

English version: The Bilingual Stream - Frequently Asked Questions

THE BILINGUAL STREAM - FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- What does Bilingual Teaching at Wix Mean?

Wix Primary School and the Lycée Charles de Gaulle have collaborated to set up a bilingual teaching stream. Half the children in a class come through Wandsworth LEA and half through the Lycée. This is a unique and special arrangement.

The children are taught in French for half the week by a native French teacher and in English for half the week by an English teacher that is for approximately 14 hours in each language. The children do not learn either English or French as a foreign language- they learn in the language as a child in England or France would at a local school. Half way through the week there is an effective change of country and culture. Class teachers ensure of course, that core class routines and standards of behaviour are the same in both languages and work closely together to ensure the welfare and progress of the children. The children interact frequently with the children in the English and Lycée classic streams.

The two schools have looked carefully at the English and French National Curricula and have put together a joint bilingual curriculum which is we believe to be an amalgam of the best and most important aspects of each national curriculum. Teachers cooperate closely in the teaching of all subjects to ensure that key points are covered without undue repetition in both languages. Some subject areas, however, are taught in both languages to ensure that all necessary vocabulary is learned. This is an ongoing process. The teachings of English and French most closely follow the respective national programmes of study but even here we have made adjustments to allow the curricula to be taught in the 2 ½ days available.

- What Are the Advantages of Bilingual Learning at Wix?

Our aim is for the children to become fluent in a second language as they progress through the school and to develop an understanding of the culture of another country- this in itself is a significant advantage in an increasingly uncertain economic world. Research has shown that children taught bilingually are in a good position to go on to learn further languages in the future. Research has also shown that bilingual learning enriches the understanding of one's native tongue. Further, the bilingual stream is a creative and inspiring environment. The children learn quickly and the teaching fosters independent learning. For the children, learning is fun and they are constantly "stretched". We have also seen bilingual children grow into noticeably engaging young people- open minded, tolerant, imaginative, unprejudiced and open to new ideas. They constantly have the good example of two teachers of different nationalities working harmoniously together. It is a great experience. We are confident that they will be good European citizens.

- What Should We Consider Before Deciding to Apply for the Bilingual Stream?

There are some points to consider carefully before enrolling your child in the bilingual stream. This is a demanding, quite academic environment requiring significant parental support and you will

need to consider if this is right for your family. The children will need help in organising themselves- ensuring they bring in what they need on any given day. There will also be significantly more homework than in an equivalent English or French class to cover the demands of both languages. Children will be expected to read every night in English and French, learn spelling words in English and French and, by CP/Year 2 do one piece of homework in English and French each week. This homework will increase noticeably from Year 3/CE1. The support of the parents in working with the children at home is absolutely vital to making a success of the bilingual stream. Indeed, we see close cooperation between staff, parents and children as underpinning the whole bilingual project.

The lessons are stimulating and we try to ensure that the children are not overburdened, but they do undoubtedly work hard. Due to the constraints of time in the bilingual stream we tend to incorporate music, drama, art and sport into our bilingual lessons in a cross curricular fashion rather than always having dedicated lessons in those subjects.

- Will My Child Be Disadvantaged Compared to His or Her Peers learning only in English or French?

By the end of Year 2 CP, no. We have made adjustments to the English and French curricula to make them fit together as smoothly as possible. For example, the teaching of phonics and reading starts slightly later than in an English primary school but sooner than in a French school. However, the children learn very quickly and our experience is that by the end of CP/ year 2 the great majority of children have caught up with their monolingual peers if not overtaken them. Research has shown that bilingual teaching has no negative impact on the learning of other subjects either, and can improve that learning if adequate support is also offered at home.

- We Are a Monlingual Family- Is the Bilingual Stream for us?

Our results show that, with the right support, monolingual children can be very successful bilingual learners. However, your child will need to understand why he/she is enrolled in the bilingual stream. It would be helpful for you, as parents, to show your interest in the second language by learning it yourselves, or by at least attending cultural events in that language.

If you are a French family living in England you will need to ensure that your child is immersed in English language and culture and that homework, spelling and reading are done consistently in both languages.

If, on the other hand, you are an English-only family you will certainly need to find opportunities outside the school day for your child to learn and practise French. The lycée runs French after school homework clubs every day which we would encourage you to use. We also encourage play dates with French friends, informal homework swaps between French and English families, use of the French library at school and at the Institut Francais and the borrowing of French cds and films. If you wish your child to join the bilingual stream, it would be prudent to arrange to meet other English-speaking families whose children have succeeded in French for you to see if you wish to make this investment of time.

- My Child Has Special Needs- Can We Join the Bilingual Stream?

We welcome all children to the filière bilingue. If you have a particular concern about your child's learning needs we suggest you speak to us before enrolling, to be sure that this demanding environment is the best educational choice for your child.

Is the French and English Teaching Very Different?

It is and this is one of the great advantages of our way of bilingual teaching. It means that the

children can learn in a whole variety of ways and what is hard using one method may be more easily solved in another. Flexibility of thought and independence of mind are encouraged. The English system is predicated on the basis that each child should, as much as possible, be stretched to his or her own limit, receiving help and support to that end. The French system is built on the basis that all children will attain a specific level. We consider these differing pedagogical and strategic approaches to be a key benefit.

- What Happens if it Doesn't Work Out?

The bilingual teachers and parents stay in very close touch, not least by e mail. Teachers are always happy to meet parents to discuss concerns on either side. There will be 2 formal meetings with teachers a year and two reports (Livrets d'évaluation). Teachers will help in any way possible with advice and support if your child is struggling. Most problems are soon sorted out. If not we will use all reasonable endeavours to help your child transfer to a more appropriate class.

- Should We Enrol for Bilingual Teaching?

We are fiercely proud of the achievements of our bilingual children. We have no doubt that they have an interesting and stimulating primary education. They leave us as well placed as possible for the next stage in their education.

If, having considered all the implications, you would like to enrol your child then we will welcome you.