In 2011, Wales Street Primary School received $500,000 over 5 years in one-off funding from the Department of Education and Training (DET)*. This funding was in addition to our standard school entitlements for staffing. As stated in the associated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), the purpose of the funds was to enable an expanded languages program – incorporating classes in Greek and Mandarin as well as Italian – at Wales Street Primary School.

In line with the terms of this agreement, this funding will expire at the end of 2015. The forthcoming return to our standard level of funding, together with significant growth in student numbers for 2016, has forced us to reconsider our approach to teaching languages other than English for 2016 and beyond.

Earlier this year, the School approached DET for an extension in the funding, however, the Department clarified their position that there will be no additional funding or extensions to the MOU. Subsequently, in July this year, the School Council endorsed the establishment a Languages Working Party to help us determine a way forward for language learning at Wales Street. The conclusions of these investigations are presented here for the parents and carers of students at Wales Street Primary School.

* Formerly the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Background

Language learning at Wales Street today

Wales Street Primary School has fully supported the teaching of languages other than English as an important area of student learning, and a valuable specialist area within our broader school curriculum. A DET grant received in 2011 has allowed us to fund a generous languages program for our students over the past five years.

Through this program, we currently offer three languages to students:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>For year levels...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>Prep to Grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>From Grades 3 to 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>From Grades 3 to 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each language is taught in a weekly session of 50 minutes. In line with the Australian/Victorian Essential Learning Standards (AUSVELS), the focus of these language programs is providing language exposure in the early years (Prep to Grade 4), and on extending this to more measurable language acquisition in the later primary years (Grades 5 and 6). In Grades 5 and 6 the language component of the curriculum forms part of each student’s overall assessment.

A return to standard funding levels

The future of language learning at Wales Street is set to change substantially from 2016 onwards, as the additional DET funding effectively expires at the end of 2015. While the School has explored avenues for continuation of this funding, to date these efforts have been unsuccessful.

As a result, at the close of 2015, the School will go from having the resources to fund 1.9 full-time equivalent (or ‘FTE’) language teachers, to funding for one FTE teaching resource. Add to this the significant growth in student numbers (in 2016 we will accommodate approximately 620 students, which is significantly higher the 506 students attending Wales Street when the funding was first announced in 2011) – and we face significant pressure not just on resourcing, but also on timetabling.

An ongoing commitment to a broad curriculum

Despite these challenges, Wales Street Primary School remains committed to language education for our students, as part of a broad and diverse curriculum. Indeed, the learning of languages other than English from Prep level onwards is a legislated requirement for Victorian schools (government and non-government alike). Similarly, in schools undertaking the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program, teaching languages other than the mother tongue is also a requirement.

While our commitment to language learning remains strong, it has not been possible to simply reduce funding in other specialist areas of our curriculum (such as Physical Education, or Performing Arts, for example) – as we believe all of these specialist areas have a valuable and important place in our overall curriculum.

Instead, the focus of our Languages Working Party has been on exploring how best to provide a language program in the context of greatly reduced funding going forward, without impacting on other areas of our curriculum.

About the Languages Working Party

Purpose

The Languages Working Party was established in July 2015 to examine the options for future language teaching at Wales Street, primarily in the context of reduced funding levels for 2016 and beyond, but also with regard to both the overarching legislative requirements for Victorian schools, and requirements associated with teaching the Primary Years Program.

Members

Christian Woodcock, Principal
Jenny Deeble, Assistant Principal
Royce Monk, parent volunteer
Frances Coppolillo, parent volunteer
Fiona Clarke, parent volunteer
What will change in 2016?

Moving to a single-language model

Over the past few months, the Languages Working Party has reviewed DET policy in relation to language education at primary school level. In addition we have consulted with an external language acquisition expert from the University of Melbourne, and we have consulted with DET regarding options for additional funding. Further to these investigations, and particularly in view of the forthcoming return to standard levels of school funding, we believe the most appropriate way forward is to teach a single language at Wales Street from 2016 onwards.

This is our most viable option in terms of meeting our budget requirements. It also represents the best option for ensuring that we provide the most effective learning experience for students in view of these funding constraints, and one that is fully compliant with AUSVELS.

In short, our future funding levels are best applied to teaching one language to the fullest capacity – providing cultural awareness and language exposure for younger students, and then reinforcing this learning throughout the later years of primary schooling and extending this to measurable language acquisition skills for our Grade 5 and 6 students.

Some pros and cons

While a single-language model removes the element of choice for students, it ensures that our language program can still achieve these objectives for our students, and in a way that also provides consistency and continuity. Of course, we acknowledge that teaching just one language does not offer the breadth of opportunity for students that we've been able to offer to date.

Transitional arrangements in 2016

We’re conscious that moving to a single-language model may significantly impact those students who are currently in Grade 5, and would like to continue with their current language studies for the remainder of their Primary years.

For students currently in Grade 5 (and due to move into Grade 6 in 2016), we will continue to offer our current choice of three languages at the current time allocation (50 minutes per week) throughout 2016. This will allow these students to continue with their current languages throughout their final year of primary schooling should they choose to do so.

For those students entering Grade 5 or below in 2016, the single-language model will apply.

Retaining our current staff

We understand that the school community will naturally be concerned for our current languages teaching staff. We’re very pleased to confirm that the current teaching staff associated with our specialist language programs will have the opportunity to remain as members of the Wales Street staff, and to contribute to overall student learning at Wales Street in 2016 and beyond.

A chance to have your say

Survey coming soon

We would like the input of the school community in selecting which language (from our existing three languages – Italian, Greek and Mandarin) will be taught as the primary language at Wales Street next year. We’ll be distributing a survey to families, requesting that you nominate your preferred language.

Surveys will be sent electronically via Tiqbiz and/or email. Hard copies will also be made available for those families who are unable to access the survey online.
Alternative avenues for language learning

Despite the coming funding constraints, the school continues to value language education as an important element of a diverse curriculum. We’ve been exploring alternative avenues for providing students with exposure to languages other than English.

After-school classes on school premises

We’re currently looking at the option of facilitating after-school language classes on school premises, along the lines of the Mandarin classes currently offered to our Grade 3-6 students. These classes were offered at a cost of approximately $10 per session in 2015 (this is provided as an indicative cost only). Parents and carers electing to enrol their children in these classes bear this cost. When we survey the school community in October this year, we will also seek to gauge the level of interest in classes of this nature.

External avenues for language learning

A number of external organisations – some private, and some community-based – provide language programs aimed at primary school children. We’ve provided a list of helpful links below, should you wish to explore some of these options further:

- **Community Language Schools**

- **Victorian School of Languages**
  Website: [https://www.vsl.vic.edu.au](https://www.vsl.vic.edu.au)

- **Ethnic Schools Association of Victoria**
  Website: [http://www.esav.org.au](http://www.esav.org.au)

- **Languages Australia**

Queries or concerns

If you have any queries or concerns regarding the provision of languages other than English at Wales Street Primary School, please do not hesitate to contact:

Christian Woodcock, Principal, or Jenny Deeble, Assistant Principal

Email: wales.street.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au
Phone: 9484 3949