

# Opening doors to languages

## Lessons from a year of progress

As Ireland's primary education landscape continues to evolve, modern foreign languages (MFL) are beginning to take on a more visible and meaningful role in classrooms nationwide. Dr Francesca La Morgia joined Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI)/Languages Connect prior to the launch of the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum*, bringing her extensive experience as a lecturer in language education and multilingualism, alongside many years of teaching languages to adult learners. She offers insight into programmes for teachers such as *Say Yes to Languages* and *Foreign Language Upskilling* in making languages accessible, enjoyable and meaningful in primary classrooms. Here, she reflects on a year of progress for PPLI/Languages Connect and explores new approaches to fostering children's curiosity towards languages and cultures.



Dr La Morgia welcoming pupils from Griffith Barracks School who visited the Interactive Museum of Languages for Young Audiences.



### Opening European pathways for teachers

Building on these upskilling opportunities abroad, another significant achievement this year was securing Erasmus+ accreditation. This will enable us to offer primary teachers opportunities to take part in language upskilling courses and shadow teachers in other European countries. Our own education officers have reported on how enriching these exchanges are, providing a fresh insight into classroom practice and a deeper appreciation of the benefits of learning from colleagues across Europe.

### From European vision to Irish classrooms

Evidence from primary classrooms around Europe shows that introducing languages at primary level plays a vital role in shaping long term attitudes to language learning. This aligns closely with the Council of Europe's 2022 recommendation on plurilingual and intercultural education, which highlights the cognitive, linguistic and social value of learning and engaging with multiple languages, and frames plurilingual education as central to democratic culture.

Over the past five years, over 1,900 schools have engaged with languages in ways that are playful, inclusive and fostering positive attitudes towards different languages and cultures. *Say Yes to Languages* is building teacher confidence by providing a supportive space to explore new ideas, approaches and resources for introducing languages in the primary classroom.

We are preparing and equipping our young learners to become global citizens in a rapidly changing world, creating access to additional opportunities at home and abroad.

### Collaborating for success

All the team at PPLI/Languages Connect is excited to continue on this journey, working closely with teachers, schools and the Department of Education and Youth to make languages a natural part of everyday learning at primary education. We encourage teachers and schools to consider how they can get involved by visiting [languagesconnect.ie](https://languagesconnect.ie) or emailing us at [primary@ppli.ie](mailto:primary@ppli.ie)



I was very fortunate to join PPLI/Languages Connect just a few months before the redeveloped *Primary School Curriculum* was launched, and to join a team of skilled and passionate people who provide expertise and support for MFL education. We share a common vision, where languages can be enjoyed by all young people in our education system.

We are extremely fortunate to have a holistic primary curriculum that incorporates languages by connecting them, and builds a foundation for children to become aware of a range of different languages and cultures. Ireland is well placed to support the introduction of new languages, with primary teachers already bringing a strong grounding in language learning pedagogy.

### Supporting teachers as language learners

A key role of PPLI/Languages Connect is to build teachers' competence and confidence in their MFL skills, and while we have been planning a range of supports to respond to the needs of a diverse cohort of teachers, we realise that this shift will take time. When I hear teachers' hesitation, I often think back to my first role in Ireland over 20 years ago teaching Italian to adult learners. Many students were initially sceptical about what they could achieve in just 20 or 30 hours of learning, yet time and again I saw confidence emerge. By the end of each course, every learner had reshaped how they saw themselves – as capable and successful language learners.

As many teachers across Ireland upskill in a foreign language, celebrating small wins becomes a powerful driver of confidence and motivation. These wins can be simple, such as listening to a French podcast on sport once a week, exploring an Italian recipe book, or following a yoga class online in Spanish. Over time, these small wins will start to become the building blocks of a teaching body that feels empowered to share a love for languages and cultures in every primary school.

### Upskilling and strengthening language confidence

Recently, we spoke with teachers whose experiences highlighted how linguistic diversity and plurilingualism are becoming increasingly common among teachers. One teacher shared how a Spanish upskilling course led her to spend her career break in Spain; another spoke of reconnecting with her own heritage by learning French. As foreign languages become a more visible part of our conversation in education, personal stories of connection and identity are beginning to surface.

Our team has focused on broadening the range of courses and reaching as many teachers as possible, facilitating more than 60 courses in the past 12 months, including four which took place in France, thanks to our collaboration with the French Embassy. Feedback from teachers has been very encouraging, highlighting that they feel more confident in their language skills and better prepared to teach languages in their class.