



Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

Transform**ED**

Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028

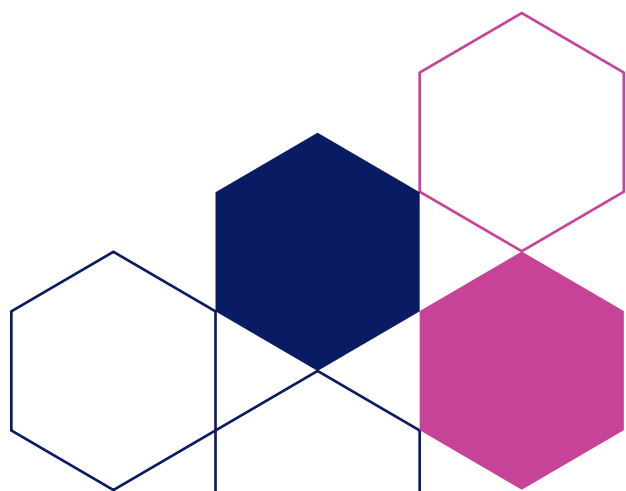
An entitlement to excellence and equity

Key Stage 3

Modern languages

Draft curriculum framework for Public Consultation

This document forms part of a suite of curriculum materials published for consultation





Contents

Vision statement	3
Subject-specific categories	5
Key Stage 3	7
Phonics	7
Vocabulary	7
Grammar	8
Language proficiency: applying the knowledge through listening, reading, speaking, writing	8
Strategies for language learning and communication	9
Cultural knowledge and intercultural competencies	9
Statutory appendices 1–4 for language content	10



Vision statement

Language learning connects lives, expands horizons, and shapes identities, seeding a richer understanding of others, ourselves and our place in the world. It opens minds to communicating within our own communities and beyond, offering powerful new perspectives. Learning another language sparks aspiration, equipping young people for Key Stage 4 language study, future travel, work, meaningful intercultural experiences and lifelong language learning. It is also an intellectually stimulating and fulfilling endeavour in its own right.

Learning the high-value words, structures and sounds of a new language is an inclusive and emancipatory apprenticeship into becoming multilingual. This key knowledge is the gateway to clear communication for practical and personal purposes. Steadily expanding language knowledge unlocks a greater breadth of listening and reading material. Learning how a language works strengthens language analytic ability, as pupils understand how words and grammar combine to make meaning. They use high-value vocabulary and structures flexibly to make original or personal combinations of words, igniting a drive to communicate in the new language. Secure knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences (phonics) allows pupils to move reliably and independently between spoken and written language, establishing robust literacy and supporting independent learning in and beyond the classroom.

Language both embodies and expresses culture. Initially, language knowledge and proficiency are broadened and deepened through cultural springboards. As language builds, pupils gain greater access to rich cultural insight into the people and places where the language is spoken, including the arts, beliefs, customs, traditions, history, geography and social systems. They also see how subtle features of language itself carry cultural meaning, revealing ways of seeing the world both familiar and different from their own.

Pupils develop effective strategies for learning language adding carefully chosen words to a secure core of high-frequency language, so they can express meanings that matter to them with increasing confidence. They recognise the value of regular revisiting of new language, by practising individually and with peers to strengthen recall. When encountering unfamiliar language, pupils draw on linguistic context and knowledge of the world and other languages to infer meaning. They use high-quality reference resources when necessary, including digital tools, to guide accurate language use and consolidate their toolkit of fundamental concepts and terms ('metalinguage') that support language learning. In communication, they can sustain conversations, addressing misunderstandings by seeking and offering clarification. In speaking and writing, they practise paraphrasing to convey intended meaning, drawing on vocabulary and grammar that they already control.

From the earliest stages, pupils enjoy a powerful sense of progress in language development, which is deepened by regular opportunities to communicate independently in their learned language. They speak up in class and are at ease in unscripted exchanges, as their understanding of what has been said enables careful responses with clear intended meaning. As a result, pupils approach essential opportunities to communicate with fluently speaking peers remotely or face to face with curiosity and confidence. They learn from these encounters and feel the excitement of making genuine connections. In planned speaking and in extended writing, pupils draw on their firm grasp of sounds, words and structures to communicate clearly and with increasing precision. They begin to develop resilience to the limitations of digital language tools (such as translation and interpretation apps). Such realisations contribute to their journey towards becoming critical users of computer-generated language.

Through their experiences of language learning, pupils develop readiness to engage openly with others, care in understanding and navigating difference, and respect for new people, places and perspectives. Their growing language awareness becomes a stable reference point for future learning, helping them to notice patterns and make connections. Pupils carry forward a sense of agency in their ability to understand and be understood: a lifelong resource that can enrich relationships, broaden opportunities and strengthen their contribution to the communities they encounter.



Subject-specific categories

The Modern languages curriculum is organised into six subject-specific categories:

Phonics

Through mastery of phonics, pupils develop knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences (SSCs), particularly those that differ from English, so that they can pronounce, decode (read aloud), and transcribe familiar and unfamiliar language accurately.

Vocabulary

High-frequency, useful words and common multi-word expressions support comprehension and meaningful interaction in the new language, while also providing opportunities for pupils to build a small, personalised vocabulary repertoire.

Grammar

Knowledge of grammar features and practical fluency in them ensures that pupils can understand and create meaning in speech and writing, including reference to time, participants, and communicative functions such as questioning and negation.

Language proficiency

Pupils need planned opportunities to use phonics, vocabulary and grammar knowledge through listening, reading, speaking and writing in both prepared and unprepared contexts.

Strategies for language learning and communication

These are strategies that support effective language learning and resourceful communication, including analysing patterns, inferring meaning, paraphrasing, seeking clarification and using reference resources critically.

Cultural knowledge and intercultural competencies

This category introduces age-appropriate cultural knowledge about communities where the language is spoken and supports respectful and thoughtful intercultural communication through exploring similarities and differences in lived experiences.

Using the subject-specific categories

All six subject-specific categories develop language knowledge and the ability to use that knowledge in listening, reading, speaking and writing. Of these six categories, four are *language focused* – phonics, vocabulary, grammar and language proficiency. These constitute the core linguistic entitlement that will result in beginner proficiency. Cumulative development will be observable in all six categories but will be most directly measurable in those four language areas.

Reading, listening, speaking and writing should not be treated as separate, independent skills. It is better to think of these as a common body of language knowledge which is experienced and learned in different modes (production and comprehension) and modalities (oral and written). Also, many contexts require a mix of skills. For example, interaction (such as conversations, role-plays) involves both speaking (production) and genuine active listening (comprehension).

The categories of language learning and communication, and cultural knowledge and intercultural competencies include strategies that support effective language learning and communication. In such ways, the categories are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.



Key Stage 3

The Modern Languages curriculum enables pupils to attain beginner proficiency in understanding and communicating in another language through listening, reading, speaking and writing. By the end of the key stage, pupils should be able to understand and communicate clear meanings using high-frequency words, sounds and structures in both prepared and unprepared contexts, while drawing increasingly confidently on strategies that support independent language learning and interaction. Together, the interlocking strands of the curriculum enable meaningful accomplishment at Key Stage 3, while also preparing pupils for further study, including GCSE qualifications in one or more of French, German, Irish or Spanish.

The curriculum also builds on pupils' earlier experiences of language awareness through multilingualism by deepening both language knowledge and intercultural understanding. Pupils learn how sounds, vocabulary and grammar work together to create meaning, and they apply this knowledge through purposeful communication in speech and writing. Through encounters with communities and cultures where the language is spoken, pupils also develop understanding of similarities and differences in lived experiences, alongside increasing confidence in communicating across languages and cultures.

Phonics

Pupils should learn:

- sound-symbol correspondences (SSCs), focusing on frequent and challenging correspondences that differ most from English, as listed in the appendices
- how to read aloud and transcribe unfamiliar words

Vocabulary

Pupils should learn:

- to understand and produce words meaningfully, in both isolation and context, that have high frequency in general language (as listed in the appendices)
- a small number of highly frequent and age-appropriate multi-word units to support initial communication and interactions; these may be linguistically complex but communicate common pragmatic functions (e.g. 'I would like', 'please', 'how are you?', 'see you tomorrow', 'good luck', 'what time is it?', 'what's the weather like?') (as listed in the appendices)
- a small, personalised vocabulary that carries importance for the individual

Grammar

Pupils should learn, using the grammar listed in the appendices:

- to understand sentences and short texts in written and spoken input
- to produce unprepared sentences in learner-paced speech, where the pupils' own intended meaning is comprehensible despite lapses in accuracy
- to write sentences and short texts where pupils express their own meaning which is usually clearly and easily understood by a reader
- grammar systems needed to understand and create precise meaning, including: the time of events/experiences (past, present, and future); the participants (person, number, gender, subject and object roles, pronouns); function (negation, interrogative). Wherever possible, pupils should learn the least complex means of expression

Language proficiency: applying the knowledge through listening, reading, speaking, writing

Pupils should:

- understand when listening and reading specific details and overall messages of passages comprising the listed vocabulary and grammar in listening:
 - audio and audiovisual input will be pronounced slowly and with clear articulation, following sound-spelling relations that are globally recognised in a standard variety (as listed in the appendices)
 - synchronised bimodal input (hearing the spoken language at the same time as seeing the corresponding written words) is used to support accurate decoding, comprehension and learning
 - listening also includes demonstrating messages are understood when in an oral interaction with another speaker
- read texts that could comprise additional off-list words that are true cognates (spelling and meaning clearly aligned to English) and derived forms as listed in the grammar appendices
- produce, in writing and speech, language that is clear and comprehensible, in sentences and multi-sentence texts; sentences containing dependent clauses usually indicating complexity and sophistication
- write from memory (i.e. text created without closed framing), which may include 'developmental approximations' in terms of spellings (which may align with SSCs but not be standard)

- produce both prepared and unprepared speech:
 - when creating their own meaning in *unprepared* situations, speech will be slow, deliberate, and likely contain developmental errors demonstrating creative use of the language and risk-taking
 - speaking will be practised in interactions, where genuine comprehension is also needed
 - where appropriate, pupils will build performative confidence by rehearsing short pre-written texts (e.g. for a poem recitation, an age-appropriate job-interview scenario, a speech, or other real-life exchanges)

Strategies for language learning and communication

Pupils should learn how to:

- use effective vocabulary learning techniques
- analyse language to pick out the function of patterns (e.g. breaking down words and phrases into flexible, component parts)
- seek high-quality help for using the language, including learning how digital support can be both useful and flawed
- paraphrase to express meanings using already known vocabulary and grammar
- use the linguistic context and world knowledge to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words or structures
- identify a misunderstanding and address it by seeking and giving clarification
- speak confidently to achieve communication.

Cultural knowledge and intercultural competencies

Pupils should:

- learn a small set of age-appropriate cultural information about countries and communities where the language is spoken. 'Culture' is broadly defined to include the arts (including literature e.g. stories, poetry and song), beliefs, customs, traditions, history, geography and social systems
- understand how subtle features of language itself can express cultural information
- learn that other language speakers have culture that can be both similar and different to that experienced everyday by the pupils
- experience communicating with a peer who is a first language or fluent user of the target language (whether remotely or in person) in writing and in speech

Statutory appendices 1–4 for language content

Phonics, vocabulary and grammar provided in one appendix for each language: Appendix 1 French; Appendix 2 German; Appendix 3 Irish; Appendix 4 Spanish.

In the phonics sections of this appendix:

A “source word” contains the target sound-symbol correspondence (SSC). All other letters in the word are either transparent consonants or likely to be previously taught correspondences. The word is typically high-frequency and on the vocabulary list. It offers a key model for illustrating the SSC.

“Cluster words” are a small group of words that further illustrate the target SSC. They include examples of the SSC in different positions in the word (e.g. initial, medial, final), if possible, while ensuring that other letters are either transparent consonants or likely to have been previously taught. These words are, where possible, high-frequency and on the vocabulary list.

In the vocabulary sections of this appendix:

The ‘frequency’ column refers to the frequency ranking of the word, according to a very large corpus of spoken and written language from a range of countries and genres of language. These frequency rankings have been taken from the following sources:

- Lonsdale, D. & Le Bras, Y. (2009). *A frequency dictionary of French*. Routledge.
- Tschirner, E. & Möhring, J. (2019). *A frequency dictionary of German* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Davies, M., & Davies, K. (2019). *A frequency dictionary of Spanish* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- The National Corpus of Irish <https://www.corpas.ie/en/extras/word-lists/> Accessed February 2026.

In the grammar sections of this appendix, the ‘part of speech’ column includes some or all of the following part of speech abbreviations, as appropriate to each language:

adj = adjective

adv = adverb

adj/adv = item that is both adjective and adverb

adv/num = adverb/number

comp [prep + det] = compound

conj = conjunction

det = determiner

intj = interjection

mwp = multi-word phrase

n = noun

num = number

part = particle

part/interj = particle/interjection

pppn = prepositional pronoun

prep = preposition

pron = pronoun

v = verb

vcop = copula

vn = verbal noun

vp = verb particle

In addition, the 'headword' column uses the following punctuation:

* = First mention of a word that appears again later in the list but with a different part of speech

** = Second mention of a word that appears earlier in the list with a different part of speech

/ separates different orthographic forms (contractions, abbreviated forms, spelling variations) of the same word

| separates different inflected forms (tense, case, mood) of the same word

; separates different meanings of a word that occur as the result of an added function word (preposition, reflexive pronoun)

Multiple English translations of a word are separated by a comma.

Any bracketed information (e.g. m, f, nt) applies to each English translation unless otherwise indicated.



Department of
Education

www.education-ni.gov.uk

TransformED
Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028
An entitlement to excellence and equity