

STATES OF JERSEY



DELIVERY OF THREE BILINGUAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Lodged au Greffe on 19th July 2024
by Deputy Sir P.M. Bailhache of St. Clement
Earliest date for debate: 10th September 2024

STATES GREFFE

PROPOSITION

THE STATES are asked to decide whether they are of opinion –

to request the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning to take the necessary steps to convert, by the beginning of the academic year 2025-2026, a minimum of three primary schools into English-French bilingual schools, with a progressively phased introduction of bilingual tuition in these schools to begin with reception classes in 2025.

DEPUTY SIR P.M. BAILHACHE OF ST. CLEMENT

REPORT

Introduction

1. The establishment of bilingual French/English primary schools has been under consideration since April 2013 when officials of the Ministry for External Relations and the Education department began discussing the project at the request of their Ministers. A report was eventually taken by the Department of Education to the then Council of Ministers in the summer of 2016 seeking a steer on a project to establish “a French bilingual provision”. The Council of Ministers expressed broad support for the project, but the view expressed by a group of three headteachers was that the establishment of such a school did not provide a sufficiently wide focus for the development of languages across the entire school cohort. Notwithstanding the support of the Council of Ministers, the project did not make progress before the elections in 2018.
2. The report to the Council of Ministers identified four areas where benefits would accrue from the establishment of bilingual primary schools, and those benefits remain as valid today as they were in 2016. They are (1) the positive educational advantages of bilingualism; (2) the economic benefits both to individuals and to Jersey of an increasingly bilingual workforce; (3) the cultural and constitutional benefits of building upon the Island’s linguistic heritage; and (4) the diplomatic and political advantages of enabling closer working relationships with our nearest geographical neighbour just as our anglophone heritage facilitates close relationships with the United Kingdom.¹

Educational advantages of bilingualism

3. Considerable research internationally has taken place around the benefits of speaking two or more languages. Some research has been driven by political factors – for example, the large Hispanic population of the United States, and the significant Francophone minority in Canada. Other research has stemmed from an academic interest in the advantages enjoyed by children from dual language families. Studies have shown that bilingual programmes are of benefit to all children, and not just to high academic performers. A paper presented by a distinguished academic in July 2024 at an APF conference in Canada attended by Deputies Kovacs and Miles showed that bilingual education was of benefit even to children with special needs.
4. A number of studies have shown that a second-language immersion education has a positive effect on cognitive development in children. One Belgian study in 2012² compared the performance of 53 children enrolled in English immersion classes with 53 children enrolled in French monolingual classes. The two groups were matched after 3 years at age 8. A battery of tasks was administered to assess attentional and executive skills; the immersion group’s reaction times were significantly faster than those of the monolingual group. The results showed that after only three years a second-language immersion school experience produced cognitive benefits associated with early bilingualism.

¹ A Final draft of this report is available to view on request to Deputy Bailhache

² [Cognitive advantage in children enrolled in a second-language immersion elementary school program for three years](#) (2012)

5. A Canadian study in 2007³ on French as a second language education in Canada showed that French immersion students enjoyed significant linguistic, academic and cognitive benefits. The review demonstrated that “French immersion programs enable students to develop high levels of proficiency in French and English, at no cost to their academic success.” Many other pieces of academic research report the same conclusions.⁴
6. The main point to take from the broad base of academic research is a consensus that teaching and learning in two or more languages has many benefits beyond language acquisition alone. There is evidence that it slows down the advance of dementia in older people. Bilingualism has been shown to enhance performance in mathematics and the study of music, for example. A paper from Jiangxi University in China in 2009 stated that “Bilingual education ... which has long been neglected, will play an important part in the social and economic development in China”.⁵
7. Another benefit of being bilingual is that additional languages can be mastered more easily than by monolinguals. Language skills reinforce each other.⁶ We have anecdotal evidence of this truth from the ability of many from Jersey’s Portuguese community who, fluent already in English and Portuguese, find the study of *Jèrriais* much easier.

Economic benefits

8. Enhanced language skills among the working population would be a key employability and economic asset to Jersey. Improved communication in French will enable the development of additional business opportunities with Jersey’s nearest geographical neighbour, and further afield. French is the third most spoken language in the world; there are 25 francophone countries in Africa alone. As the Island seeks to develop growth opportunities across the globe, the creation of bilingual schools can be seen as a long-term investment in the skills base of Jersey’s population.
9. One of the inhibitions to the development of trade with France is the perception that doing business in a foreign language is difficult. The gradual removal of that inhibition by building up a cohort of francophone individuals in the Island could be economically of great importance in the middle and longer term. The economic advantages to Jersey are of course reflected in the advantages accruing to individuals. In the hospitality industry and in commerce more

³ [Linguistic, Academic, and Cognitive Benefits of French Immersion | The Canadian Modern Language Review \(utpjournals.press\)](https://utpjournals.press)

⁴ [Cognitive advantages of immersion education after 1 year: Effects of amount of exposure - ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com) (2017); [Cognitive Advantage in Children Enrolled in a Second-Language Immersion Elementary School Program for One Year - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) (2019); [Early bilingual immersion school program and cognitive development in French-speaking children: Effect of the second language learned \(English vs. Dutch\) and exposition duration \(2 vs. 5 years\) - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/) (2021)

⁵ “On the economic approach to bilingual education in China”, International Education Studies (November 2009) www.ccsenet.org/journal.html

⁶ www.eb.org/bilingual-programs/why-choose-bilingualism

generally, the ability to converse with visitors from France in their own language would be of benefit to numerous individuals working in those sectors.

Cultural benefits

10. Although English is the dominant language in everyday life in Jersey today, it was not so long ago that the majority of educated people were able to speak and write in both English and French. Until 1945, most Laws and regulations adopted by the States Assembly were written in French. French was the language of the courts until the inter-war years. It was the mass of Anglophone immigration which happened after the Liberation from occupation that finally tipped the balance and converted the Island into a predominantly English-speaking community. Yet, even now, French remains one of the Island's official languages, albeit that in the Assembly the use of French is now generally confined to opening prayers, roll-call and the casting of votes. The French language is still, however, a vitally important part of our culture and heritage. Place names, street names, and family names, and their origins and history, can only be understood through a knowledge of French.
11. Our history is intimately entwined with the history of Normandy (and, to an extent, Brittany) and France. In certain areas of our law, we still derive inspiration and precedent from the customary law of Normandy. The Bishop of Coutances was our bishop until the middle of the 16th century but his influence endured long after the formal attachment of the Island to the diocese of Winchester. Even today, the parish churches are replete with memorials and further evidence not only of our historic association with Normandy but also of the linguistic connection with France. Our native language, *Jèrriais*, is understood by those who speak Norman-French.
12. It is disappointing that few Jersey people can today speak French with any degree of fluency or understand the language of our nearest neighbour. As levels of fluency decrease among the population, Jersey is in danger of losing a cornerstone of its cultural being. If we are to retain French as an official language of our Island and a meaningful part of our heritage, rather than an empty form, we need to do much more to encourage the learning of the language. Bilingual primary schools can ignite that process and lay the foundations for a reconnection with our linguistic heritage.

Diplomatic and constitutional benefits

13. Discussions between 2014 and 2017 with French ambassadors, French government ministers and regional representatives in Normandy demonstrated considerable interest, if not excitement, at the prospect of French bilingual schools taking root in an anglophone context in the British Isles. French citizens are notoriously passionate about their language and culture. It is unsurprising, therefore, that representatives of the French government at many levels have expressed enthusiasm for the project and a willingness to support it. There is little doubt that it would have a very positive effect upon the French government's perception of Jersey. Relations with France are second only to relations with the UK in terms of importance from a diplomatic and international perspective.

14. The preamble to the Common Policy for External Relations adopted in 2022 notes “Jersey’s deep historic, cultural and familial connections and economic links with Normandy and Brittany, and with France as a whole”. The Council of Ministers placed “particular priority” on developing and enhancing relations with France, stating that this “engagement will recognise the many common interests at both regional and national level, including the economy, trade, and cooperation in support of Jersey’s children and young people.” Bilingual schools will play a significant part in supporting young people to engage with France.

Language policies

15. Much political water has passed under the bridge since 2016. The case for bilingual French primary schools must now be viewed against the background of important educational policies adopted by CYPES in the last few years. The first is the Jersey Premium Policy issued in 2017. It was introduced to help children to get the best out of education despite their socio-economic background or other barriers to learning. Significant funds have been made available, allocated on a per pupil basis, to enable schools to provide additional support to such pupils. One of the specific challenges is that faced by children whose first language is not English. In some schools, such children form a large proportion of the student cohort. The Jersey Premium has helped to facilitate several different programmes designed to meet the challenges of being taught in an unfamiliar language.
16. The second policy is the Language Policy for Jersey Education issued in 2022 after work by the Language Policy Working Group. This was focussed upon multilingual learners, defined as students with a language or languages other than English in their repertoire. In some schools, such as Plat Douet School, such multilingual learners make up approximately 50% of the school population. The vision expressed in that policy is the achievement of high levels of attainment in English, as well as the development of proficiency in multiple other languages and broad cultural understandings. The policy seeks to “raise awareness of the benefits of cultural and linguistic diversity and champion its contribution to life in Jersey”. It reminds us that “before English became the language of instruction in 1912, multilingualism was commonplace, with Jèrriais, French and English prevalent in the Island.”
17. The third relevant policy is the Jèrriais Language Strategy also launched in 2022 and building upon the Jèrriais Plan 2017-19. The Policy underlines that Jèrriais “is a part of our cultural identity as a small Island nation and has the ability to bring us together.” It is supplementary to the Language Policy described in paragraph 13 above. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence that multilingual children, particularly those of Portuguese, Polish and Romanian heritage, already make a disproportionate contribution to the cohort of Jèrriais learners. The fact that they already speak two languages makes it much easier for them to absorb a third. Academic research suggests, in fact, that many languages can be readily absorbed by those who have a bilingual heritage or education.

Establishing bilingual schools in Jersey

18. Advice from bilingual French schools in London, visited during the research carried out in 2013-16, was that a conversion to a bilingual school would best be achieved gradually and progressively, beginning with the Reception class. If, say, bilingual schools were opened in September 2025, bilingual tuition would be delivered in that academic year only to pupils in the Reception class. In the following year, bilingual tuition would be delivered again to the Reception year, but also to Year 1 pupils. It would therefore take 6 years for the process of conversion to be completed. There are several advantages to such a process. First, the number of French native teachers needed in the first years is very small. Secondly, experience of how best to manage bilingual teaching is built up slowly and cautiously. Thirdly, the financial implications of establishing such schools are relatively modest and can be accommodated within existing budgets.
19. The proposition states that a minimum of three bilingual schools should be established. This needs to be set in context. There are 25 primary schools in Jersey, and an additional 7 private primary schools. Establishing only three bilingual schools is a modest ambition. A survey of parents was undertaken by the Department in 2016 which showed that at least 60% of those surveyed would wish to send their children to a French bilingual school if that option were available. There is no reason to believe that such parental enthusiasm has diminished. Indeed, why would parents not seek the opportunity relatively effortlessly of giving their children these language skills which would be of great advantage in adult life? If this demand is sustained, it may be anticipated that more bilingual schools can be established in the future.
20. It should be acknowledged that there are challenges to be overcome. Training of staff should be enhanced, and encouragement should be given to achieve the *Brevet de Capacité*, [Diploma of Competence] (with a proper allowance paid to such teachers). Finding the requisite staff might pose problems, although the French authorities, including the *Alliance Française de Jersey*, have offered assistance. An adaptation of the catchment basis for attendance at the bilingual schools would be necessary to select only students whose parents wished for bilingual education. From the viewpoint of headteachers, some acknowledgement of achievement in French should be added to children's assessments at the end of the academic year. Perhaps a financial allowance to compensate for the additional responsibility should also be given. If the will is there, none of these challenges poses an insuperable problem.

Conclusion

21. The establishment of bilingual schools should be firmly anchored in a broader policy for the teaching of French and other languages within the curriculum. Bilingual schools can provide centres of excellence radiating linguistic skills outwards and enhancing the teaching of languages throughout the Island's primary schools. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, it must follow that urgent consideration should be given to the teaching of languages at secondary level. It is disappointing that, despite French being part of the curriculum for primary schools at Key stage 2 and beyond, unlike the situation in the United Kingdom, the achievements of students at GCSE and A level are

no better than their counterparts in the UK. All the efforts devoted to the teaching of French at primary level add nothing to the results at secondary level.

22. The establishment of French bilingual schools can be seen as the natural culmination of the considerable advances in language tuition at the primary level which have been made by the Department of Education under successive Ministers and Assistant Ministers in the last 10 years. An acknowledgement of the multilingualism already embedded in our community, and the cultural benefits derived from it, is a part of that process. Yet an understanding of the importance of a greater proficiency in the French language has not firmly taken root. French is part of our heritage, culture and traditions. It is the foundation upon which the expansion of *Jèrriais* can be built. It is the language of our nearest neighbour. To enhance the ability of our population to speak French fluently would also create a commercial advantage for our entrepreneurs and business people. For more than a thousand years we have flourished between the rival powers of England and France. Our bilingual heritage contributed greatly to that success. In the last 50 years we have become an essentially anglophone society. For all the above reasons, it is time to reverse that trend. Bilingualism is not a rare phenomenon. In fact, more than half the people on earth speak two or more languages. Monolinguals are in the minority. To speak more than one language fluently is good for the development of children's brains. Evidence from our own schools shows that multi-lingual learners generally perform at least as well if not better than their monolingual peers. To create bilingual primary schools may be a bold but is also a practical and sensible step towards stimulating Jersey's economy in the middle and longer term.

Financial and staffing implications

It is not anticipated that there will be any significant extra financial resources required to implement this proposition.

It will be necessary to employ teachers with language skills but there are already some teachers with such skills in the employment of the Department. Given that only 3 such teachers will be required in the first year of the operation of bilingual schools, and given that **additional** resources in the sense of extra teachers will not be required, it is not considered that the staffing implications of this proposition will be significant.

Children's Rights Impact Assessment

A Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) has been prepared in relation to this proposition and is available to read on the States Assembly website.