



# Saying yes to languages for five years!

The 10-week foreign language module is transforming classrooms, boosting teacher confidence and inspiring a multilingual future

This year marks the fifth anniversary of *Say Yes to Languages* (SYTL), Ireland's national 10-week foreign language module for all recognised primary and special schools. Now in phase two, SYTL supports 5th and 6th class pupils in building transversal skills, strengthening literacy, and developing connections across English, Irish and additional languages, thus supporting the enactment of the language specification across all primary schools.

To celebrate this milestone, PPLI/Languages Connect will be visiting schools nationwide to acknowledge the remarkable work happening over the past five years and to celebrate those bringing languages to life in schools. In advance of this, teachers Aideen O'Brien, Stephanie Browne and Adele Guiney from Bayside SNS, Sutton, Dublin and principal and deputy principal Conor Ryan and Deirdre Payne from Belgrave Senior Boys' School, Clontarf, Dublin, gave us an insight into what the module has meant to their pupils, teachers and schools.

## Say Yes to Languages – Exploring languages today, to support tomorrow

SYTL offers schools a structured, fun way to explore foreign language learning. The module encourages play, communication and curiosity. Bayside SNS teachers emphasised that language learning through SYTL is enjoyable and inclusive, with Aideen noting that "It's all about having fun." Pupils learn through

games, songs, movement and everyday expressions, weaving between their new language(s), English and Irish. As Aideen mentioned, "They're all interconnected. It's all about communication."

Teachers consistently describe it as a bridge toward fully integrating modern foreign languages (MFL) in the future. Aideen and Stephanie shared, "SYTL represents a really important step in getting MFL ready" and "gives teachers a natural trying out phase." With schools required to enact MFL over a phased basis, as part of the language specification, "SYTL offers a bridge, a way to discover what works best".

**Above:** Teacher Aideen O'Brien and children having fun learning Spanish at Bayside SNS.

## The positive impact of SYTL on pupils' learning and attitude

Teachers have described a profound and lasting impact on children, staff and the wider school community because of SYTL, with pupils becoming increasingly confident, enthusiastic and open to learning. As Deirdre, deputy principal, Belgrave, noted, "It opens horizons and gives them a confidence boost." Pupils begin to see languages as familiar, achievable and exciting rather than intimidating. This is reflected by Bayside



SNS teacher Aideen who commented that “learning through SYTL makes languages seem not scary, but easy.”

Bayside SNS teachers also link languages with inclusion. Their school community has become more culturally diverse in recent years and SYTL has provided an opportunity to explore these cultures further, to great success. “It’s a lovely mix of diverse cultures, and learning languages helps us celebrate and learn about them,” Aideen noted. “Embracing languages makes us even more inclusive, giving every child’s linguistic identity value and visibility,” added Stephanie.

Parents echo this positivity. Both schools affirmed that many parents speak proudly of their children practising at home, sharing new vocabulary or using apps. Stephanie highlighted parent-teacher meetings where feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with parents praising the joy their children experience from engaging with French and Spanish.

Both teachers emphasised the lasting impact of the experience on the pupils, with Aideen recalling how a pupil who discovered Spanish through SYTL now spends every summer working in Spain. “Language isn’t about a test,” Aideen reflected, “It’s about mobility, opportunity and opening doors.”

### SYTL reignites teacher confidence and enthusiasm

The module has also revitalised teacher confidence. All three Bayside SNS teachers completed the Department of Education and Youth funded upskilling courses, facilitated by PPLI/Languages Connect, including Spanish with Instituto Cervantes and French with Alliance Française. Stephanie and Adele also spent a week in France for a residential immersion programme as part of a partnership between PPLI/Languages Connect and the French Embassy in Ireland, which Stephanie described as “the best week and something that changed how we teach French for the better.”

Acknowledging initial apprehension, Stephanie reassured colleagues: “There is no need for fear. Confidence grows when teachers and pupils learn together.” Aideen agreed, recalling moments when she learned new words alongside the children, describing it as “a shared learning experience.”

Belgrave’s journey began with visiting tutors bringing in Japanese, followed by Irish Sign Language (ISL) and French. The engagement with visiting tutors revealed



Belgrave boys Having fun during a SYTL lesson! and (right) 'Mapping the languages in our school' display at Belgrave.

hidden talents among teachers, and now, classroom-based teachers will deliver the module for the first time. As deputy principal Deirdre Payne said, “We just put it out to staff, and out of nowhere, two surprise candidates said that they would do it.” She continued, “I think that’s been the biggest impact, just acknowledging the other languages in our school community. It surprised us.”

### Looking ahead – A bright future for MFL in primary schools

Principals nationwide view SYTL as a catalyst for positive change. “It’s not going to be as difficult to bring languages in as people think,” reflected Belgrave principal Conor Ryan. SYTL, he explained, normalises language learning and offers pupils a “sample or taste of languages, while celebrating the diversity already present in school communities.”

Conor recognises that schools have many initiatives to choose from, but he believes SYTL stands out for its simplicity. “SYTL is far more straightforward than other programmes,” he explained. His advice to others is to try: “The only way you’ll know whether it’s going to work or not is to give it a go. Simple as that. And sometimes it’s through trial and error.”

Aideen echoes this sentiment, affirming: “This initiative is worth it” and “Everyone has been enriched by the experience.” She emphasises how SYTL can play a vital role in preparing children to become global citizens, helping them appreciate democratic values, identity and connection.

### Conclusion

In its first five years, *Say Yes to Languages* has transformed classrooms nationwide, boosting teacher confidence and sparking pupil enthusiasm for language learning. Its positive impact is clearly felt in schools like Bayside and Belgrave, inspiring inclusion and lifelong curiosity.

As the programme grows, it continues to make languages accessible and enjoyable, paving the way for successful enactment of modern foreign languages in the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum*.

To celebrate SYTL five-year anniversary, PPLI/Languages Connect will visit schools throughout 2026, promoting activities that celebrate creativity, diversity and the joy of embracing languages. Teachers and pupils can look forward to new opportunities to share their fantastic work.

Find out more about SYTL, access resources, and explore language upskilling opportunities on the PPLI/Languages Connect website.



 Languages Connect

PPLI/Languages Connect, funded by the Department of Education and Youth, supports foreign language education in Ireland at primary and post-primary levels.

Through the Languages Connect strategy, PPLI/Languages Connect works to enhance, expand, and diversify language learning opportunities and highlight the value of plurilingualism and multilingualism in Irish society. Its team of education and foreign language specialists delivers impactful projects, conducts research, develops resources and collaborates closely with teachers, schools and education partners.