



Taking 'Say Yes to Languages' beyond the classroom

Languages Connect are delighted to bring you the third in a series of articles focusing on schools and teachers who have taken part in *Say Yes to Languages*, which is rolling out for a second year. Ronan Barrett, a teacher in Rathfarnham Educate Together National School, Dublin, talks about integrating the programme beyond the language class, useful ways to invest the grant funds and interesting ideas on how to progress from one year to another.

Rathfarnham ETNS, a small suburban school tucked away off Nutgrove Avenue in Rathfarnham, is a mainstream, multi-denominational school with approximately 220 pupils and a staff of about 30. Most of the pupils attending Rathfarnham ETNS live in the surrounding area and whilst we are small for a Dublin school, with only one class in each year group, we have a really great sense of community.

Bringing diversity to the fore

As a multi-denominational school, we have quite a diverse community at Rathfarnham ETNS. We welcome pupils of all nationalities and celebrating languages and culture has become a regular occurrence in the school calendar.

For me personally, having previously taught in the UK and the United Arab Emirates, I am very aware of the importance of language and culture in raising awareness of diversity. My love of travelling and proficiency in Spanish has also allowed me to appreciate the value and the great benefit of being able to communicate in different languages.

The *Say Yes to Languages* programme provided an opportunity to bring these themes together and take them to

another level within the school setting. It looks to give pupils an insight into learning a spoken foreign language or Irish Sign Language (ISL) and develop an appreciation for the diverse range of languages and cultures that surround them daily. As soon as we became aware of the programme, we signed up without hesitation and were delighted to secure a place in the very first year.

Beyond the classroom

We applied to run *Say Yes to Languages* in two classes, with Spanish being our chosen language, and were keen to get started. We were fortunate to have two staff members with proficiency in Spanish, so we were able to deliver the programme from within the school staff.

Even though we chose Spanish as our language focus, we identified over 20 different language connections among the two classes taking part, which opened discussions around the important link languages play within our communities and how they reflect various cultures and traditions.

The programme also gave us an opportunity to create greater awareness of the school's dedication to language, culture, and diversity, as we promoted the

module through the school website using the press release provided. Extending the message beyond the school gates, we also looked to involve parents by challenging them to share a word or phrase in a foreign language in return for a sticker or the highly coveted *Say Yes to Languages* trolley token. This put our new language learning on the parents' map too. We encouraged pupils to practice and use their new phrases in the wider classroom setting but also to integrate the new learning with other subjects, especially geography and PE, which the pupils were very receptive to.

One of the ways that we used the *Say Yes to Languages* grant was to purchase listening and recording devices, which gave pupils a readily accessible tool to help. Digital technology was also used to support pupils using their new phrases in stop-motion animation and the creation of simple e-books. This was one of the highlights for the pupils, as they commented on how they enjoyed working collaboratively and using their new phrases.

As a teacher I could see the confidence growing and that technology was assisting all our pupils to access the programme.

Growing for success

Following the success of *Say Yes to Languages* in 2021/22, we were thrilled to hear that we had been accepted for 2022/23. The immense benefits of the programme were recognised throughout the school and as a result, we were keen to expand to more classes and languages.

This year, we are delighted to be able to provide this opportunity to four classes, offering Spanish and French as our language options. Whilst this means over half the school will now be involved, the guidance and resources provided by *Languages Connect*, including detailed webinars, ensure everyone is comfortable with the process and feels fully prepared for a successful rollout.

Bigger and better

The feedback from pupils and parents has been extremely positive and we are excited to build on the great work done so far. Commenting on the programme, our Principal, Maevé McCarthy noted “A key benefit of the programme for us is that the children see the language of the home used and valued at school. The initiative also builds on the overall interest in languages we are developing in Rathfarnham ETNS. We have adopted the Gaelbhratach programme and this year we have expanded the Say Yes to Languages programme to introduce French in our senior classes. Our teachers feel well-supported by Languages Connect and we are happy to continue to be part of the programme.”

In order to take our language learning to the next level we have some aims and objectives for year two;

- We would like to host a celebration at the end of the programme to highlight all that we learnt during the module;
- Invite native French and Spanish speakers to our school to read a story;
- Exploring music and dance culture in other languages;
- Promote more multilingual signage across the school community;
- Have paired and collaborative language activities across grade levels;
- Continue to showcase our language learning on the school website and social media.

A peek into the future

Say Yes to Languages has provided us with a great opportunity to look into the future and experience what it could be like to teach modern foreign languages (MFL) at primary level. It was amazing to see the pupils make connections between English, Gaeilge and their new languages.



This gave them a further understanding of how languages are linked together and provided them with an appreciation for the value of learning languages, exemplifying the value of the programme.

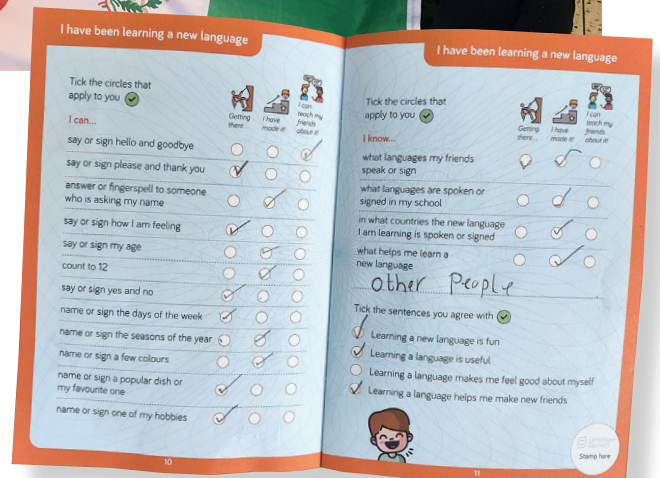
We are very excited about developing the programme further this year. I would encourage any school interested in the module to consider applying, and to any school that is just embarking on their language journey, enjoy where the experience takes you and your pupils!

2022/23 programme

This school year, over 700 schools and 50,000 pupils nationwide are taking part in *Say Yes to Languages*.

The programme, from Languages Connect, introduces pupils to a modern foreign language (MFL) or Irish Sign Language (ISL), while also raising awareness among pupils of the diversity of languages being used by their peers in their schools and community.

It is taught over an eight-week period



during the normal school timetable.

RONAN BARRETT is a teacher in Rathfarnham ETNS, Dublin. For more information about *Say Yes to Languages*, email primary@ppli.ie or visit www.languagesconnect.ie.

Languages Connect promotes the personal, social, and economic benefits of foreign language skills to principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and students. Funded by the Department of Education (DE) and facilitated by Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), this is a key objective of *Languages Connect; Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017 – 2026*.

