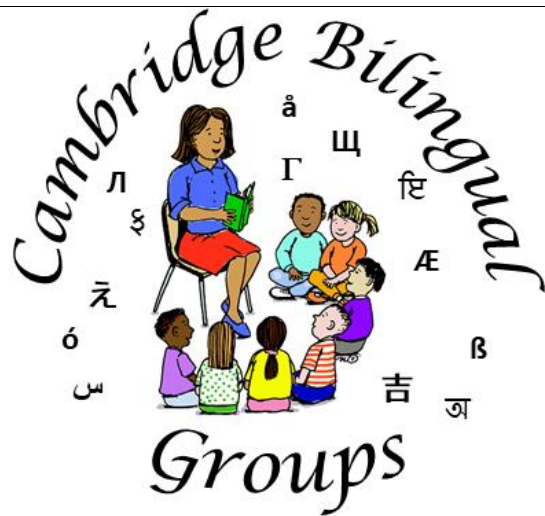


## Supporting bilingual children

**Cambridge Bilingual Groups, an initiative that brings together local community schools**

**- model and recommendations**



*Local volunteer-run community schools in and around Cambridge were limited in their aspirations and development due to a lack of networking and tailored service provision. Bringing together a large group of community schools on a local level offered opportunities for exchange of expertise and developing a bespoke training and support programme. As a result, new schools get set up quicker, existing schools are more stable in times of transformation, and they generally work at a high standard.*

*Ideally, community schools and bilingual children are part of a support network of local umbrella groups, national language-specific associations, local mainstream schools and councils.*

### **The problem for community schools**

10 years ago, about 15 volunteer (parent)-run community schools existed in Cambridge that were barely aware of each other. None of the schools was able to buy in any kind of training as their budget would not allow for that and because they didn't have a sufficient number of people to train. Existing local training events for example on safeguarding were not accessible to volunteering working parents due to the time of day when they are delivered. Community schools not being aware of each other also meant that there were no networking events.

The existing schools were not very visible to the general public and mainly only known within their own communities and to their landlords, i.e. some mainstream schools and community centres. Advertising happened mainly by word of mouth and through a few general online directories for children's activities. This led to the situation that - where a new school was forming - they were very much on their own and had to build up expertise from scratch, when they could easily have learned from others.

Since the parents who run community schools are normally not British nationals who may well not have relevant skills and expertise, the schools can fail to fulfil statutory requirements, may serve only a subgroup of the community and are at higher risk of break down, e.g. a school closing down (or splitting into smaller schools) when no new chair can be identified.

## **The impact of Cambridge Bilingual Groups**

The foundation of Cambridge Bilingual Groups addressed the issues that arose from each community school working on their own. Managers of schools for bilingual children (including some for profit) have now the opportunity to meet once termly and discuss a wide range of organisational problems and offer solutions to each other. Occasionally a speaker with expert knowledge is invited, for example a person working in insurance. These meetings became especially important during Covid times when quick reaction to changing situations was required. Information exchange also takes place on a dedicated WhatsApp group.

Cambridge Bilingual Groups works with emerging schools, guides the founders through the issues they need to solve and buddies them up with existing schools. To help them around initial financial bottlenecks it offers start-up funding to cover insurance or DBS checks, or to attend a crucial training. As of April 2022, there are now about 30 community schools in and around Cambridge serving about 25 heritage languages and a small number of toddler groups.

Cambridge Bilingual Groups has a mission to increase the stability and standards on which the associated community schools operate. Having conversations about organisational frameworks, policies and procedures, and succession planning in both networking meetings and 1:1 is one way of ensuring this. Moreover, emerging schools which find themselves in a group of other schools that already work at this level automatically accept these standards as the normal way of conducting themselves.

To address training needs, Cambridge Bilingual Groups organises termly teacher training sessions on various topics and annual safeguarding training. Participants are charged a low fee of between £10 and £25 which is reduced or waived where a school cannot afford it. The fees are used to pay for expenses incurred and start-up funding for community schools.

Cambridge Bilingual Groups maintains a website and Facebook page for several purposes. They raise the general visibility of Cambridge Bilingual Groups and its associated community schools, they give a channel to advertise for students and teachers for individual schools, they are a repository of information on policies and other matters of interest, and they are Cambridge Bilingual Groups' vehicle for speaking for, and lobby on behalf of, bilingual children and their schools towards the general public.

Having Cambridge Bilingual Groups as a local umbrella group allows third parties to interact more easily with them, and thus benefit the local community of schools. Offers of free rooms for training events and access to speakers are just some of the benefits that Cambridge Bilingual Groups received on behalf of the schools, notably from an academic at the University of Cambridge and some of the member schools.

The biggest unresolved local issue is the case of the 'missing schools', i.e. there are many children who miss out on the opportunity of attending a community school for their language. To illustrate, there are two languages with more than 300 children registered in schools in Cambridge and Cambridgeshire and another five languages with more than 100 children. In comparison, the smallest established community schools in Cambridge are run on the basis of less than 30 children registered as speaking that language. Cambridge Bilingual Groups has not yet managed to make contacts within these communities and encourage the foundation of any 'missing' school.



## Bilingual Cambridge Schools for bilingual children and families

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|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Arabic</b><br/>Cambridge Muslim Academy<br/>cambridgemuslimacademy.com</p> <p><b>Kalamna</b><br/>kalamna.org</p> <p><b>Bulgarian</b><br/>Bulgarian School<br/>'St Ivan Rilski'<br/>ivanrilskischool.com</p> <p><b>Chinese</b><br/>Cambridge Chinese School<br/>cca.aoc.srcl.net</p> <p><b>Czech</b><br/>Czech School Cambridge CIC<br/>czechschoolcambridge@gmail.com</p> <p><b>French</b><br/>Alliance Française Cambridge<br/>alliance-cam.co.uk</p> <p><b>Les Petits Caméliciens</b><br/>lespetitscamelicien.org.uk</p> <p><b>German</b><br/>German Saturday School<br/>schule-cambridge.org.uk</p> | <p><b>Greek</b><br/>Greek School of St Athanasios<br/>cambridgegreekaschool.org.uk</p> <p><b>Hebrew</b><br/>Alumat, centre for Hebrew<br/>language and culture<br/>alumat.co.uk</p> <p><b>Hungarian</b><br/>Hungarian School Cambridge<br/>magyariskolacambridge.co.uk</p> <p><b>Japanese</b><br/>Shirasu Bunko<br/>emi@tsukuidesign.com</p> <p><b>Korean</b><br/>Cambridge Korean School<br/>cambridgekoreanschool.org</p> <p><b>Persian</b><br/>Reesha Persian School<br/>Cambridge<br/>persiancambridgeaschool@gmail.com</p> | <p><b>Polish</b><br/>Polish Saturday School<br/>pms.cambridge@gmsf.com</p> <p><b>Russian</b><br/>Cambridge Russian school<br/>camrusschool.org.uk</p> <p><b>Slovak</b><br/>Slovak School Cambridge<br/>stovenskaskolikacam@gmail.com</p> <p><b>Spanish</b><br/>Spanish Speaking Hub<br/>Cambridge<br/>info.cam.spanishcentre@gmail.com</p> <p><b>Escuelita</b><br/>escuelita.org.uk/es/</p> <p><b>Tamil</b><br/>Cambridge Tamil School<br/>camtsuk@gmail.com</p> <p><b>Turkish</b><br/>Cambridge Turkish School<br/>cambridge@turkokulu@gmail.com</p> |
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**Teachers, please apply!**

### Cambridge Bilingual Groups

- relevant training for your teachers and managers
- individual support and information for your school
- networking with other schools



<https://cambilingroups.org/>  
[cambilingroups@gmail.com](mailto:cambilingroups@gmail.com)



in partnership with  
Cambridge Research in Community Language Education



## **Alternative solutions for bilingual children**

The creation of an umbrella organisation like Cambridge Bilingual Groups is not the only way in which community schools for bilingual children can be supported. Notably, in the UK some foreign governments have set up programmes of their own to assist children of citizens and give funding, provide conferences, training sessions, teachers or a curriculum and teaching resources. In the local context, community schools supported in this way tend not to associate with Cambridge Bilingual Groups at all or partake only in the networking meetings.

Some community schools can become members of national or international associations for their language. The support offered here varies widely and some of the association may again be run by volunteers, but these associations can be very valuable where teaching resources, curricula and teacher training are concerned. A few successful commercially run schools take a similar role by scaling up their operations through franchising or 'planting' schools in other areas of the country.

Sometimes provision for bilingual children is organised from outside their community, for example by a mainstream school that runs lunch clubs for children sharing a language, or an after-school club where they have a large population of students with the same home language and possibly prepare them for exams. Like many other extra-curricular activities these clubs are at risk of being suspended when the focus of senior leaders changes or the one person driving them leaves. Furthermore, these clubs may differ from community schools in that they do not cater to the students' needs of exploring their identities and bicultural status, and limit the activity just to language instruction.

An obvious alternative to community schools are bilingual mainstream schools as realised in Wales and Northern Ireland and other places in the UK by some fee-paying schools, but they cater to only a very small group of languages and cannot be upscaled across the country.

Internationally, some other countries demonstrate that community schools and the teaching of heritage languages can be organised centrally. The government of New South Wales in Australia actively encourages the setting up of community schools for 60 different heritage languages. These community schools are attached to mainstream schools, and the government provides a framework, funding and further support.

## **Recommendations**

Within the UK context, volunteer-run community schools are a suitable solution for providing bilingual children with instruction in their heritage language and culture.

Limiting these schools' impact is the fact that usually they are run and taught by volunteers with a wide range of relevant skills and expertise, or with none. Other aggravating factors are that many of these parent volunteers are not familiar with the legislative environment and may have limited English, especially when it comes to finance and legal jargon.

Finally, lack of funding and capacity can hold back some communities in setting up their own schools.

The ideal landscape to support bilingual children in the UK with instruction in their heritage language would include

1. Local networks of community schools of different languages that provide local solutions, such as cheap and regular networking and training events, advice with finding rooms, raising visibility etc;
2. A well supported and funded national network of language specific associations that deal with the language-specific aspects of running a community school, such as teaching resources, curricula and teacher training;
3. Integration of these local networks and national associations with local councils, mainstream schools and other third sector organisations;
4. Councils or mainstream schools setting up provision for bilingual children of local communities that for one reason or another do not maintain a community school of their own.

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*Anke Friedrich is the mother of two bilingual children and one of the co-founders of the German Saturday School Cambridge. In 2012 or so Anke organised a teacher training event that, out of need, she opened to two or three other schools. Inspired by this experience, her studies in Charity and Social Enterprise Management at ARU, and a conversation with a group of Hungarian ladies who wanted to start their own school, Anke then founded Cambridge Bilingual Groups. She is very lucky in having the support of Dr Yongcan Liu, Professor at the Department for Education, University of Cambridge, and the enthusiasm and generosity of the local community schools.*

Another article from Anke '**Organising support for local community schools**' can be found in the section called 'Settings' on this webpage.