

## Developing modern languages through other subjects: Dallam School

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### Brief description

In Dallam School, bilingual classes are taught in personal, social and health education (PSHE) and humanities, using either French or Spanish. Their language teacher is also their form tutor, so tutor time is conducted in the target language. The impact of the method is shown by all groups of students reaching a high standard in languages by the end of Year 9. This is one of four examples comprising two primary and two secondary schools where teaching subjects through the medium of a modern foreign language has raised achievement overall.

### Overview – the school's message



'We have been a specialist language college from the start and are always open to new ideas. As an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School, we are committed to the principles of the IB and have sought to raise student aspirations through an international ethos. However, a policy of languages for all at GCSE is a challenge for a non-selective school on the rural fringes of the Lake District. We needed to find a practical way to boost student language learning and establish positive attitudes from the start.

Many students and their families said, as early as Key Stage 3, that they couldn't see the point of language learning. We wanted to motivate them with relevant, interesting content from the time of entering the school. We believed that immersing them in this two or three times a day would give them the confidence to use another language in spontaneous, natural, sometimes informal ways. This had the added benefit of extending languages across the curriculum and promoting the training of staff, through highly innovative practice and partnerships with colleagues in other schools and Higher Education at home and abroad. Although an obvious solution, bilingual teaching

has been hard work and is limited to the number of staff with the required skills, but it's had great results and I would love to do more of it!

*Steven Holdup, Former Principal*

## The good practice in detail

Since 2008, the school has had one bilingual form of 30 students in Years 7 to 9. The aim is that students will have greater opportunities to practice their language by having some of their lessons conducted entirely, or almost entirely, in either French or Spanish. The language alternates each year between French and Spanish and the lessons are delivered by a specialist languages teacher. All the written materials are also in the target language and students are discouraged from speaking English.



These students have four regular 50-minute lessons of modern languages every week, as do other students in the year group. In addition, they are given one lesson of PSHE and all their registration and tutor time through the medium of French or Spanish. Students in the bilingual classes do exceptionally well in Spanish or French by the end of Year 9. All of them go on to do very well at GCSE and beyond. Achievement has speeded up in languages, [according to its recent inspection](#), and students are on track to reach well above average attainment. The school won the [British Academy Schools Language Award](#) in 2012 for its work with bilingual tutor groups.



These classes are heavily over-subscribed with 60 applicants each year for just 30 places. Students are selected at random. Although the bilingual group is drawn from a wide, random, cross-section of applicants of all abilities, their level of attainment in French or Spanish by the end of Year 9 compares very favourably with the rest of the cohort. Until recently, they were entered for GCSE in Year 9, where the large majority gained A\* to C grades and then went on in Year 10 to do either re-sits or the IB followed by AS-level work.

There are plans to extend these bilingual groups into Years 10 and 11 by utilising further members of the languages department as form tutors. Students will now take their GCSE at the end of Year 11 to maximise their chance of obtaining the highest possible grade.

The school has started to introduce one lesson a week of history or geography taught through either Spanish or French. All language teachers in Year 7 and 8 – not just those taking the bilingual classes – will deliver a geography or history module in French or Spanish during a languages lesson. A Second World War module has been adapted into French with history objectives retained. This is an additional unit, so will

not have a negative impact on the quality of the regular history course content. Students will still have all their regular history and geography lessons in English.

## Proof of progress

School data indicate that students in the bilingual classes always do better in their attainment in languages compared to attainment in languages in other classes, even though they have been selected at random. Students from previous years have achieved a much higher proportion of A\* and A grades by the end of Year 9 than other classes have achieved by the end of Year 11, despite two extra years of studying the GCSE course.

Informal feedback from the school indicates that students in the bilingual class are better behaved than other language classes, show more confidence and develop better relationships through teamwork.

The bilingual classes are sustainable as there are other members of the languages department who can be trained to take on the role. As there are six members of the languages department, it would not be possible to extend bilingual classes to more than one in each year group up to Year 12, otherwise non-language specialist teachers would have to be deployed as form tutors.

There are links with other bilingual tutor groups in other countries. There is a virtual exchange project. The Second World War history project has links with Normandy where school exchanges take place.

The teachers have a high degree of language subject knowledge and commitment to teach through the target language. They are skilled in planning activities that promote student discussion in the target language for a real purpose, whether planning a camping trip in PSHE or debating the build-up of Second World War in history.



Students' listening skills are very well developed and their speaking skills are advanced to the extent that they can give extended responses and then justify their answers with evidence. Students are also confident to ask questions in French or Spanish when they do not understand something. The use of additional adults, who are themselves fluent in the target language, reinforces the use of the language all the time.

## Positive impacts

The success of the bilingual classes must be attributed to the high profile and support the subject receives from senior leaders. The principal – not a linguist by training – speaks Spanish to students all the time to ensure that it is valued and promoted. Leaders have based their approach solidly on academic research of what works. The whole-school curriculum has been devised to allow the bilingual classes to operate and there are ever closer ties now being made with the leaders of PSHE and humanities subjects. Close liaison takes place with life skills tutors over their course. The schemes have to be very detailed for

non-specialists to deliver them. Bilingual tutors translate and adapt materials for bilingual classes. The life skills coordinator has observed lessons to ensure that subject content is maintained.

Students themselves are highly positive about the impact of the bilingual classes, not only on their high achievement, but also influencing their future career paths. Even when they are not choosing to continue with language study at university, they still see themselves using their language skills in their future chosen career by working overseas or in an international setting. Where students speak other languages not taught by the school, they are encouraged to take them at GCSE. Other teachers in the school are bilingual in other languages and this is viewed very positively by the school. Students are very positive about the benefits of bilingualism in helping them with their studies, as well as promoting their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development in the way they see the world, and in celebrating difference and diversity.

## The school's background



**Dallam School** is located just south of the Lake District in Cumbria and became an academy in 2011. It is an international language college specialising in modern foreign languages. It caters for boarders and draws students from across the United Kingdom and overseas. It offers the International Baccalaureate in the sixth form. In its most recent inspection in April 2013, the school's overall effectiveness was judged as good.

## Other examples published in this set

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