; this was removed a couple of years ago but the new curriculum protocol we have brought in from the Trust we have merged with will mean almost all students will study a language for KS4 as a compulsory subject."*

*"A modern language is compulsory except for a very small handful of SEN pupils."*

*"Our school has a compulsory policy for GCSE and in this instance we are very supported by our governors. However, Languages are not seen as important or needed in comparison to STEM subjects."*

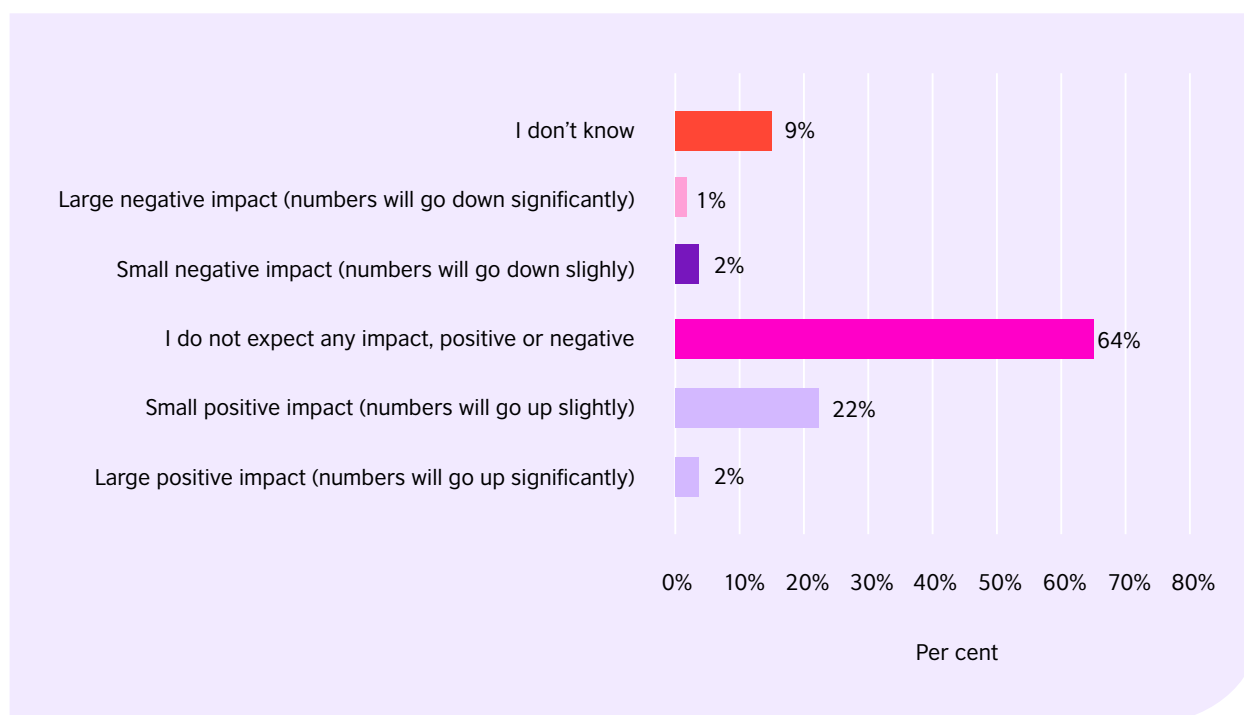


Figure 14: To what extent teachers think the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish for first teaching from September 2024 will have a positive or negative impact on uptake at GCSE

Some 252 state schools told us that the biggest challenge to uptake of MFL at GCSE is the nature and content of external examinations. Eduqas has announced that it plans to discontinue its suite of GCSE (9-1) in French, German and Spanish in England with final assessment opportunity in summer 2025. This leaves a binary market choice of AQA and Edexcel. We asked teachers if the new GCSE had had impact on their curriculum planning for Key Stage 4. One third of teachers said no, whilst the remaining two thirds said yes.

*"We have had to start embedding new skills such as dictation into the teaching schemes of work"*

*"The new GCSE [from 2024] has impacted our curriculum at Key Stage 3. We have introduced more explicit teaching of phonics, dictation and we have altered the Key Stage 3 tasks to mirror the new GCSE exam."*

*"As the specifications for German and Spanish have only been accredited recently and the new resources are not yet published, we are only now starting to plan the curriculum."*

*"We have stopped rushing through topics and we are in the process of rewriting our curriculum focusing on mastery of vocabulary through Extensive Processing Instruction. Being able to use the language is impacting [positively] on the self-efficacy/motivation of students."*

*"Lots to 'get your head around' in terms of planning, assessment, new skills to ensure the Scheme of Work is suitable."*

## Home, Heritage and Community Languages

Languages other than English used in daily life at home, in school and in local communities are sometimes known as home, heritage and community languages (HHCL). Specifically, (i) a home language is a language learned in childhood in the home, (ii) a heritage language is a minority language that is often indigenous such as Irish, Gaelic or Scots, Welsh, or Cornish but can also refer to languages which have developed in local communities as a result of immigration over time, or through new arrivals to the local area and (iii) community languages are generally those spoken by members of minority groups or communities within a majority language context.

There are 19 language GCSEs available in England, not including ancient languages: Arabic, Bengali, Mandarin Chinese and Cantonese, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Italian, Japanese, Modern Hebrew, Panjabi, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish and Urdu.

	State secondary	Independent schools
The school pays examination entry fees for pupils	79%	17%
The school is aware of complimentary schools (e.g. Supplementary / Saturday schools) but does not collaborate with them	13%	16%
The school actively collaborates with and promotes Saturday schools	2%	0%
The school facilitates teaching of 'community' languages during the school day	4%	8%
No support provided	11%	41%
Other (please specify)	18%	33%

Table 15: Support offered by schools to pupils to take examinations in home, heritage and community languages

Table 15 shows state secondary schools generally have a commitment to supporting pupils to take examinations in home, heritage and community languages. Just one in ten state secondary schools report that they do not offer any support. In contrast, independent schools do not demonstrate as strong a commitment to supporting HHCL examinations, with 41 per cent reporting that they do not provide any support (table 15). Certification in a home, heritage and community language can help a young person to celebrate their identity. We believe a lot of preparation for such examinations takes place in complimentary schools; our data above show that links between such establishments and mainstream schools are limited. It is also difficult to ascertain the exact landscape, given the non-statutory nature of complimentary schools.

In 'other' comments, state secondary schools told us that they i) provide tutoring in other languages, ii) offer supplementary lessons and guidance in preparation for exams, iii) organise external examiners to conduct home language exams, iv) pay native speakers to help with speaking exam preparation, and v) some schools have TLR posts for HHCL:

*“Heritage Programme gives support for parents and students by way of exam skills, practice papers and general exam advice. Past heritage students support younger heritage students. This is a TLR in languages.”*

In the independent sector, several common themes emerged amongst teacher comments: i) independent schools arrange for the examinations to take place in their own school and act as an exam centre for HHCL, ii) students can enter examinations but pay privately, and iii) schools provide extra work/tutors (sometimes outside of the timetable) to facilitate the learning of HHCL.

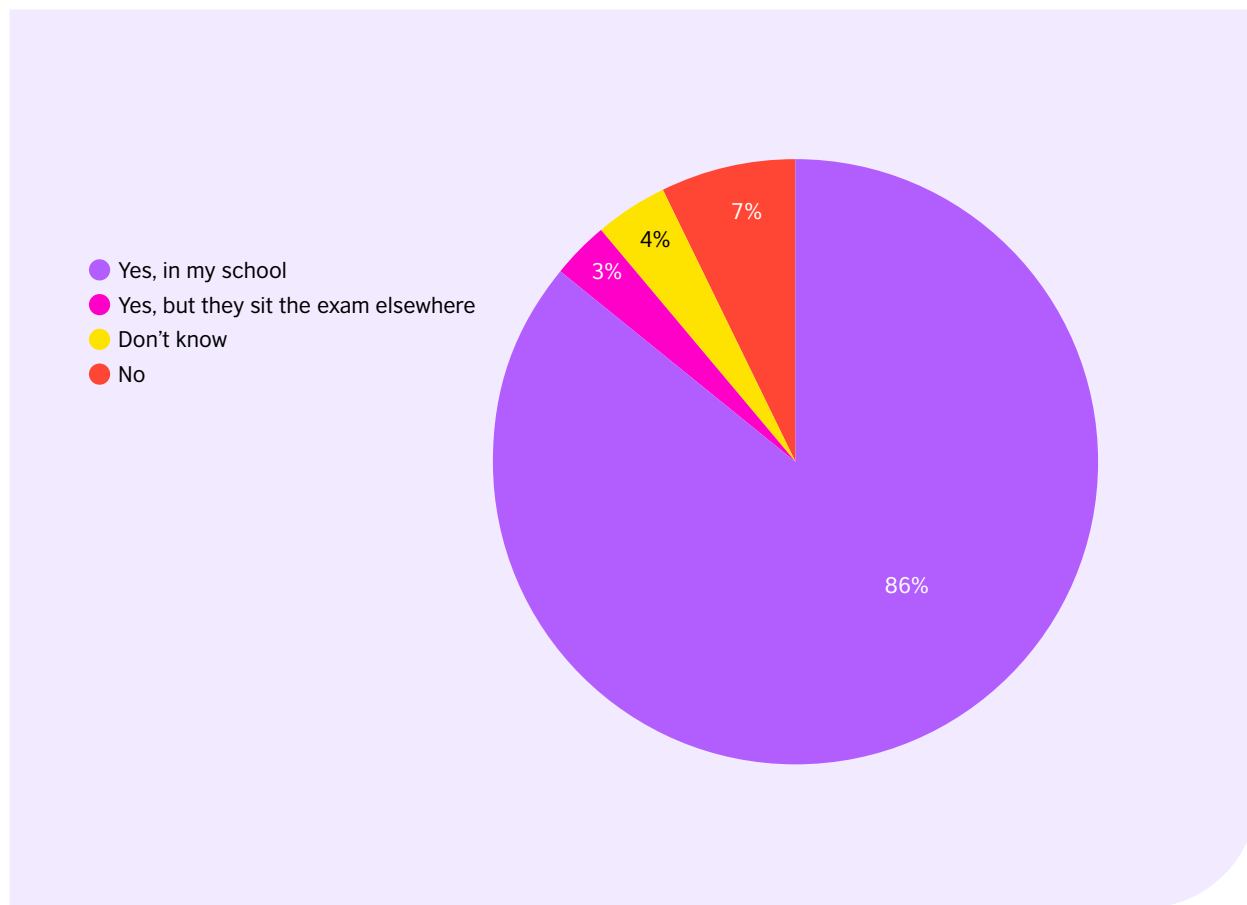


Figure 15: state secondary pupils' opportunities to take exams in the languages spoken in their homes or communities

### Languages Post 16

Commensurate with last year, the majority (89 per cent) of responding independent schools reported that they have post-16 provision in languages. In the state sector, 47 per cent of schools have post-16 provision in languages and a further 8 per cent have sharing arrangements with another school; since the findings of *Language Trends England 2023*, this data reflect a slight upwards trend in post-16 provision.

For the fifth year running, Spanish is the most popular A-level language according to official exam data, in contrast to primary and GCSE level where French remains the most taught language. Overall, we note declines in the big 3 between 2022 and 2023, but it is pleasing to see Other Modern Languages continue to recover from the slump noted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

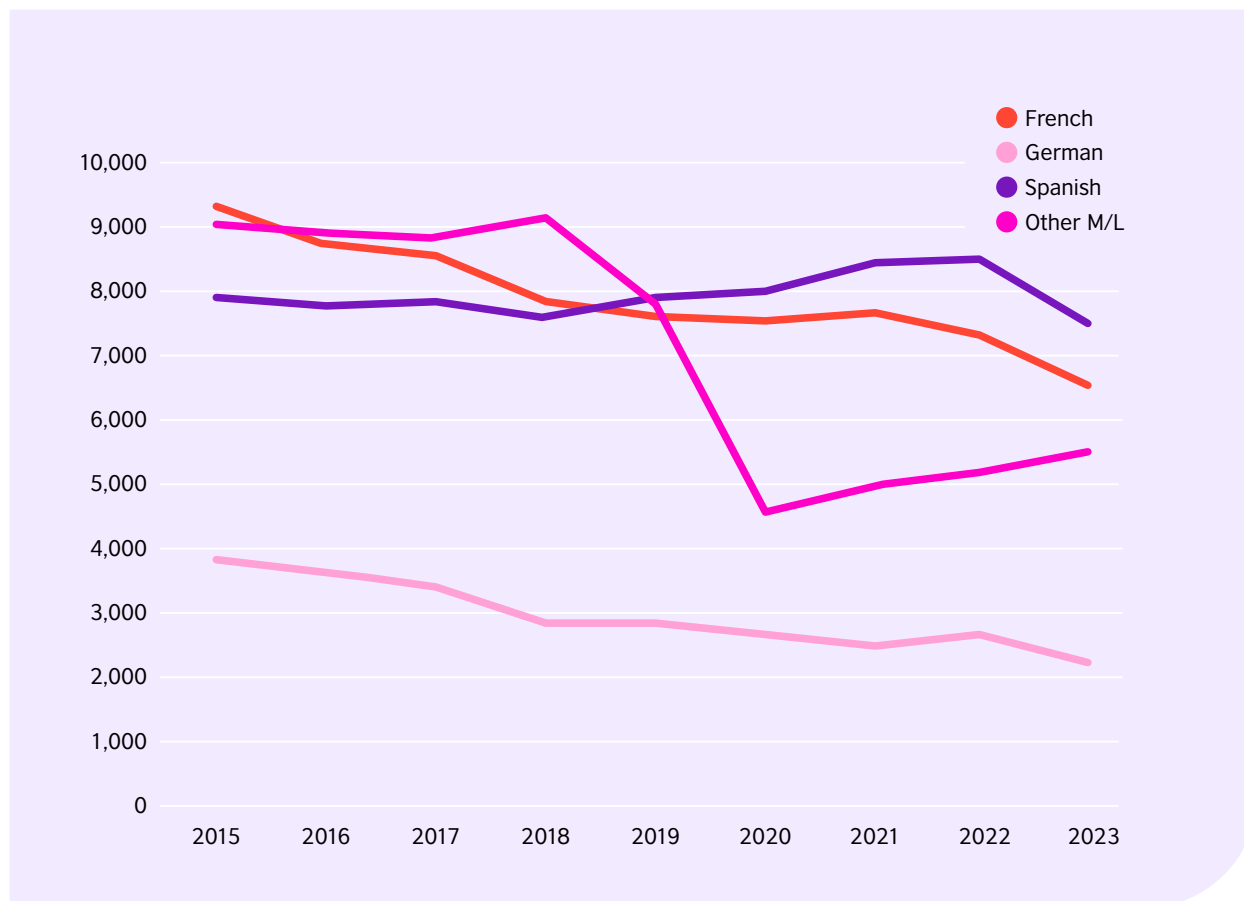


Figure 16: A-level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2023

	2005 baseline	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>French</b>	12,716	9,332	8,753	8,539	7,874	7,607	7,557	7,671	7,347	6,463
<b>German</b>	5,481	3,791	3,617	3,422	2,859	2,864	2,666	2,507	2,646	2,198
<b>Spanish</b>	5,601	7,941	7,774	7,813	7,591	7,932	8,033	8,433	8,496	7,464
<b>Other M/L</b>	6,249	9,039	8,884	8,862	9,091	7,762	4,606	4,985	5,171	5,566

Table 16: A-level entries in French, German, Spanish and Other Modern Languages in England 2015-2023 (Source JCQ)

In table 17, the data show that there are less than ten pupils in Years 12 and 13 in over half of responding state secondary schools with post-16 provision. Classes do not run in nearly two-fifths of state schools when only a few pupils wish to study a language post-16 (table 18). In 'other' comments, several teachers noted that classes often run regardless of low pupil numbers:

*"Classes run even with just one student."*

*"We are able to run a small class for one language but the school is reluctant to subsidise small classes for more than one language."*

*"Classes run as timetabled although an indication has been given that this might not be the case in the future."*

	Year 12	Year 13
5 or fewer	34%	36%
6-10	20%	20%
11-15	12%	9%
15-20	8%	8%
20+	11%	10%
None	16%	18%

Table 17: State secondary teacher responses to how many post-16 pupils in their school currently study one or more languages?

Year 12 and Year 13 classes are taught together	13%
Classes do not run	39%
Class run at a reduced timetable	28%
Shared arrangements with another school	10%
Other (please give details)	34%

Table 18: What arrangements are in place, if any, when only a few pupils wish to study a language post-16?

Teachers were asked to think about the changes in take-up and provision for languages post-16. Table 19 shows that take-up in French has decreased in 37 per cent of responding state secondary schools. In nine per cent of state secondary schools, both French and German have been discontinued during the last three years. It is positive to note that take-up remains stable in around one in three schools for French and Spanish respectively, echoing the findings of *Language Trends England 2023*.

	French	German	Spanish	Other Languages
Introduced as a new A-level	6%	1%	6%	2%
Take-up has increased	13%	6%	19%	1%
Take-up stable	31%	15%	34%	4%
Take-up has decreased	37%	21%	21%	2%
Subject discontinued during the last three years	9%	9%	3%	0%
Not taught in my school in the last three years	7%	18%	7%	1%

Table 19: Thinking about the last three years, what changes have there been, if any, in take-up and provision for languages post-16 (in state secondary schools)?

## Recruitment of MFL Teaching Staff

An analysis of the raw data found that 60 per cent of all responding state and independent schools face recruitment challenges. Table 20 shows that the recruitment of qualified teachers of MFL is an issue for two thirds of state secondary schools. The independent sector is not immune with almost half of responding schools telling us that they have had difficulty filling vacancies.

	State Secondary	Independent
Yes, a major issue	33%	15%
Yes, a minor issue	31%	31%
No, not an issue	30%	48%
I don't know	3%	4%
Other	3%	2%

Table 20: Teachers' responses to the question on whether recruitment of languages teachers is an issue.

State secondary school teachers commented:

*“For the last couple of years we were not able to find any experienced language teachers. This year we recruited an ECT (only candidate called to the interview).”*

*“Recruitment is an issue Increasingly so year on year. Quite a shock, as we are a very popular, successful state grammar school.”*

One Independent school teacher commented:

*“It depends on the language. We struggled to recruit a German teacher, but the other languages less so.”*

## International engagement

	State schools			Independent schools		
	2018	2021	2024	2018	2021	2024
The school has one or more partner schools abroad	31%	31%	27%	41%	42%	47%
We host language assistants	23%	21%	24%	50%	69%	68%
None	11%	38%	36%	3%	11%	6%

Table 21: International engagement in state and independent schools

Table 21 shows that there is a sustained decline in international engagement in the state sector; the number of schools with one or more partner schools abroad has declined by 4 per cent since 2021, while 36 per cent of schools reported no international engagement whatsoever in 2024 (consistent with *Language Trends 2023*), a 25 per cent increase since 2018. Pleasingly, the number of schools hosting language assistants has increased by 3 per cent. By contrast, there are much higher figures of international engagement in the independent sector, with only 6 per cent of responding schools reporting that they have no engagement whatsoever, compared to 11 per cent in 2021. Nearly half of responding independent schools have one or more partner schools abroad, and over two-thirds host language assistants.

The Turing Scheme is the UK government’s programme to provide funding for international opportunities in education and training across the world.<sup>9</sup> We asked state secondary teachers if they had heard of and/or accessed the Turing scheme. Figure 17 reveals that there remains considerable work to be done to raise awareness of the Turing scheme and thus provide more opportunities for international engagement. Just 24 out of 601 responding schools reported that they had applied for Turing funding, with 8 of those schools being unsuccessful.

<sup>9</sup> See: <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/>.



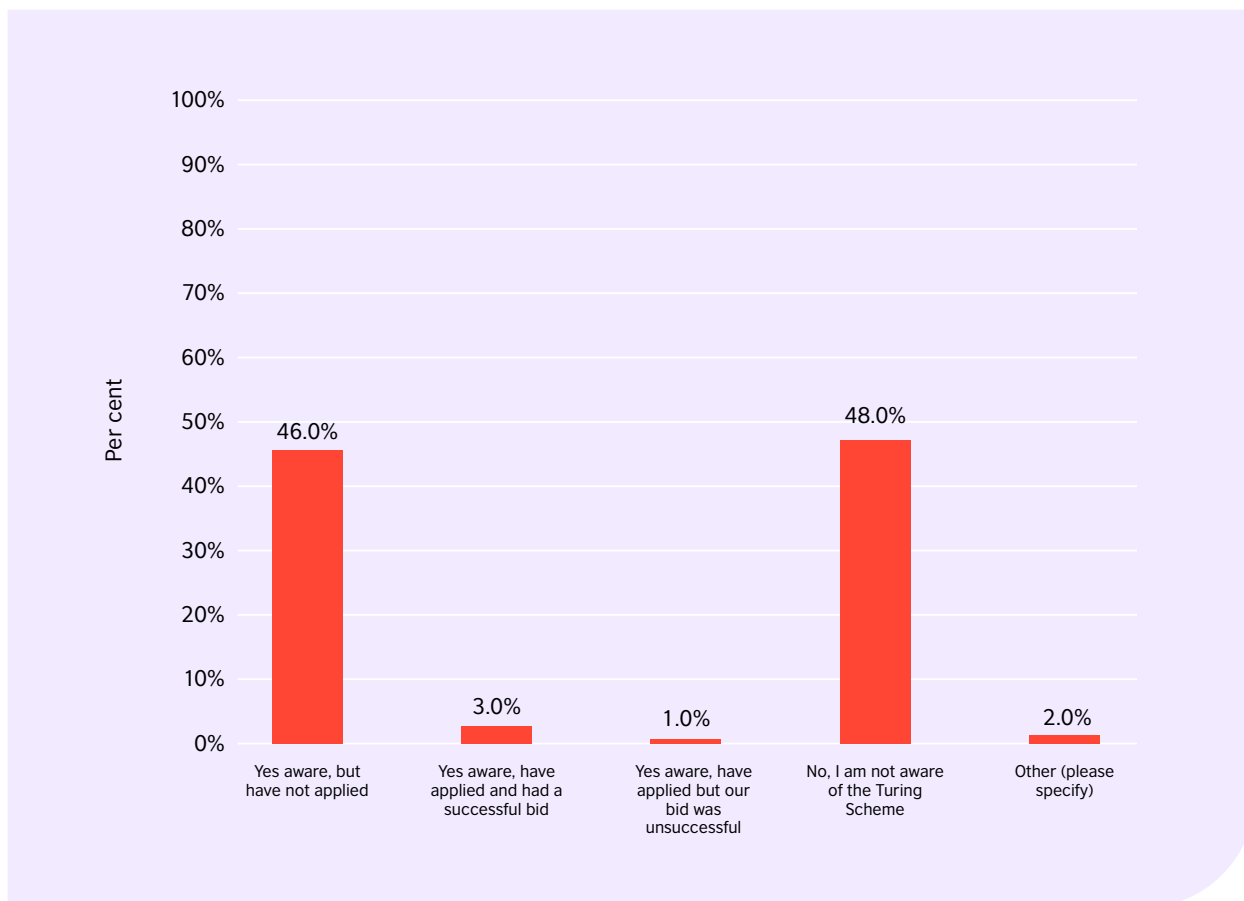


Figure 17: State secondary school teachers' awareness of Turing funding

In comments, teachers told us:

*"I am aware of the Turing Scheme but I thought it was for university students."*

*"I am aware of the Turing Scheme but I do not know what it involves or what it provides."*

While 58 per cent of independent schools reported that they are aware of, but have not applied to, the Turing Scheme, two-fifths told us that they are not aware of the scheme.

# Findings from independent schools

## Independent schools in focus

Independent schools do not receive government funding and there are no requirements for pupils to follow the national curriculum; while independent schools share many of the same opportunities and challenges of teaching languages discussed above in the state sector, there are challenges and opportunities unique to the independent school sector.

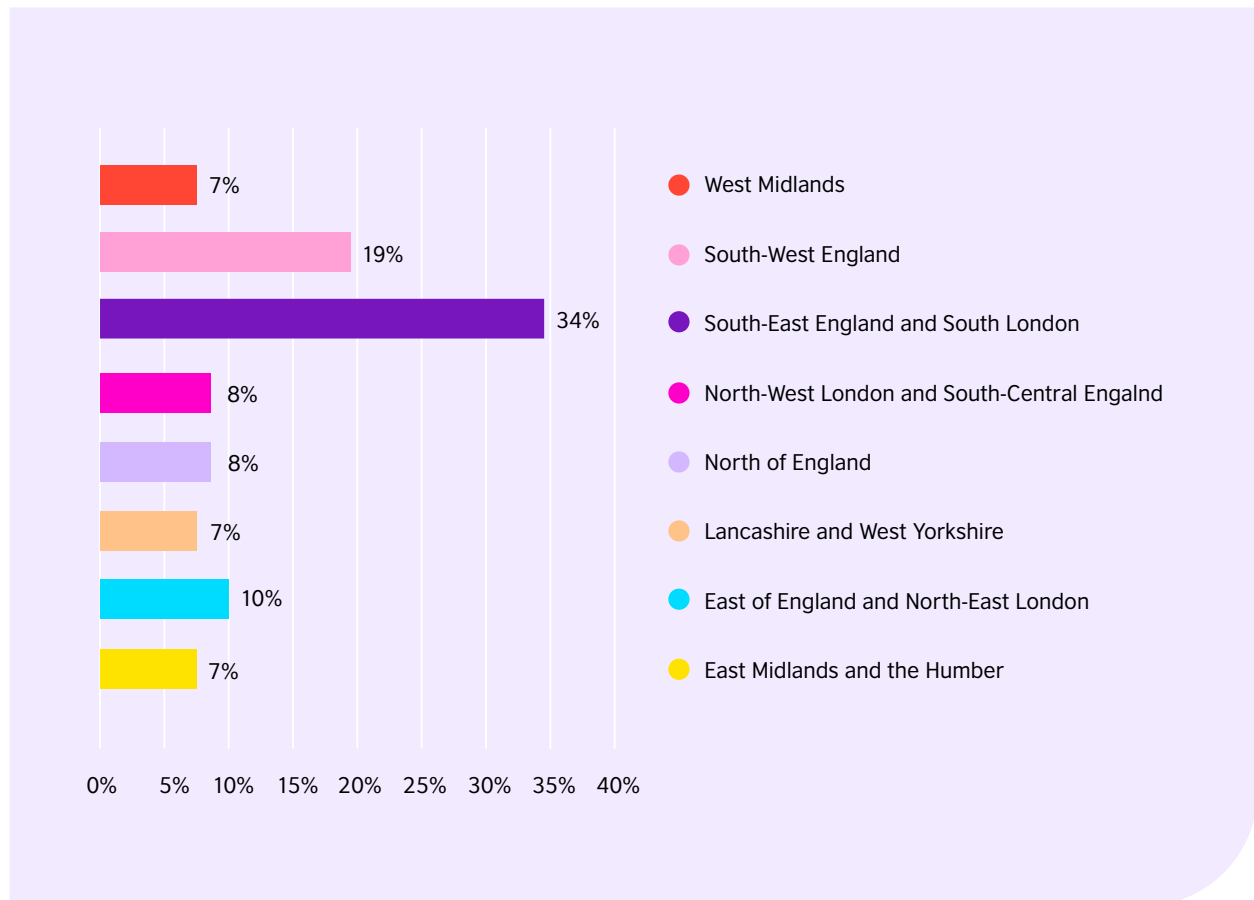


Figure 18: Geographical locations of responding independent schools (reported as eight regions of England)

Less than a quarter of responding independent schools admit pupils using the Common Entrance (CE) exam,<sup>10</sup> compared to one in three responding schools in *Language Trends England 2023*. In the 2023/24 academic year, half of responding independent schools are admitting all pupils using their own entrance exams (the same as last year's finding). Comparable to the data in *Language Trends England 2023*, only eleven per cent of these schools assess an Ancient or a Modern Foreign Language as part of the entrance examination.

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://www.iseb.co.uk/assessments/common-entrance/>.

## The independent school approach to languages on the curriculum

Figure 19 shows that, on average, a third of responding schools allocate one to two hours, or two to three hours, of curriculum time to language learning at Key stage 3. By Key Stage 4, around two thirds of schools allocate two to three hours to language learning, and nearly 30 per cent dedicate over three hours of class time.

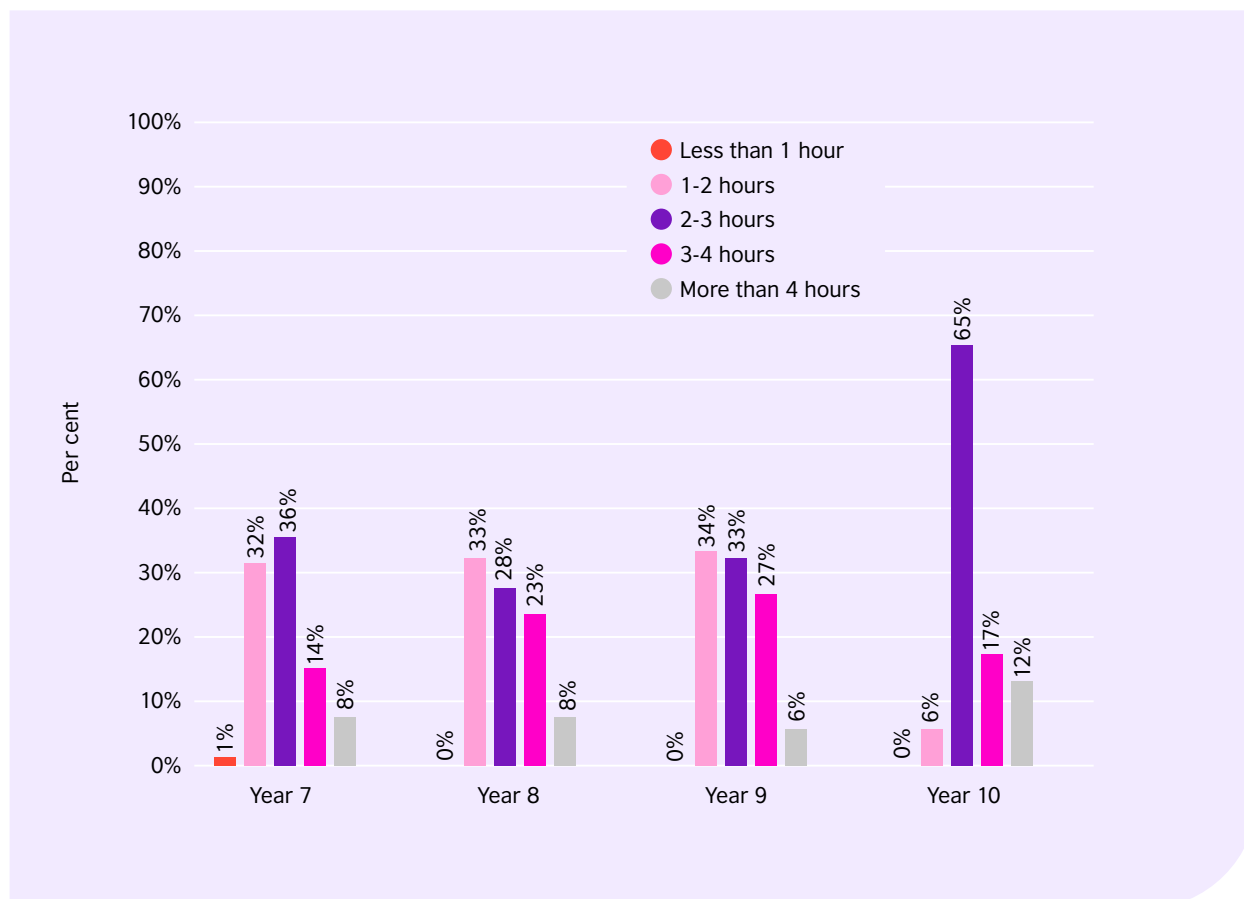


Figure 19: the total amount of class time per week allocated for language learning in independent schools at KS3 and KS4

The survey asked independent schools about their approach to take-up for languages in Key Stage 4; just under half of responding schools reported that all pupils must take a language, a similar figure to that reported in 2023 (50 per cent). In nearly a third of independent schools, pupils are strongly recommended to take a language.

The 89 per cent of independent schools who have post-16 provision in languages were asked about changes in take-up and provision for languages in their school. Table 22 shows that take-up for French and Spanish is stable in nearly half of responding schools. Take-up for Spanish has increased in 20 per cent of independent schools (similarly to state secondary schools); however, in comparison to state secondary schools, decreases in independent schools in take-up for French and German are higher, especially for German.

	Introduced as a new A-level	Take-up has increased	Take-up stable	Take-up has decreased	Subject discontinued during past three years	Not taught in my school in past three years
French	2%	4%	48%	42%	2%	3%
German	0%	9%	26%	38%	5%	21%
Mandarin	3%	5%	18%	9%	4%	62%
Russian	0%	0%	14%	4%	0%	82%
Spanish	0%	20%	48%	30%	1%	2%

Table 22: Thinking about the last three years, what changes have there been, if any, in take-up and provision for languages post-16 in your school?

In comparison to state secondary schools, independent schools report much higher figures for the employment of a Language Assistant, either through the British Council or privately. French and Spanish Language Assistants are the two most popular assistantships, tied at 67.5 per cent in responding independent schools. This is followed closely by German Language Assistants, employed in 52.5 per cent of responding schools. In the 'other' category, schools reported Language Assistants of Italian, Arabic, Japanese and Russian (figure 20).



Figure 20: Language Assistants in independent schools

The survey asked schools if they previously offered the now discontinued Cambridge Pre-U qualification;<sup>11</sup> commensurate with last year, just less than twenty schools previously offered this qualification. In terms of impact, some schools noted that it is too soon to comment, while others mention the impact on uptake in Mandarin studies especially at post-16.

Around a quarter of responding schools offer progression pathways for the teaching and learning of Mandarin; in some schools, this is only the case for native speakers of Mandarin due to concerns expressed by teachers that A-level examination content would be too difficult for non-native speakers.

### The landscape for learning in independent schools

Independent schools were asked how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed the profile of pupil intake and attitudes to languages. While just over a third of respondents commented that there has been no change, the remaining schools noted the impact on pupil literacy, knowledge gaps, negative attitudes and a decline in pupil engagement:

*“Yes - pupil attitude has turned more negative- perhaps running MFL trips again will help.”*

*“We have more pupils with a very low reading age on entry into Year 7, who are in need of literacy intervention in order to access the entire curriculum. This happens during MFL curriculum time for each year group so our entry figures will drop.”*

*“People only just recovering and starting to go abroad again. Coupled with this and Brexit, AI has come at the worst time. Online teaching and learning of listening and speaking skills during Covid had a massive negative effect on pupil perception.”*

*“General lack of confidence around speaking in class; much greater anxiety around speaking tests.”*

Despite the many challenges mentioned by teachers, there are also many positive practices happening in languages education in the independent sector that teachers have shared with us:

*“We have a very strong and committed group of teachers who make lessons fun and support students in their progress. A rich programme of extra-curricular activities, taking advantages of the London cultural scene, and trips abroad for students in most key stages”*

*“Languages are integrated into the curriculum. Our school offers home languages as part*

*of the curriculum, offering 24 languages including English. English is not given priority or superiority over other languages.”*

*“Students and parents are generally very enthusiastic of language learning and understand the importance of learning at least to GCSE.”*

*“Engagement with external opportunities (pen-pals, Business Language Champions events) very successful. SLT more open-minded to the idea of some students sitting foundation paper in a selective school. New GCSE looks promising in terms of accessibility and content.”*

### Teacher recommendations for improvement

At a system level, one teacher aptly summarises key recommendations on how to improve language learning in independent schools:

*“a clear message from the government that languages are very useful for careers, especially the case for languages spoken close to England (including more push for German - Germany being the largest economy in Europe)*

*a clear message from the government of the cognitive value of learning languages*

*much more lenient mark scheme [in public examinations], with more reward for communication*

*more applicable language learning content (that pupils can use when going abroad)*

*make it easier to recruit language assistants from abroad (current minimum salary requirements and visa rules to employ language assistants from Europe make it a bit challenging for schools to recruit)”*

At a school level, some teachers recommend increasing the allocated curriculum time for language learning:

*“Increase curriculum time in KS3 so that by Year 10 students have a solid foundation in the language. That way the two GCSE years can be spent building vocabulary and expertise, bringing in cultural elements, rather than having to teach basics again.”*

*“Ideally more time to teach the course as it is very content heavy at GCSE, and not enough time to practise exam skills. More opportunities to experience the language outside the classroom.”*

<sup>11</sup> 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

*Language Trends England 2024* has continued to map trends, both old and new, with the intention of reflecting on the current landscape of languages education in England across primary, secondary and independent sectors.

In the primary sector, we can see that French continues to prevail as the most taught language and teachers are working hard to support the development of primary languages. This year, 80 per cent of responding state primary schools commented on how they integrate pupils' home and community languages into the curriculum, reflecting the plurilingual society and educational environment in which young people are immersed; teacher comments on how children can be encouraged to be 'language detectives' through plurilingual primary education reflects the wider skillset that young people develop through early language learning.

Indeed, Liz Black (2024), outgoing President of the Association for Language Learning, has emphasised just how valuable language learning is during a child's development:

*"We have all lived through uncertain times in recent years and learnt to be flexible. Children need to be prepared for change and guided how to think flexibly too - learning other languages helps them to do this. That is the unique place of languages in the primary curriculum as they are encouraged to "learn new ways of thinking."*

Despite the government's commitment to improving language teaching and learning, significant challenges remain to be overcome, including the nature and content of external examinations according to 252 state secondary schools responding to our survey. Although such challenges remain, it is pleasing to find that 25 per cent of state secondary schools perceive more pupils to now be taking a language than before and we can see lots of optimism in our data set from teachers preparing to teach the new GCSE in French, German and Spanish. It is with this renewed sense of sanguineness that we step forward together to empower improvement for all language learners: on y va! Auf geht's! ¡Vamos!

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