

# Transcript:

## KS2 – KS3 Transition: what we can usefully do



Length of Talk: **35 minutes approx.**

Presenter: **Emma Marsden** [slides 1-6], **David Shanks** [slides 7-13], **Rachel Hawkes** [slides 14-35]

### Slide 1: (40s)

Hello. My name is Emma Marsden. I'm the director of NCELP, and I am starting off this session on KS2-3 transition for foreign language teaching.

I start with some evidence from research about the effectiveness of teaching primary foreign languages. Please be prepared, these first few slides are rather bleak but they end with a slightly more upbeat note, emphasising the importance of trying to help primary-secondary transition from within schools themselves – from the grassroots. David Shanks and then Rachel Hawkes will continue the session, presenting some ideas from practice about how this might happen.

### Slide 2: (2m)

Does starting to learn a foreign language at primary school really help? The purpose of these first few slides is to show you what the research has told us so far in answer to this question. The aim of presenting this research is that if others (school leaders, the media, parents) make claims about primary foreign languages, then you will be better equipped to respond.

So, we often hear claims such as .... "Younger the better!" "They just pick it up!" "They learn implicitly!" "They just absorb it!"

In fact, there is sobering evidence that there are very few to no benefits of an earlier start, when measured in the longer term once pupils have done a few years at secondary school:

Those who start at secondary very often catch up with those who started earlier.

This tends to be because learning a language in school happens faster when children get older.

These problems that we are encountering here in the UK are happening across Europe, even when pupils are being taught the 'magic English'. This has been shown by research from Germany, Spain, as well as in England, where arguably the Burstall report was misinterpreted as showing no benefit.

Here is one quotation from such research: "There is no real dispute about the scientific facts, which are that primary school instruction in L2 fails to equip learners with a level of L2 proficiency which by the end of secondary schooling is superior to that of those whose instruction begins later ..."

But, here we need to pause. In fact, our knowledge about the benefits of primary languages is limited because the situation is so complex – many issues cause the lack of observed benefits. Let's look at some of the factors that influence the usefulness of primary FLs...

### **Slide 3: (1m30s)**

There are of course plenty of things secondary school teachers have no control over...

Pupils' individual differences like their memory capacity or their attentional control (Courtney et al., 2017).

Pupils' socio-economic status (Jaekel et al, 2017, [OASIS Summary](#))

Exposure to the language outside class (Puimège & Peters, 2019, [OASIS Summary](#); Peters et al. 2019, [OASIS Summary](#))

Here is a key finding about that from Peters et al's study: "In Belgium, even after eight years of [French] instruction, many learners were not familiar with the 2,000 most frequent words in French, which meant that they could do little with the language in terms of reading, listening, speaking, or writing."

That is, learners of English knew much more, after *less* time in the classroom

So, even in a country where they introduce a language early and where some parts of the country use that language to operate in, a slightly earlier start in French (at age 10) versus 13 in English did not make French any better.

Pupils seemed to perform better in English because of the out-of-school exposure.

*We also have little to no control over...*

Quality of teaching: Primary teachers' training and their language proficiency

Amount of teaching: we know that 60 mins is better than less time but we don't really know whether primary schools are able to implement that.

So, what kinds of amounts and quality of teaching is going on generally?

#### **Slide 4: (40s)**

Let's take a look at some key statistics. These statistics, taken from the Language Trends Survey, show that languages at primary schools are happening, but it is piecemeal.

It is mainly French.

The amount and regularity of the lessons are not really known and often a minimal amount of time is being allocated to it.

And it is not being done by specialist language teachers.

#### **Slide 5: (2m)**

So far, what we have seen from research is rather bleak – some sobering evidence suggesting mixed, limited or no benefits of primary FLs.

But evidence from a recent, very large study in Germany (conducted by Baumert and colleagues) suggests it is important to get **transition** right for the benefits of primary MFLs to be seen.

As with the studies we have seen so far, in this study the longer-term benefits of starting language learning at primary school were not clear. Straight after primary school, those who had learned English had an advantage - they scored better on listening and reading proficiency tests. However, the benefits did not seem to last long and the older learners learnt at a faster rate, so quickly made up for the earlier start.

Why might this be? The researchers examined many factors that might affect whether primary languages are effective: the age at which the instruction began, the amount of exposure to instruction and to the language outside

school, whether the children were bilingual, the socio-economic status of the children, the kind of school they went to.

They examined whether schools at which ALL pupils arrived with roughly the same amount of English were adapting well. They found that even in these schools were not yet adapting very well to this situation. So, even though pupils had an advantage straight after primary school, the school textbooks, the curriculum and pedagogy at secondary school were not building on the knowledge that these pupils brought.

These researchers argued that a lack of adaptivity at secondary school was the most likely cause of no long-term benefit

So, how is transition going, broadly speaking, in the UK and elsewhere?

### **Slide 6: (1m8s)**

A range of reports and reviews have found that transition is a real challenge. These are some of the key challenges:

1. secondary teachers systematically underestimating the knowledge of new students;
2. mutual lack of acceptance of differences in teaching methods between the sectors;
3. infrastructure (timetabling, grouping, exchange of performance data) not enabling secondary teachers to build on knowledge brought from primary schools;
4. content that is to be learnt not being aligned between primary and secondary schools

To address this last point, there are of course different ways in which content might align between primary and secondary school to help transition ...

David Shanks is now going to briefly mention some ways in which we might do this.

### **Slide 7 (1m13s):**

Hello, everyone. This is David Shanks speaking, and I'm a subject specialist for NCELP and a French teacher in London. Thanks to Emma Marsden for some of the research background in primary languages and for outlining some of

the main challenges faced. I'm now going to look at addressing these problems from the grass roots level. Thinking first of all of the longer term, perhaps the long-term benefits of primary MFL might be felt if firstly we had a better idea of where we were going, and if there were clear goalposts for the end of primary. These could take the form of, for example, an agreed vocabulary list of three to four hundred words that could be informed by frequency of occurrence data, and an agreed programme of basic phonics and grammar. That any such lists or programmes be defined or agreed upon is a powerful idea. This could really help support transition through a consistency of provision, and allow for a much better shared understanding of what students are learning from both primary and secondary colleagues. Secondly, the benefits of primary MFL might be felt if transition arrangements built on that knowledge gained in primary. And finally, if primary MFL involved some explicit language analysis that could help students with learning other languages at secondary, particularly should they change language or pick up a new one at the point of transition.

### **Slide 8 (1m16s):**

Now let's consider a few examples of content alignment at transition and ask ourselves 'Can we reduce the drop in motivation that that happens and that has been observed in research studies during Year 7 (Courtney 2017, [OASIS summary](#); Graham et al., 2016 [OASIS summary](#)), perhaps something that you're familiar with from your own experience and context.

Option one could be to build on knowledge systematically, and indeed that's the recommendation of the MFL Pedagogy Review and the Research into Primary Languages (RiPL) white paper which we'll come to on the next slide. Compared to primary, in Year 7 there's an increased focus on reading and writing, and it could be this that might be leading to some of the demotivation that's been observed; if students don't have good understanding of sound-symbol correspondences, then this could obviously lead to some problems. We know that phonics is key to reading and writing so if phonics were part of primary, then this increased focus on literacy and reading and writing might be fine.

Another option would be to make things different, and perhaps say let's keep the primary and secondary content different but do it in planned ways. We

can't necessarily control everything that goes on at primary, and so as long as Year 7 isn't too similar to primary then motivation might not suffer, and any learning that has gone on might be extended as opposed to being repeated.

#### **Slide 9 (1m44s):**

RiPL stands for Research in Primary Languages and that is a group of primary language stakeholders, who in 2019 published a white paper on primary languages policy in England. You have a link to the full white paper at the bottom of the slide () and also the website [www.ripl.uk](http://www.ripl.uk) . It has a lot of useful information for primary languages and for transition as well.

Recommendation number four in terms of a baseline minimum point of departure for transition arrangements, they said that in the short term, at the very least, primary schools should provide receiving secondary schools with a clear statement of what pupils in the class have been taught and what pupils should know and be able to do at the point of transfer from KS2 to KS3.

#### **Slide 10 (26s):**

These are the most recent findings about current transition practice in England, based upon the Language Trends Survey 2019. We can see clearly than nationally we're somewhat off the minimum recommendation of the RiPL white paper, and of note in the first bullet point is that since 2014 we're seeing a drop in the proportion of primary and secondary schools having contact with one another.

#### **Slide 11 (1m32s):**

I'll just give you a quick moment now to read the two quotes from the Language Trends Survey 2019, which very aptly describe the current problem from the perspective of primary and secondary. [pause] So, this shows us that some primary school teaching is very strong, but that provision across a whole secondary school intake is likely to be very uneven, and secondary schools can't see how they can cater for such a range of knowledge so they end up starting from the beginning. A very extreme example of this is where a school might even deliberately choose a completely different language from that that is taught in their primary schools. If you go back four years to 2015, the Language Trends Survey, the messages were uncannily similar and I can quote a primary school teacher who said: "We have taught French for years

– teaching has improved. We hope this will ensure that pupils move on in high school; previous experience has shown that they “mark time” for the first year.” And from a secondary teacher: “The reliability of good teaching at Key Stage 2 is poor – students come here with huge variations in knowledge. Even those who have studied French for three years cannot spell the initial words of *je m’appelle, j’ai dix ans*. We assume zero knowledge and differentiate in class.” Go back even further, to 2008, to an article entitled “*Moving on: the challenges for foreign language learning on transition from primary to secondary school,*” and the messages are the same again.

### **Slide 12 (46s):**

So now, depending on how you are accessing this training, I invite you to have some group discussion or some individual reflection time and with the table on the left you’ve got the sorts of things that the Language Trends Survey asked about in 2016-17 and again in 2018. You’ll see that it’s all about transition activities and interaction between primary and secondary school language teachers. The first of four questions I invite you to reflect upon: “Which (if any) of these take place with your feeders and/or those of schools you know”; “Which of those have or would have the greatest impact, in your view?; “Which of these are or would be the easiest to set up and maintain?”, an important one, and finally, “are there any other things you already do with your own feeder schools?”

### **Slide 13 (59s):**

This figure highlights very starkly the gulf in perceptions between primary and secondary school teachers, when considering student motivation, student skills for language learning, and whether or not they achieved the expected level of competence by the end of Key Stage 2. We could attribute this gap in part to the variety in primary schools that many secondaries have, and also to the forgetting that’s going to take place over a very long summer holiday. Perhaps though there’s a case for suggesting that in secondary we might underestimate student knowledge because it’s not immediately apparent, when we first meet the students in their first lesson. We have to remember the impact that being in a brand new school, in a class with largely unknown peers is going to have on students. It’s worth thinking about the sorts of things we might do our end in secondary in order to get a better overall picture of what students do know already, and on that note I’ll pass over to Rachel



Hawkes, who's going to go through lots of quick wins for KS2 to KS3 transition, thank you.

**Slide 14 (1m28s):**

So, acknowledging all the issues around transition, as well the compelling need to try to get it as right as we can, this seems like a good moment to identify some possible quick wins that teachers could consider for their own contexts.

The first one is, as David mentioned earlier, the option to make the Y7 curriculum distinct from anything that has gone before, and one way to do that is to teach the NCELP SOW, which backgrounds topics to allow a more sustained focus on the teaching of essential phonics, vocabulary and grammar. Students won't be able to identify their learning in terms of familiar topics, so there is far less chance that they will be demotivated by a sense of revisiting old ground. An added advantage is that the gap between students with and without prior knowledge will be much less apparent in the lessons.

Clearly this is a temporary solution for now, that recognises that inter-school transition arrangements are not universally where we ideally want them to be. When there is perhaps a more detailed curriculum for KS2 language teaching, then a more systematic dovetailing of the primary and secondary language curricula can happen.

**Slide 15 (40s):**

Second, we would hope receiving schools can get some useful information on transition from sending schools, whether it's basic – language taught, minutes per week, a rudimentary list of topics, or whether it's some work that we might gather in from students that is a summative piece showing what they were capable of at the end of the summer term of Y6.

**Slide 16-24 (5m):**

We might then be able to triangulate that information by setting our own in-school baseline test of some kind. There are some options out there that are worth considering. The Language Magician, which takes around 5 minutes, is done on computers and could be done on an intake day, a



school-created test, there might be another type of language aptitude test (anyone remember the Swedish test) and then there's the primary bee.

So, an example of a language analytic ability test, would present students with some examples of a given language and ask them to notice the patterns and extrapolate from them to produce other examples of that language. These sorts of questions are very similar to the sorts of questions that are available on the UKLO (Linguistics Olympiad) website.

This particular example here has been used with students and found to be a good reliable test that was positively correlated with the learning of French grammar. So students who did well on this test although scored very well on a test of French verb endings, for example.

### The Primary Bee

The Primary Bee is not like the spelling bee. Instead of translating and then spelling out words in the foreign language alphabet, students translate the words orally into the foreign language, and are credited for a) knowing the word and b) pronouncing it accurately.

There is a set list of high-frequency words: 120 words in total. This list alone could form the basis of a shared expectation of the knowledge, or part of the knowledge, that primary students have on transfer.

The list includes many high-frequency words (e.g., some numbers, some colours, days of the week, question words and a number of common verbs to help early learners to acquire a robust knowledge of verb vocabulary. These most common verbs are included in the infinitive and 3rd person singular forms; these two verb forms have been shown to provide a very useful linguistic core that can subsequently be further developed.

### **Slide 25 (36s):**

Further quick wins, looking now at when the teaching starts in Y7, could include giving really careful thought to strategic seating plans in year 7, based on what is known about students 'prior learning experiences. In addition, we might plan, particularly in the Autumn Term, as we get to know our students, for quite a few of our learning tasks to be as open-ended as possible, designed to ask questions and elicit prior knowledge.

### **Slide 26 (1m):**

Let's have a quick look at thoughts about seating plans.

### **Slide 27 (1m44s):**

And let's have one idea for an open-ended task for early in Y7. This is adapted from a bank of transition resources available free on the Institut Francais website, called Multicolore.

So things we could do with this to tease out what students may / may not know.

First – a read aloud to find out what they know / remember about how to read French aloud and pronounce it accurately

Do they know not to pronounce the final consonants, for example?

Second – elicit English translations to check that students notice the difference between 'je suis' and 'j'ai' and are secure with those meanings.

Third – check that students are aware of the two genders and can categorise the nouns confidently into masculine and feminine

Fourth – see if students can offer further nouns in these same semantic fields e.g more people, animals etc..

Fifth – see if students can add adjectives to describe some of the nouns (showing their awareness of adjectival agreement)

### **Slide 28 (55s):**

Going back to primary schools, some quick wins there might be:

- Y6 induction lessons
- Language Leaders (e.g., Y9 students teach lessons in primary)
- Primary Bee?
- Send the primary school a list of 100 high frequency words you'd like pupils to know on arrival in year 7 at secondary.

- Thirty high frequency nouns
- Fifteen high frequency and engaging verbs
- Choose one short (je?) and infinitive (mange, manger)
- Key personal pronouns
- Ten (regular) high frequency adjectives
- A few adverbs
- A few question words
- A few interaction words (oui, non, merci, bonjour)

### **Slide 29 (1m):**

Finally, where it's perhaps proved tricky to get conversations started and/or sustained between primary and secondary schools, it might be worth remembering that the new Ofsted framework might be a conversation starter (Now that's not something I expected to hear myself say, ever!)

There are some clear requirements about curricula that compel primary schools to offer a broad, ambitious curriculum, and that includes primary languages.

So conversations about the time allocation, the model for delivery (length and frequency of lessons), the content (including phonics, and high-frequency vocabulary), and some agreement about the number of words that it's reasonable to expect to teach and more important learners to remember by the end of KS2, all of these conversations are beginning to happen now, and with a bit more urgency, and that's surely a very good thing.

### **Slide 30 (1m):**

Within this new Ofsted framework, primary teachers are under the spotlight as subject experts, to a much greater extent than previously. This is a very big ask, particularly in smaller primary schools, where some teachers have to have more than one subject specialism. This is where secondary colleagues may be able to be of some help, offering to meet to give some advice on documentation, SOW planning, coverage of the NC Programmes of Study

etc.. In this there are sources of information, freely available, that might be of use to primary colleagues.

**Slide 31 (18s):**

The primary language handbook is one such document.

**Slide 31 (1m16s):**

This slide gives a useful breakdown of the KS2 PoS in a very clear format.

**Slide 32 (13s):**

Here is also a link to a CPD presentation from the Northern Primary Language Show about vocabulary in primary language learning.

**Slide 33 (23s):**

And here a keynote presentation given by the Lead HMI for languages Michael Wardle, all about primary languages.

Any or all of these might be helpful to inform discussions primary and secondary colleagues could have, together.

**Slide 34 (14s):**

This is probably a useful moment to reflect and consider if there are one or two points for action that you could take back to others in your department at secondary or in your school, if you are a primary colleague, which you think might improve transition in your context.

**Slide 35 (23s):**

Consider one thing you could do within your school as a department and one thing you could do jointly with primaries.

