



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for
Curriculum and Assessment

**Frequently asked questions
about the introduction of
*Modern Foreign Languages to
the Primary Language
Curriculum (PLC)***

This set of questions and answers has been developed about the future of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) in the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum. The FAQs will be updated and reviewed regularly to respond to further questions.

Why is MFL being added to the redeveloped Primary Curriculum?

The addition of MFL to the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum stemmed from [Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026](#). This strategy outlined that consideration was to be given to the inclusion of foreign languages at primary level.

The NCCA commissioned a background research paper examining the inclusion of MFLs in primary settings in other jurisdictions and examples of MFL practice in Ireland. [Background paper - Integrating modern foreign languages in a redeveloped primary curriculum | NCCA](#)

Following a period of consultation by NCCA on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* from 2020-2022, MFL was included in the *Primary Curriculum Framework* (Department of Education, 2023). The findings from this consultation are contained in the [Report on the consultation on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework](#).

What does the [Primary Curriculum Framework](#) say about MFL in the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum?

The framework states that from 3rd Class onwards, MFL will be added to the Language area of the curriculum, alongside English and Irish. The framework “*supports the introduction of modern foreign languages in Stages 3 and 4, incrementally building on children’s existing knowledge and awareness of language and progressing from a language awareness model to a competency model in Stage 4*” (Department of Education, 2023, p. 17).

Language Awareness involves an exploration of language through which children become more aware of their own language knowledge and explore connections with other languages. This exploration includes comparing and contrasting all languages in their repertoire and environment, developing a deeper awareness of how languages work and drawing their attention to how they learn languages. The framework outlines that in Stage 3 (3rd and 4th Classes), children will build on their knowledge and awareness of other languages and gradually progress to being able to speak and understand a third language (L3) in Stage 4 (5th and 6th Classes).

What will MFL learning and teaching be like in Stage 3 (3rd and 4th Classes)?

- *Building an awareness of languages and cultures*

MFL in Stage 3 will build on the language awareness which is woven through the Learning Outcomes in the *Primary Language Curriculum (PLC)*. The learning at this stage will explore and build on children's existing knowledge, experience and awareness of languages, and celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity within and beyond the school.

The focus on language awareness emphasises the importance of a holistic view of children's language development including English, Irish, MFL and home languages and develops children's overall knowledge of languages. It aims to consolidate prior learning about languages by tapping into children's implicit knowledge of their own language(s) and languages within and beyond the classroom. Through drawing children's attention to what they already know about languages and language learning, their knowledge of language becomes more explicit.

The PLC also places a strong emphasis on the development of intercultural awareness through language learning, where children will learn about, and come to appreciate, cultures that are different to their own. This approach:

- draws on and explores children's existing knowledge, experience and awareness of languages,
- celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity within and beyond the school.

What will MFL learning and teaching be like in Stage 4 (5th and 6th Classes)?

- *Building an awareness of languages and cultures*
- *Communicative Competence in the L3*

MFL in Stage 4 will continue to build children's awareness of languages and cultures. It will also include language competency in an L3. With this approach:

- Children continue to build their awareness of languages and cultures to now include the L3 and culture(s) associated with that language.
- Children learn to communicate in a third language (L3) at a basic level for the purpose of communication.

What are the advantages of learning a MFL?

Through building an awareness of languages and cultures, and learning a L3, children will further develop their skills as language learners and their cognitive functioning. They could also be motivated to learn an additional language in post-primary school. The introduction of MFL aims to further enable primary and special schools to promote an inclusive culture that celebrates the linguistic and cultural diversity of their pupils, staff and community.

Learning a L3, will enhance knowledge and skills already gained through learning English and Irish. Children will learn to compare and contrast languages of the classroom, school and community to the mutual benefit of all of their languages.

Advantages associated with learning languages have been shown to assist with logical thinking, problem solving and creativity, among others. Developing a greater awareness of language is also associated with an increased awareness of culture. Through the exploration of language, children are given greater opportunities to explore and be exposed to other cultures and begin to understand and navigate cultural diversity in society.

Who will teach MFL in Stages 3 and 4?

At Stage 3, the classroom teacher will continue with the development of language awareness and intercultural awareness, through the language of the school (English or Irish) and drawing on all languages of the classroom and school.

The Department of Education will provide more specific advice on enactment for Stage 4 in due course.

How much time will be allocated to learning and teaching MFL in Stages 3 and 4?

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines a suggested time allocation of one hour per week for learning and teaching MFL in Stages 3 and 4. This time can be integrated across other

curriculum areas and subjects as well as across the school week. Occasionally, a discrete block of time may be useful to focus on specific aspects of learning.

Stage 3	MFL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building an awareness of languages and cultures 	1 hour/week
Stage 4	MFL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Building an awareness of languages and cultures ▪ Communicative competence in the L3 	1 hour/week

At Stage 3, time for the element *Building an awareness of languages and cultures* is used to consolidate children’s existing knowledge of English, Irish, and other languages, as well as explore their own and other cultures. Learning at this stage builds the skills and foundations required for children to activate their existing knowledge of languages and cultures and apply it to further language learning in the L3 at Stage 4 (alongside English, Irish and other languages).

At Stage 4, the time allocated for MFL is divided across the element *Building an awareness of languages and cultures* and learning the new language—the school’s L3.

Has MFL ever been part of the primary curriculum before?

Teachers in Ireland have a great wealth of experience in language pedagogy, through their interaction with and experience of English, Irish and other languages.

Some schools may have participated in the *Say Yes to Languages Module*, which has facilitated many schools in including MFL for an 8-week term since 2021.

Some schools may have participated in the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI) during the period spanning 1998-2012.

This will be the first time that MFL has officially formed part of the Primary School curriculum, rather than being piloted. Going forward, all schools will be able to benefit from the inclusion of MFL and the additional exploration of language and culture.

What is the timeline for the inclusion of MFL in the redeveloped Primary School Curriculum?

The *Primary Curriculum Framework* will guide the development of the specifications for each of the five curriculum areas, including Language. The NCCA has established Development Groups for each curriculum area and a draft specification will be available for public consultation in the first half of 2024. The NCCA envisages the completion of the development of all curriculum area specifications in 2025. A timeline for schools' work in enacting the redeveloped curriculum will be set out by the Department of Education. You can find out more about the Language Development Group at the following link:

[Primary Language Development Group | NCCA](#)

Is the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) being updated to include MFL at Stages 3 and 4?

MFL will be incorporated into the Primary Language Curriculum (PLC).

New Learning Outcomes specific to MFL will be added for Stage 3 (Building awareness of languages and cultures) and Stage 4 (Building an awareness of languages and cultures, and communicative competence in the L3). Sections 1 to 6 of the PLC / CTB will also be updated to reflect the introduction of MFL.

Will MFL be taught in Special Schools?

The redeveloped curriculum is for all children in all primary and special schools. The curriculum also supports teachers to make decisions on the content, design and pace of learning experiences based on their knowledge of the children and their individual needs, interests and abilities. MFL will be introduced for Stages 3 and 4 (3rd-6th classes) in the redeveloped curriculum.

How will schools select the L3?

The Department of Education will provide guidance in this regard.

What prior NCCA research has been conducted on the inclusion of MFL in the Primary School Curriculum?

Prior NCCA work examining MFL in the Primary School Curriculum includes:

- [Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment Background paper - Integrating modern foreign languages in a redeveloped primary curriculum \(2019\)](#)
- [Modern Languages in the Primary School Curriculum: Feasibility and Futures \(2008\)](#)
- Report on the feasibility of Modern Languages in the Primary School Curriculum (2005)
- [Modern Languages in Primary Schools: Teacher Guidelines \(2001\)](#)
- [Pilot project on modern languages in the primary school: Draft Curriculum Guidelines \(1999\)](#)