

Dr Allan speaking note

Statement to Language Leaders Summit 17 October 2014

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1. Introduction – why languages matter

In Scotland we have our own, distinct education system. We have developed our language policy to fit with our ambition, which is to transform Scottish education from good to great. There are common themes between what we are doing in Scotland and what the All Party Group Manifesto for Languages seeks to achieve. I welcome the opportunity to share with you the Scottish languages policy, which we have begun to deliver.

In its opening line, the Manifesto acknowledges that there is as much of a disadvantage in speaking only English as there is in speaking no English.

No one questions the importance of children learning maths and science at primary school. And nor should they question that modern languages are equally important. The learning of languages needs to become the new norm, it needs to become something we expect our young learners to do.

An ability and willingness to pick up languages has been shown to be hugely beneficial to young people's learning, as well as in their preparation for life and work. It is therefore critical that we equip our young people with language skills which will help them compete in the globalised world we now live in.

There is considerable evidence, as this group will no doubt be aware of, that young children learn languages more easily than older learners.

That is why Scottish Government is determined to be ambitious. We have pledged to introduce a norm for language learning in schools, based on the European 1+2 model.

2. What is 1+2?

In recent years language learning at secondary has declined both in Scotland and the rest of the UK. Our 1+2 strategy is designed to reverse that trend. The aim is to change attitudes to learning languages and to give all our young people language skills.

Children will begin learning a second language on entry to primary school, around the age of 5. Then, at around the age of 9, in Primary 5, children will begin to learn a further language. By the time they reach secondary school our pupils will have developed skills and confidence in two further languages in addition to their own language. We expect that learning of the second language will continue until the end of their third year of secondary education. In addition to this, we are encouraging schools to offer opportunities for children to be able to continue their learning beyond this to national qualification level.

This is a policy of depth and breadth, one which we are very proud of. We are also proud that it aligns with the policies of the wider EU and that it has attracted cross party support within the Scottish Government.

3. Funding

It is a long term policy and is one which we are committed to delivering. Therefore to date we have provided local authorities with a total of £4 million last year and a further £5 million funding in the current year to enable them to begin to implement their plans. We are well aware that to ensure implementation of this policy by 2020, we will have to build funding resources into budget planning going forward.

4. Collaboration

Collaborative working is crucial to the success of this policy. The network is extensive and includes teachers, local authorities, employers, parents/carers and, further and higher education.

The 1+2 model needs to complement and build on existing good work. There is a lot of good practice in language learning and teaching in schools to be shared.

There is a need to develop the nation's language capability and increase the number of language learners taking languages beyond their third year of secondary school.

However, it is not all about achieving linguistic perfection or qualification, it's more about global communication skills and intercultural understanding. And crucially about developing a sense that learning language is advisable and normal.

There are of course links to our China plan, in which we pledge to double the number of school students attaining recognised qualifications in Chinese language. It is very much a part of the work we are doing in building our language capacity

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Scottish government sees modern languages as key to achieving the overall purpose of creating a more successful Scotland with opportunities for all to flourish through increasing sustainable growth.

It is an ambitious commitment which sends a strong signal that we are determined that all our young people should have the same advantages as their multi lingual peers.

But it's a commitment that is eminently possible, if we work together, for us to achieve.

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