

## Languages at the heart of the curriculum: Springfield Lower School

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### Brief description

At Springfield Lower School, teaching Italian through an approach based on content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is firmly established. Language lessons use the current topic in the curriculum for their content. Links with Italy and its culture provide rich opportunities to develop the pupils' understanding and appreciation of other cultures. Modern language learning is for all pupils; disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make especially good progress. This is one of four examples, two primary and two secondary, where pupils make rapid progress in learning modern languages through a curriculum designed to extend opportunities to be immersed in the language studied.

### Overview – the school's message

'Our teaching style has a profound effect on the children's experiences and the rate that they acquire a new language. It has been an amazing learning journey for the staff and the children, with Italian now being spoken around the school both in and out of lesson time. We have lots of schools visiting us to see our work in Italian from children as young as four years old.'

*Richard Benson, Headteacher*

'This method of language learning is the opportunity we have as educators to give pupils who speak English as an additional language and below-average achievers the chance to confidently take the lead. These children are able to use cues as a matter of course so they begin with a clear advantage whereas high achievers have the chance to develop these important skills often for the first time. Language learning at Springfield is using culture and curriculum to open a new world for the pupils. Embedding language learning into the curriculum takes time and teacher commitment but the reward is enthusiastic language learning which is not reliant on one person.'

*Marianne Allen, Deputy Headteacher and subject leader*

## The good practice in detail



The school was awarded the [Primary Languages Classroom Award](#) for Italian, coming first against 150 other schools from across the country and it is easy to see why. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and their confidence in speaking or singing in Italian is impressive. Even the youngest pupils can remember the words of a large number of songs, chosen for their relevance to the topics being studied across the curriculum for that term, rather than for their linguistic simplicity. They love learning languages. Many have competence in several and consider

themselves as speakers of Italian, rather than just learners. One boy proudly told me: 'Italian will be my third language'. Another was familiar with seven.

### Teaching Italian in Italian

All children have at least 30 minutes per week of Italian teaching that motivates and engages them. One child told me: 'My teacher makes learning fun and interesting and puts lots of energy into it.' The topic-based curriculum extends into language lessons. The class studying the book *Stig of the Dump* were learning about recycling; those studying ancient Rome were following orders as Roman soldiers in order to learn the names for parts of the body in Italian.



The lessons are delivered almost entirely in Italian and the pupils respond easily because teachers use signs, mimes, visuals and actions to make the meaning clear. Pupils say they find it easy to understand because of this and are helped to remember the language because: 'teachers give us a rhythm'.

Teachers have high expectations of the use of Italian as the main means of communication. Pupils tell the teacher in Italian if they would like a school dinner that day. They greet each other in and often out of lessons in Italian.



As a result, they are confident and responsive when spoken to in Italian. They are starting to be able to answer questions requiring the use of previously learnt language and covering a range of topics by the end of Year 2. Independence is encouraged through the use of technology, for example researching alternative words through online dictionaries.

Some class teachers deliver their own language lessons or they are delivered by

specialists. All children have input from a native speaker each week. All teachers reinforce the language at other times. Consistency is ensured by regular discussion of the week's topics and thorough monitoring by the subject leader. Teachers have a good understanding of a range of language teaching methods to support their pupils' progress. As a result, by the time they leave at the end of Year 4, most are able to speak and understand spoken and written Italian at a level not normally achieved so early. The school assesses the pupils' ability and the levels achieved are passed to the next school.

### Links with 'real' Italian

The school makes excellent use of native speakers of Italian. They employ foreign language assistants each year, supported by funding from the local authority and shared with two other schools. The Italian consulate also provides a teacher from Italy and there are two native speakers of Italian on the staff. The benefits are evident in the pupils' excellent



pronunciation and in the confidence and language competence of the other teachers in the school. Class teachers deliver the language lessons who are not linguists are very well supported. The school offers them opportunities to develop their language skills after school and to undertake projects in Italy with their partner school. In the past these have covered topics such as music, information and communication technology and sport. A continuous link with Italian speakers is available on the school's learning platform.

The partner school in Italy is a vital part of the ethos of the school that places such a high value on learning languages and broadening horizons. Each year a group of pupils from Year 4 go on an exchange visit, where they take part in joint projects, experience the life in a school and see for themselves where familiar food is grown. The Italian pupils make a return visit where the newly formed friendships flourish. The school takes this aspect of its work so seriously that the headteacher was given a performance management objective at the start of the project which was to learn Italian.

### The school's background



[Springfield Lower School](#) is a larger than average community school for children aged 4–9 years old and is situated in Kempston, south-east of Bedford. The majority of pupils are from White ethnic backgrounds, but the proportions from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language are above average. The school has gained the International Schools award.

## Other examples published in this set

Chenderit School  
Dallam School  
St Austin's Catholic Primary School

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