



# Say Yes to Languages

## *positively impacts school culture*

Languages Connect bring you the first 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. Togher GNS Principal Eimear Long and programme lead and teacher Bríd Kelleher provide an insight into the positive impact the programme has had on their school community and culture.

Togher GNS is an urban, all-girls school located in Cork City with approximately 270 pupils. We have diverse ethnicities and minorities attending the school and 40 per cent of pupils use English as a second language. This year, the school was classified as a Delivering Equality of Education (DEIS) 1 school.

Intercultural education and inclusion are constant planning priorities for classroom, support and EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers. The school aimed to expand its students' experiences further, however we realised the need to source expertise and resources beyond our scope. Being included in the Languages Connect *Say Yes to Languages* programme in 2021-2022 gave us an opportunity to enhance teaching and learning experiences in the school.

### Our motivation to apply for *Say Yes to Languages*

In June 2021 we successfully applied for *Say Yes to Languages* to avail of a programme that would better prepare the pupils for secondary school. Providing an initial, formal introduction to a modern language, the programme would look to develop pupils' oral and aural skills and increase their awareness of the variety of languages and cultures present in the school community.

### Our experience of the programme

A French tutor was sourced and arranged for May 2022. The class teachers and the tutor attended online workshops and information sessions provided by Languages Connect, to familiarise themselves with the programme. Continued support and resources from Languages Connect guided us in the successful launch of the programme in the school.

In addition, boxes of colourful *Say Yes to Languages* resources were supplied



directly to the school, ensuring pupils would engage with the programme. As the bunting was hung on walls, the anticipation mounted, and the *Say Yes to Languages* programme began. Classes were centred around fun activities, games and songs. Space was given to the pupils to compare the language they were learning with all the other languages that they were already familiar with.

### Luna's Lingo!

In an effort to include and celebrate all cultures, a pupil from third class taught her classmates Spanish. With the support and encouragement of her teacher, this became a weekly event. An experience which became known as 'Luna's Lingo' developed, as dances and actions were added to the Spanish language being learned by the pupils. Principal Eimear Long was invited to a performance of 'Luna's Lingo' which was also performed at our weekly school assembly and taught publicly at *Togher Lifelong Learning*

*Festival* for the Lord Mayor of Cork. Many proud families attended this special event and as a result of this experience, other pupils were eager to begin sharing their languages with their friends and the wider school staff.

### A positive ripple effect

As talk of the programme spread amongst other pupils, the EAL teacher became involved and collaborated with the tutor and class teachers. Projects were created by pupils from sixth class that celebrated the many cultures in the school including Polish, Roma, Russian, Spanish and Indian. These projects were presented and shared at school assemblies and online via Zoom with parents and relatives - joining sometimes from different continents!

Pupils flourished during the *Say Yes to Languages* programme and by June of 2022, there were English, Irish, Irish Cant, Romani, Chinese, Spanish, Polish, Russian, French and Indian projects displayed on our dedicated *Say Yes to Languages* and

EAL corridor for all to read and enjoy!

Building on pupils' pride in their cultures and parental support, an International Day was celebrated in the school, linking in with the Global Citizenship Flag and Green Schools committee. With over 40 per cent of children experiencing other cultures and nearly 30 different nationalities, it truly was a day to remember. Costumes, traditional dress and colours from numerous countries were worn on the day and it is now envisaged to become an annual event. A sense of ownership of learning, through the facilitation of student-led teaching, along with the guidance of a multilingual, experienced tutor, added to the success and long-lasting impact of the *Say Yes to Languages* programme.

### Lessons learned and ideas for the future

We believe that an awareness of the range of languages used by our students and the success of the *Say Yes to Languages* programme have truly enriched our school culture. We were thrilled to be successful in our application to take part in *Say Yes to Languages* again this year. Building on our experience, the following are our proposed intentions for the current year:

- Formalise the existing 'buddy system' for communicating with new EAL



- students
- Peer tutors will instruct their classmates in modern foreign languages within senior classes
- Cross-curricular planning, highlighting connections with other languages and their cultures and integrating with other subjects
- Student-led creation of multilingual posters in the senior classes
- Begin our programme in term one of the school year, rather than term three, allowing for a longer timeframe to embed the learning
- Spotlight informal meet and greet vocabulary of a different language fortnightly, with staff and pupils using



- it throughout the school day
- Use social media to share and record displays, drama, music and art.

### 2022/2023 programme

This academic year, over 700 schools in Ireland will take part in *Say Yes to Languages*. Over 50,000 pupils will be involved and a range of 15 languages, including Irish Sign language, will be showcased.

**EIMEAR LONG, Togher GNS Principal, and BRÍD KELLEHER, Togher GNS programme lead and teacher. For more information about Say Yes to Languages, email [primary@ppli.ie](mailto:primary@ppli.ie) or visit [www.languagesconnect.ie](http://www.languagesconnect.ie).**

Intercultural education and inclusion are constant planning priorities for classroom, support and EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers.



**Say Yes to Languages** from Languages Connect offers an introduction into a variety of modern foreign languages and Irish Sign Language (ISL) while also looking to raise awareness among pupils of the diversity of languages being used by their peers in their schools and community.

**Languages Connect** promotes the personal, social, professional and economic benefits of foreign language skills to principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and students. Funded by the Department of Education 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.