

# **Mind the Classics Gap. Current position of classical studies in English schools from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Challenges and solutions.**

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## **Introduction**

This article describes and analyses the current position in the National Curriculum and status of the different classical subject areas of study for Latin, Classical Greek, Ancient History and Classical Civilisation in English primary and early secondary schools. I first describe the non-linguistic classical subjects, noting some of the commonly-used resources and teaching practices at this stage; I then investigate how far the Key Stage 2 foreign languages programme of study has promoted classical languages at this stage, again noting commonly-used resources. I go on to explore how the Department for Education's previous policies have caused what I call 'the Classics Gap' at Key Stage 3 and how the new Latin Excellence Programme may address some of it.

The devolved Scottish and Welsh Governments set their own education systems and curricula, and classical subjects in each of these places are in a much weaker position or are still subject to their own country's educational reforms (Imrie, 2019; Bracke, 2018). I have chosen to concentrate on the English system because classical studies are most embedded there.

It may come as a surprise to readers that for nearly 35 years all students in mainstream schools in the state-maintained sector have had an entitlement to learn

about the ancient world. (State-maintained schools include those maintained by the local authority, academies and free schools; they include selective ‘grammar’ schools and non-selective ‘comprehensive’ schools). Despite the repetitive media description of the slow decline and imminent death of classical studies in UK state-maintained schools, since the creation of the National Curriculum of 1988<sup>1</sup> non-linguistic classical studies have been ever-present in English state-maintained schools. Although the National Curriculum excluded classical languages from the three core and seven foundation subjects<sup>2</sup> which were every students’ entitlement from age 11-16, it *did* include the non-linguistic study of the Ancient Greeks and of the Roman Empire in the History Programme of Study for Key Stage 2 and 3 respectively. After Baker’s reforms proved unmanageable, variations of the National Curriculum have followed, some remaining favourable to classical studies and others less so (Gay, 2003). For example, the Dearing Review of 1994 replaced the study of the Roman Empire in Key Stage 3 with that of Roman Britain in Key Stage 2, thereby leading to a reduction in content, possible time allocation and teaching commitment. On the other hand, it did open up the possibility of studying Greek and Roman mythology at both Key Stages 2 and 3 in the English Programmes of Study. (Gay,

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<sup>1</sup> As Aldrich (1988) has pointed out, the term ‘National’ Curriculum is strictly a misnomer. On formation in 1988 it was neither National nor a Curriculum, being not applicable to Scottish and Northern Irish state-maintained schools nor independent schools, and comprising a set of subject descriptions and assessments whose educational aims and objectives were unclear either for the learner or for the benefit of society as a whole. When asked why the National Curriculum was not to apply to independent schools, Stuart Sexton, then a senior advisor to the government, replied that, by nature, those schools already provided the sort of curriculum that parents wanted and that state-maintained schools needed to be brought into line with the independent: the *market* of the independent schools meant that what they provided was always what the parents wanted (Sexton, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> In the 1988 National Curriculum the three core subjects were Mathematics, English and Science, while the foundation subjects were History, Geography, a Modern Foreign Language, Technology, Art, Music and Physical Education. In state-maintained schools, students were to have an entitlement to study all of these (if not examined) to age 16. Despite pleas made by numerous individuals and by the Joint Association of Classical Teachers for Latin or Ancient Greek to be included somewhere in the foundation subjects (see, for example, Haviland (1988, p. 42)), Baker, who himself studied Latin at A Level at St Paul’s School, seems to have considered that classical languages were almost by nature *inaccessible to every* student and therefore condemned them to the 20% of ‘spare time’ that a school might find for subjects of their choice outside the standard curriculum entitlement (Baker, 1989). It was inevitable, however, that other statutory requirements (though not considered to be National Curriculum), such as Religious Education and, later, Citizenship, tended to eat into this small time allocation, and with Local Management of Schools concentrating the minds of the schools’ financial administrators, the classical languages, appealing to small numbers of students on this extra-curriculum model, tended to be let go in favour of the more-pressing and statutory Religious Education and Personal, Social & Health Education (PSHE), and the other varied needs of the curriculum.

2003). Sadly, nothing was made statutory, merely advisory, and the rise of the school inspection regime Ofsted made headteachers increasingly concentrate on the statutory requirements of programmes of study for the core and foundation subjects. The crumbs of comfort offered by Dearing still did not make for a full justification for a *classical* curriculum of its own, and few schools seem to have paid much more than lip service to the statutory requirements, as Lister found when he studied the provision of classical subjects in the *Greeks and Romans in Primary Schools* report (Lister, 2007).

This article investigates some of the ways in which subject organizations, commercial interests and charity such as The Classical Association, Cambridge School Classics Project, Classics for All, the Primary Latin Project, Hands-Up Education and others have all made a positive impact to try to help those schools who have found – against the odds in most cases – curriculum time and teachers to maintain or mend the thread. And I also want to draw attention to the fact that the Department for Education itself has finally – after 35 years of National Curricula of various forms – come to realize that direct action is required and has stepped in with the development of the Latin Excellence Programme. Perhaps this will finally help to close the Classics Gap.

### **Key Stage 2 Ancient Greeks and Romans**

The present English National Curriculum dates from 2013 and is part of the enormous package of reforms to the education system instituted by the Minister for Education Michael Gove (2010-2014).<sup>3</sup> Much of Gove's time at the Department for Education seems to have been spent turning an education system into anything but

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<sup>3</sup> Once again, the National Curriculum is not applicable to schools in the independent sector. More curiously, the National Curriculum is now also not applicable to those state-maintained schools which have become academies or which were set up as free schools – both of which are schools which are independent of local authority control but state-funded. There is insufficient space here to go into the political complexities of the Academies and Free Schools movement (see, for example, (Exley & Ball, 2011)); however, it seems that the opportunity for these types of school not to have to adhere to the National Curriculum has been used by the Department for Education as some kind of incentive not so much as to develop different curricula of their own as for them to break away from local authority control (Morris, 2012). In practice, now that the majority of state-maintained secondaries have become academized, the National Curriculum has reverted to a minimum entitlement against which Ofsted now compare a school's actual curriculum (Ofsted, 2022, sections 200-210). In other words, the National Curriculum maintains a stranglehold on secondary school curricula (and the opportunities within it to offer classical subjects) as strong as it ever was.

a system: the Conservative party's ideological preference for a market-driven approach to education has underpinned everything that he did and the ramifications, inconsistencies and challenges raised by the atomisation of the system which the reforms caused are still being felt today, often not in ways that were intended (Freedman, 2022). For non-linguistic classical studies the situation has remained broadly the same, at least in the primary schools. As before, Key Stage 2 students study the Ancient Egyptians, Ancient Greeks and Romans, but the content has been reduced to the Ancient Greeks as an optional depth study ('Ancient Greece – a study of Greek life and achievements and their influence on the western world') and the Romans as part of the 'story of this island race' with a focus on invasion, Romanization, and departure from Britain.<sup>4</sup> More problematically, the History Programme of Study needs to be followed chronologically, which means that students are very young when they learn about them, and the enormous range of the historical period that must be covered (the 'Stone Age' to 1066) means that time spent on any one part is necessarily brief. Thus, Ancient Greeks and Romans often lack the depth of study they might deserve. It is impossible to say whether Lister's (2007) research mentioned earlier continues to hold. In 2019, according to the biannual Historical Association's survey of primary schools, the most popular ancient world study was Ancient Egyptians, with some 88% of primary schools reporting that they teach it from the list of options allowed (Historical Association, 2020). The same survey noted, however, that the Ancient Greeks and Romans were much less reported by teachers in 2019, compared with 2017, suggesting that interest in curriculum development of other subject areas had risen. Whether this was to the detriment of Ancient Greeks and Romans is impossible to determine. In theory every student in the state-maintained sector will have studied something about the Ancient Greeks and Romans at some point in their primary school career; in practice, it is highly likely that the nature, depth and period of study varies from school to school

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<sup>4</sup> The topics recommended (but not statutory) by the key stage 2 History programme of Study, but not statutory, could include 'Julius Caesar's attempted invasion in 55-54 BC; the Roman Empire by AD 42 and the power of its army; successful invasion by Claudius and conquest, including Hadrian's Wall; British resistance, for example, Boudica; "Romanisation" of Britain: sites such as Caerwent and the impact of technology, culture and beliefs, including early Christianity; Roman withdrawal from Britain in c. AD 410 and the fall of the western Roman Empire'.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/239035/PRIMARY\\_national\\_curriculum\\_-\\_History.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239035/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_History.pdf) (accessed 8th August 2022).

and even from year to year according to the interests and knowledge of the teachers. Nevertheless, having survived several versions of the National Curriculum, the position of Ancient Greeks and Romans, such as they are, now seems secure in the primary sector.

What is curious about these whole series of study is that there have been relatively few publications to support teachers at this stage – something of a lack of interest both by publishers and the wider subject community for bread-and-butter topics almost every primary student in England studies takes. The Historical Association's publication 'Primary History' does publish short articles on teaching about the ancient world and has a resource-sharing area on its website (see [www.history.org.uk/publications/categories/primary-history](http://www.history.org.uk/publications/categories/primary-history)); otherwise, subject material is scanty for this age range. Some print and digital resources include:

**Opening Worlds** (Counsell & Mastin, 2022): a series of downloadable written / visual resource booklets. Christine Counsell and Steve Mastin's influential work focuses on the use of disciplinary language to develop learners' historical thinking and argumentation.

**Keystage history** (Keystage history, n.d.): a series of digital enquiry-based lesson plans, and informational booklets. Neil Thompson's site has a focus on practical pedagogy and active learning approaches to the ancient world.

**BBC Bitesize** (BBC, 2022): a series of games, videos, text and informatics.

**KS2 History** (KS2 History, 2022): a series of downloadable resources and object / artefact packs.

**Hamilton Trust** (Hamilton Trust, 2022): a series of downloadable resources.

**Life in the Roman World** (University of Leicester, n.d.): a set of free downloadable resources about life in Roman Britain, drawn from archaeological remains found in Leicester.

**Ancient Greeks** (Davis, 2018) and **Romans in Britain** (Copley, 2014): student booklets (and supplementary 'Activity books'), taking a broadly topic-based approach to the ancient world.

Many of the digital resources for the above are in the form of PowerPoint slide presentations with supplementary paper worksheets. These readily available resources are usually under subscription to the whole school and 'lock in' teachers to a particular commercial group's brand identity for all topics. They save the busy teacher time in locating material, but can diminish the personalisation that a teacher might bring if they use their own knowledge and resources and they tend to facilitate standard presentation, practice, feedback classroom routines.

There are many non-fiction and fiction books in general use. Perhaps the most commonly-used fictional books are Caroline Lawrence's 'The Roman Mysteries' series of fiction for younger readers which are widely-used in schools to provide background information about the ancient world.<sup>5</sup> Outside the classroom, it has long been noted how many museums, which have even the smallest collection of ancient finds, have taken the lead in providing activities (Woff, 2003). You need only see the trails of primary age students snaking through the British Museum and scores of other local museums to realise quite how important and welcome their role is in supporting the National Curriculum for primary school teachers and for establishing the 'food-chain' for the secondary Classics curriculum.<sup>6</sup>

## **Key Stage 2 Ancient Languages**

Potentially new life has been breathed into what might be described as a nascent primary Classics curriculum offering: schools may offer Ancient Greek or Latin, for the compulsory Programme of Study for Foreign Languages.<sup>7</sup> There is growing evidence that many primary school teachers are choosing to do so. Again, statistical details are hard to come by. The most recent British Council Language Trends survey (British Council, 2022) reported that of the 735 state primaries which responded, 3% were offering Latin or Ancient Greek along with a number of other

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://carolinelawrence.com/> (accessed 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the outstanding provision made for primary school visits at such institutions as the British Museum ([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)), the Museum of London ([www.museumoflondon.org.uk](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk)), the Great North Museum (<https://greatnorthmuseum.org.uk/>), University of Leicester Archaeology and Ancient History Department (<https://romanleicester.com/resources/>) and the Roman Baths Museum ([www.romanbaths.co.uk](http://www.romanbaths.co.uk)), and also for online visits possible for these sites for students who are not able to visit in person (all accessed 8<sup>th</sup> August 2022).

<sup>7</sup> See [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/239042/PRIMARY\\_national\\_curriculum\\_-\\_Languages.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239042/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_Languages.pdf) (accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022).



rarer languages,<sup>8</sup> a small increase over the previous year. It is important, however, that the British Council survey bothers to ask and report ancient languages as well as modern: it means that future Education Ministers, with power to change the curriculum at will, might choose to respect the growth in figures and nurture classical subjects rather than slash them away again. There is also very strong evidence from the charity Classics for All which reports that it has been supporting some 564 Primary schools to start, for the most part, Latin and (occasionally) Ancient Greek (Classics for All, 2021). This must represent a more accurate national figure.

It is not clear where the impetus for the inclusion of Latin and Ancient Greek in the Key Stage 2 Foreign Languages Programmes of Study came from. I have noted the enthusiasm for classical languages among a group of politically right of centre journalists, academics and some politicians as a possible source (Hunt, 2018a). The greatest impetus must have come from Boris Johnson, Mayor of London at the time, who frequently used his position to advocate for the study of classical subjects in state-maintained schools both publicly and privately (see, for example, Johnson, 2010, 2020; and Carr, 2007)). For a time, from its inception, he was patron of the charity Classics for All itself.<sup>9</sup> Under the London Excellence Fund, which was designed to raise standards in the capital's state-maintained secondary schools, an offshoot was named 'Capital Classics', for which Classics for All received a grant (Olive & Murray-Pollock, 2018). Johnson spoke at several Classics for All's fund-raising events and seems to have personally supported it financially. The Department for Education sought more advice, perhaps at his instigation: I was told that although there would be no extra money available, what policy levers might I suggest that would encourage the take up of classical languages in secondary state-maintained schools? I thought that without money, the prospect seemed futile: what school would set up Latin if there was no money to support it? And where would the teachers come from – at the time, the Department for Education seemed intent on reducing the number of secondary teacher training placements in England yet further as it was (Partington, 2011; Hunt, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2011). For its own part, the Department for Education seemed interested in encouraging informal partnerships

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<sup>8</sup> Along with Arabic, British Sign Language, Danish, Hebrew, Italian and Japanese.

<sup>9</sup> In 2018 Johnson ceased to be patron of the charity after his infamous remarks on Muslim women in his column for the Daily Telegraph newspaper (BBC, 2018).

between state-maintained and independent schools (the formal versions of which it had only recently abolished as a cost-cutting measure) and how this might lead to the sharing of teacher expertise in classics.<sup>10</sup> I was called to give evidence for that too. But nothing was followed through. After a certain number of these back-room conversations with, no doubt, better qualified people than me, Gove came out in favour of encouraging classical languages in Key Stage 2 rather than in the secondary sector. Key Stage 2 perhaps had advantages: there was the likelihood that primary school timetables had the space to fit classical languages and the requirement for specialist teachers to teach it could be much reduced. Evidence could be drawn from training events carried out under the auspices of Classics for All (Maguire, 2012; 2018; Maguire & Hunt, 2014) and Classics in Communities (Holmes-Henderson, 2016) that non-specialist teachers already employed in the primary school could, with a little training, be capable of teaching Latin and maybe Ancient Greek to the level required at this point in a student's school career. Moreover, the languages might fit neatly alongside the history of the Ancient Greeks and the Romans that was taught at Key Stage 2

In 2014 Gove, floating a new policy idea, began to speak of his enthusiasm for the traditional Common Entrance examinations used in private preparatory schools. The civil servants at the Department for Education seem to have steered clear of the somewhat traditional grammar-translation pedagogy of the prep school, whether by accident or design.<sup>11</sup> Instead, in the Languages Programme of Study statement, there is more than a whisper of the reading-comprehension approach, which makes it align a lot more strongly with pre-existing resources such as Barbara Bell's longstanding *Minimus* Latin course books. It is also likely that a traditional grammar-translation approach would sit uncomfortably alongside the approaches anticipated in modern languages teaching at this level and staffing it might be problematic for

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<sup>10</sup> Independent-State School Partnerships (ISSPs) were set up to promote the sharing of good practice between the school sectors, with the aim of raising standards generally and providing specialist teachers from independent schools to work alongside teachers in state-maintained schools. For an evaluation, see (Bourne, 2017). The York ISSP continues today, with support for the teaching of Latin (see <https://yorkissp.org/>) (accessed 8<sup>th</sup> August 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Gove's enthusiasm for Common Entrance examinations for all state-school students hit the headlines in 2014, but was short-lived (TES Magazine, 2014). For examples of the assessments for Common Entrance in Latin and Ancient Greek, see the website of the Independent Schools Examinations Board: <https://www.iseb.co.uk/assessments/common-entrance/classics/> (accessed 7<sup>th</sup> June 2022).



primary school teachers taught by communicative modern languages methodologies. For Ancient Greek, there was little that was suitable, but soon came along *Basil Batrakhos and the Mystery Letter*, and *Gorilla Greek*, both innovative publications in their own ways. Alongside these came Classics for All's own suite of resources, including *Maximum Classics* and *Mega Greek*, and training which went with it. The Cambridge School Classics Project published an online *Primary Latin Course*, now under the custody of Hands-Up Education. More on these later.

The Languages Programme of Study at Key Stage 2 states that ancient languages may be taught for a different purpose than for modern languages. I've been wrestling with the word 'may' in the Key Stage 2 Languages Programme of Study statement:

A linguistic foundation in ancient languages may support the study of modern languages at key stage 3 (Department for Education, 2013b).

Much hangs on the word 'may'. Is it a nod towards the rich supply of anecdotes and teaching experiences that learning ancient languages helps the student learn modern languages more easily?<sup>12</sup> Certainly, this was the great hope that Nick Gibb, Minister for School Standards (2010-2012), attributed to learning ancient languages:

[...] Latin shows us how the mechanics of language works. The English we speak today descends in part from the Vulgar Latin spoken by workers, merchants and legionaries. English is so riddled with exceptions to the rule that we need Latin to bring sense, order and structure to grammar. Latin gives us the skills to learn not just Romance languages like Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and French - but the aptitude and confidence to learn new tongues beyond Western Europe (Gibb, 2020).

Empirical data are lacking, however, and are almost impossible to capture. Perhaps then the use of the word 'may' is not so much a declaration of *fact* as a kind of *comforting reassurance* to the teacher that the teaching of ancient languages has high educational value: it can act as an encouragement to senior leaders in the schools to consider offering Latin or Ancient Greek, just as much as they might consider offering French or Spanish or Mandarin Chinese. This is 'may' as *opportunity*. The school may choose Latin or Ancient Greek due to the languages'

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<sup>12</sup> For a review of such arguments, see Bracke and Bradshaw (2020) and Hunt (2016, pp. 31-32).

likelihood of supporting a modern language – so why not choose them? For those primary schools whose students go on to several different secondary schools where different modern languages are offered, learning Latin cannot be said to burn any boats.<sup>13</sup> Or more specifically, does the statement point to practice in the classroom? In this case ‘may’ is more loaded: does it imply *possibility* (the teacher *may choose* to teach ancient languages as a support for modern foreign languages, but equally *may not*), *agency* (the teacher would teach ancient languages for only these reasons), or *licence* (the Department for Education’s advisors *allow* the teaching of ancient languages *on condition* that it is for the purpose of supporting modern foreign languages later on)? I’m not splitting hairs: these things matter, because the inspection team from Ofsted may one day have cause to check that the teaching of ancient languages is according to the legal framework given in this very statement. Perhaps as a subject community, we should make up their mind for them before they decide for us and define it as suits us best: namely that a school may simply choose an ancient language at Key Stage 2, and if that *helps* with a modern foreign language *later on* at Key Stage 3, then so be it. At the time, there is no way of telling how much it *will* help, because the exposure to the language at Key Stage 2 is so slim that no statistically significant research can prove its impact.

More pertinently, what exactly should be taught, using what resources, for how long, and with what purpose has been left to the schools themselves: the Department for Education has offered no advice except encouragement. When Liz Truss, the then Under-Secretary of State for Schools (2012-2014) was interviewed by a Classical Association / Classics for All deputation about the Department for Education’s expectations for ancient languages at Key Stage 2, she was unable or unwilling to answer precisely (Hunt, 2018a). Nothing more has been forthcoming from the Department for Education or any Minister until 2021, when the Latin Excellence Programme was announced (see below).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Note, however, that Evans and Fisher’s (2012) research suggests that in modern languages knowledge transfer between primary and secondary schools often lacks consistency due to inadequate co-ordination between school teachers; it is likely that this situation is exacerbated for those students who have studied ancient languages at Key Stage 2.

<sup>14</sup> Not a single comment about Latin in schools of any sector or age group have been made until Gavin Williamson, Minister for Education (2019-2021) made his announcement about the proposal for a Latin Excellence Programme in secondary schools on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021 (Department for Education, 2021).

Such a *laissez-faire* attitude is perhaps all well and good when there has been some fifty years of Department for Education curriculum development in primary schools for every other subject area. But for classical languages, there has been none.<sup>15</sup> You would think that the lack of a roadmap might prove too much of a challenge for school leaders to contemplate. But having been given *carte blanche* to do whatever they wanted, a surprisingly large number of primary schools have indeed chosen Latin (and some Ancient Greek) as we have seen. That this has been achieved within ten years from pretty much the ground upwards, with no government backing other than the words in the Languages Programme of Study, is remarkable. Instead, it is as if government has outsourced curriculum development and teacher training in Key Stage 2 classical languages almost entirely to charities, most notably to the charity Classics for All. And, until 2021, perhaps drawing on the earlier patronage of Boris Johnson (the former Prime Minister) for Classics for All, the government seems to have been entirely happy about that.

Details of the most-commonly available classroom resources for the teaching of Ancient Greek and Latin at Key Stage 2 follow:

**Ancient Greek** is Perhaps more difficult as a ‘sell’ to Primary School teachers, but it has some takers and enthusiasm seems high. Maintaining public awareness of the value of the study of Ancient Greek and its accessibility is a key element (Wright, 2015; Holmes-Henderson, 2015; Mitropoulos & Holmes-Henderson, 2016; Bracke, 2015).

**Basil Batrakhos and the Mystery Letter** (Classics for All, 2019): a broadly reading-comprehension approach in which students follow a continuous storyline centring on a puzzle in Ancient Greek which they get to decipher with the eponymous frog. Innovative features include a form of trans-language, in which Greek letters and words are carefully and gradually drip-fed into an English narrative, until the student is able to read a complete Ancient Greek story. Multiple exercises practice letter formation and word recognition, and

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<sup>15</sup> The changes in Latin pedagogy, for example, that might have taken place in the light of greater knowledge and understanding of how young people learn and acquire languages in schools, remain stifled by traditional course book materials and assessment practices (see Hunt 2022a). Contrast this with the support given to the development of the Cambridge Latin Course back in the 1960s (Forrest, 1996).

simple grammar is explained. Background information about the Ancient Greek world supplements the language work. The book can be purchased from Classics for All or downloaded free of charge from its website.

**Mega Greek** (Classics for All, 2022b) is a freely downloadable course comprising ten thematic lessons which combine foundation Greek language learning with work on Ancient Greek civilisation and culture. There are also three ‘taster’ modules available (each comprising three lessons) that introduce pupils to a particular aspect of Ancient Greek culture – ‘Homer’s Heroes’, ‘Professor Pythagoras’ Magical Maths’ and ‘Speak Like the Gods.’

**Gorilla Greek** (Wright, 2013): a simple picture book, featuring attractive large pictures of the gorilla toy in various scenes, with Ancient Greek subtitles.

There are also sections on pronunciation and the continuing impact of Ancient Greece on the modern world. This book is currently out of print.

**Latin** has far more interest and appears to be much more accessible, sharing the same alphabet as English, of course. There are many resources to choose from, but the most widely available are given below.

**Minimus** (Bell, 1999) and **Minimus Secundus** (Bell, 2004) is one of the most popular course books for beginning Latin in use today. Based around archaeological finds at Vindolanda on Hadrian’s Wall, the broadly story-based course makes use of cartoon strips to carry the Latin readings, with explanations of grammar and English word roots to follow. The stories are interspersed with information about the Roman world and Greek mythology. There is an accompanying website and supplementary resources, including recordings, workbooks and a plethora of small *Minimus*-inspired gifts.<sup>16</sup>

**Primary Latin Course** (Hands-Up Education, n.d.) is a freely available online course that provides a gentle introduction to the Latin. The language learning is fully integrated into an immersive cultural and archaeological course set in ancient Herculaneum. The course is driven by photographs and evidence from the ancient site for pupils to explore and investigate. The course is innovative in exploiting some of the affordances of digital media, such as

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<sup>16</sup> Bell has written extensively about the course. See (Bell, 2018).

touch-screen navigation and recorded spoken Latin. It's meant for whole-class teaching and aligns with much current practice in primary schools.

**Maximum Classics** (Classics for All, 2020b) is an accessible digital course combining foundation Latin language learning with work on classical civilisation and culture. All materials (including PowerPoints, worksheets for students and teaching guides) are free to download. Like the Primary Latin Course above, Maximum Classics is designed for whole-class teaching, with supplementary resources for individual work. There is a lot of emphasis on Latin-English word roots, which is one of its appeals to teachers (see below).

**Cambridge Latin Course** (CSCP, 2007), though designed for use from Key Stage 3 for preparation for GCSE examinations at Key Stage 4, has been used with older students in Key Stage 2, at least with the early stages in Book 1. The well-known reading-comprehension course, initially based in and around Pompeii, is fully supported by a wealth of digital and other resources.<sup>17</sup>

Some observations of my own on the characteristics and classroom practices of using these materials follow:

At Key Stage 2, because of the so-called 'two-tier curriculum' of core and foundation subjects (Alexander, 2010), provision and expectations for ancient and modern foreign languages are often given less time and status than Mathematics, English and Science. This situation is exacerbated because provision is not bound by any guidance establishing the length and depth of study, language content, assessment or pedagogy.<sup>18</sup> For some, this may be a godsend and one of the appeals to offering an ancient language: there is, on the face of it, complete freedom of choice. For others, making that choice is a challenge, and it is not helped, in my view, by the mixture of resources which are available. Only a few of the course materials provide students with much exposure to the ancient languages: the only one which provides

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<sup>17</sup> For details of the development of the Cambridge Latin Course, see Forrest (1996) and Story (2003).

<sup>18</sup> Ofsted has, however, published a 'Research Review' for languages (which does mention ancient languages in passing, but focuses for the vast majority on modern foreign languages at Key Stages 3-5) (Ofsted, 2021). The review has been criticised for its narrow conceptualization of languages learning as a linear process and one which might encourage teachers to focus on the individual building blocks of phonics, vocabulary and grammar in isolation from interpersonal, communicative language learning activities (Malone, 2022).

extended passages of Latin, suitable for the age group is the Cambridge Latin Course; all the other resources tend to provide short sentences or phrases or just disembodied words. The atomisation of complete sentences (and, for that matter, connected sentences) into individual word units and grammar features is exactly what Malone (2022) warns us to guard against for learning modern foreign languages and is exactly what all primary school teachers are taught not to do in their teacher training. If we want Latin to grow in the primary sector, we need to design resources which match contemporary understanding of how all humans learn and acquire languages. Activities in many of the resources named above include wordsearches and matching exercises, which might be said to contribute little to language learning, and which are designed by secondary school teachers for primary schools, based on classroom practices with older students, without thinking about the interests and needs of younger learners. This includes, for example, taking cues from primary teachers themselves, rather than designing materials which are watered down versions of secondary materials: the tendency for primary teachers to use PowerPoint displays at the front of class and individual worksheets for students, heavily-personalized; the use of interpersonal communication as well as the written word; the use of play and props; the use of audio-visual supplements as well as worksheets; the establishment of language-learning routines which work for ancient languages (such as Total Physical Response<sup>19</sup>). While it's fun to dress up as a Roman soldier or to make Roman cakes, it does not help with language development. More than anything else, we need an advisory curriculum – one that is manageable on half an hour a week – in which the measurement of progress and assessment fit. I'm not suggesting that students need take formal examinations: they have enough with SATs as it is. But we need to have a serious conversation about what 'progress' over time for students of ancient languages might actually mean – and not just for students in primary schools, but in secondaries too - and rather than 'measure' it by knowledge of or 'mastery' of a particular grammatical feature. With modern foreign languages, there are plenty of ways of measuring progress, through students' performance in listening, reading, speaking and writing. Perhaps we might consider some of these?

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<sup>19</sup> For details of Total Physical Response, see (Asher, 2012). For its use in the ancient languages classroom, see Hunt (2016, 113-114; 2022a, 51-52).



Another area of note is the dominance of the idea that learning Latin or Ancient Greek will benefit students' literacy in English. There is no getting away from the fact that students' proficiency in English literacy is important. The extent to which individual students and primary schools are relentlessly prepared for national tests on knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar at the end of Key Stage 2 can be detrimental to other subject areas (Spielman, 2017). The idea that literacy in English can be developed through knowledge of Latin and Ancient Greek word roots is attractive and has a long pedigree.<sup>20</sup> While research evidence is itself patchy (see Bracke & Bradshaw (2020) and Hunt (2022a) for overviews), much credence is given to anecdotal examples and the 'feeling' that knowledge of English word roots and etymology must benefit students, even if it is difficult to measure objectively. Brenda Gay, formerly course Director of the PGCE and Lecturer in Classics Education at King's College London, stated:

[The National Curriculum Programmes of Study for English] offers an opportunity for looking at the influence of Greek and Latin on the English language through work on derivations and through looking at the structure of language and the way in which classical styles and literary devices have been used in spoken and written English (Gay, 2003, p. 26).

Barbara Bell, writing about her reasons for publishing the *Minimus* Latin course books said,

I decided to attempt to write a simple, fun introduction to Latin for young children. The core would be to teach English grammar, including the main parts of speech and build their English vocabulary through derivation exercises (Bell, 2018, p. 112).

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<sup>20</sup> Many publications exist for teaching language awareness, based on Latin and Ancient Greek word roots: Adrian Spooner's *Lingo: A Course on Words and How to Use Them* (Spooner, 1991) is designed as a classroom resource; James Morwood's *Our Greek and Latin Roots* (Morwood, 2007) is for the more general reader; Caroline Mackenzie's *Pocket GCSE Latin Etymological Lexicon* (Mackenzie, 2022) (for the UK) and Elizabeth Heimbach's *Word Mastery through Derivatives Designed for Students of Latin* (Heimbach, 2017) and Joegil Lundquist's *English from the Roots Up: Help for Reading, Writing, Spelling and S.A.T.s Scores, Volume 1* (Lundquist, n.d.) and *Volume 2* (Lundquist & Lundquist, n.d.) (for the USA) attest to the interest in teaching ancient language word roots to improve attainment in examinations.

Jane Maguire, describing her project to teach Latin in North Norfolk, a deprived rural district of England, noted,

The most obvious benefits are seen in literacy, as Latin clearly provides such a wonderful insight into the construction of languages and their relationship to each other. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are obvious beneficiaries as well as vocabulary building through word derivations (Maguire, 2018, p. 132).

And the charity Classics for All gives as a reason for starting classical subjects:

There is increasing evidence that the study of classical subjects helps to [...] support language skills for pupils of all abilities, encouraging a structured approach to grammar and a strong foundation for literacy and learning modern foreign languages (Classics for All, 2022c).

Many classroom resources also emphasise this aspect of learning the ancient languages:

- Part of the fun of learning [Ancient] Greek is meeting some of these time-travel words that have helped to form the languages that we speak today (*Basil Batrakhos and the Mystery Letter* (Classics for All, 2019, p. 6)).
- In these sentences, the words which are underlined all come from Latin. Some of them may be new to you. Write down the Latin word that each of the underlined words come from. Then write down what you think these words mean (*Minimus* (Bell, 1999, p. 11)).
- One of the main benefits of teaching Latin as a KS2 [Key Stage 2] language is its useful interplay with English grammar and vocabulary. *Maximum Classics'* introductory unit explores the history behind English's links to Latin and Ancient Greek. Vocabulary used on the course is selected to facilitate the exploration of interplay between Latin and English vocabulary and every lesson incorporates games or activities drawing on this. The course also tracks KS2 elements such as word class, tense and auxiliary verbs using the same terminology used in English SPaG [Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar] teaching (*Maximum Classics* (Classics for All, 2020a, p. 6)).

And non-Classicist Alex Quigley's *Closing the Vocabulary Gap* (Quigley, 2018), designed to help teachers of all subjects, advises:

Some strategies for vocabulary development, like the study of morphology to better understand words and concepts, may prove more successful in subjects with a very high percentage of Greek and Latin root words, like science, compared to developing vocabulary in a subject like English literature [...] (Quigley, 2018, p. 111).

Such endorsements have encouraged many primary school leaders to take Latin and Ancient Greek to their hearts as a further means of supporting English literacy, through knowledge of ancient word roots.<sup>21</sup> While anecdotal evidence may perhaps be compelling, Woff cautions we should be careful of making exaggerated claims about the potential benefits of language awareness courses (Woff, 1990). As Lister points out, literacy is a ‘communicative skill’, not just vocabulary knowledge (Lister, 2007, p. 28). In particular, Woff draws attention to the danger that such courses, based only on Latin or Ancient Greek word roots, only provide an ‘impoverished form of language awareness to our pupils’, merely helping a student’s passive vocabulary and not extending their active vocabulary (Woff, 1990, p. 7).<sup>22</sup> More recently, the very concept of ‘vocabulary gaps’ has come under fire by Cushing (2022), who has argued that it ‘spreads discourses about the supposed linguistic deficiencies of low-income, racialized children’ and

[...] licenses policy makers to point blame at minoritised speakers and their families, diverting attention away from educational inequalities produced by broader structures of white supremacy, global capitalism and European colonialism (Cushing, 2022).

Whatever one’s view, my own observations of classes, as a Classics teacher educator, suggest that a heavy focus on noting word roots is much less engaging for the majority of students than teachers might think, especially if it is at the expense of communicative activities, such as reading and exploring continuous texts and using the language actively, even if only in a simple way. Latin courses which promote the use of Latin as a language, with engaging subject matter and a reason for doing so,

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<sup>21</sup> For details of past studies carried out in the USA on the impact of knowledge of ancient languages word roots on attainment in SATs scores in the USA, see LaFleur (1981; 1985). For details of USA SATs examinations, which serve a very different purpose from UK SATs, being taken at a much higher age and for access to university rather than for measuring attainment at the end of primary education, see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAT> (accessed 13th August 2022).

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion, see Lister (2007, pp. 26-28).

might deliver more of what we as ancient languages teachers would prefer students to be doing. Latin as *language awareness* is in danger of missing the point: it is more than just words on a page.<sup>23</sup>

## The Classics Gap

After all that work at Key Stage 2, there follows something of a surprise. On a student's arrival at secondary school, starting in Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14), there is no statutory entitlement in classical subjects. For the vast majority of students, then, their access to a formal classical curriculum comes to an end at age 11. Perhaps some kind of mental residue remains to inform students about the classical world from this brief exposure. Certainly, Khan-Evans' (2018) research into what motivates students further along in their education careers to take up non-linguistic classical subjects at A level suggests that the impact of learning about the ancient world back in primary school is significant.

But there is a further surprise, at Key Stage 4: after a gap of three years' curriculum time, classical subjects seem to have regained ministerial approval, with both Latin and Ancient Greek languages, and the non-linguistic Ancient History<sup>24</sup> included in the EBacc.<sup>25</sup> If Romans and Ancient Greeks, Latin and even Ancient Greek are encouraged by the government at Key Stage 2, why the lack of interest in Key Stage 3? And then, how might this lead to a recurrence of these approved subjects at Key Stage 4? This was exactly the problem that the Joint Association of Classical Teachers pointed out to Kenneth Baker back in 1988 in their submission to the consultation for the National Curriculum:

The exclusion of Latin from years 1 to 3 [of the secondary curriculum] will remove the necessary base for examined courses in years 4 and 5. The

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<sup>23</sup> Porter *et al* (2022) similarly criticize the Ofsted research review for languages (Ofsted, 2021) for

...what seems to be a narrowing of the current languages curriculum, in terms of content and teaching/learning activities, with less focus on interaction and communication for a range of purposes, and a restriction on the use of authentic materials and culturally rich content as these, it is claimed, would risk 'cognitive overload' (Porter, Graham, Myles, & Holmes, 2022, p. 209).

<sup>24</sup> But not Classical Civilisation.

<sup>25</sup> The EBacc is a measure of a collection of approved GCSE examination subjects which the Government wishes to promote as being facilitating subjects for entry to the most research-intensive universities.

absence of any non-linguistic teaching about the classical world in these years will further damage the subject by removing one of the natural stimuli which leads pupils to take up Latin (Joint Association of Classical Teachers, quoted in Haviland, 1988, p. 42).

Having Romans and Ancient Greeks and the slight possibility of Latin or Ancient Greek at Key Stage 2 and then again at Key Stage 4, is better than nothing. But explicitly *not* having any at Key Stage 3 means that the thread from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 stays broken for most students in England, and thereby does much to prevent students accessing classical subjects at A level and beyond into university, unless they are lucky enough by geography to have a school nearby which continues to offer it, or are wealthy enough to pay for it (Hunt & Holmes-Henderson, 2021).

Why should this be so? Is it a matter of education policy? Ofsted argues that the three years at Key Stage 3 should comprise a broad and balanced curriculum. In it, modern foreign languages are a statutory requirement, while ancient languages are not.<sup>26</sup> Civil servants in the Department for Education have told me that ministers prioritise modern foreign languages over ancient as being more obviously needed in the national interest to support economic growth<sup>27</sup> – a point made explicit in the Key Stage 3 Languages Programme of Study:

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<sup>26</sup> Some schools offer two years only at Key Stage 3, the subject of some concern by Ofsted as potentially narrowing students' access to a 'broad, rich' curriculum and which may harm disadvantaged students (Ofsted, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, the same arguments were used 35 years ago by Dame Angela Rumbold, Minister of State for Education and Science, in response to Michael Fallon MP, in a debate in the House of Commons about the difficulties of maintaining Latin in state-maintained schools in the face of proposals for a new National Curriculum:

It has been suggested in the newspapers that Latin or Greek should, if the school so wishes, replace a modern foreign language in the list of foundation subjects. I want to take issue with that suggestion. The study of a modern foreign language serves both individual needs and the needs of the country. Worthwhile skills in such a language are an asset which can be developed and put to use by people at work or in their personal lives, at home and abroad. Compared with many major trading nations, ours has a damagingly small proportion of people who understand and speak a modern foreign language. Knowledge of a potential customer's language can be a deciding factor in securing and maintaining exports (Rumbold, in Hansard, 1987).

So, no support for Latin over modern foreign languages.

Language teaching should provide the foundation for learning further languages, equipping pupils to study and work in other countries (Department for Education, 2013a).

Curiously, exactly the same statement was made in the Key Stage 2 programme of study which *did* contain ancient languages:

Language teaching should provide the foundation for learning further languages, equipping pupils to study and work in other countries (Department for Education, 2013b)

But, at Key Stage 2, the study of ancient languages seems to have a smaller ambition than the economic wellbeing that the study of modern foreign languages can apparently bring, deserving of a special paragraph of its own:

If an ancient language is chosen the focus will be to provide a linguistic foundation for reading comprehension and an appreciation of classical civilisation. Pupils studying ancient languages may take part in simple oral exchanges, while discussion of what they read will be conducted in English. A linguistic foundation in ancient languages may support the study of modern languages at key stage 3 (Department for Education, 2013b).

According to this, then, the study of an ancient language is just a *prelude* to the study of a modern one and not an end in itself. Economic success, it seems to suggest, does not arise from the study of the ancient world alone, but can only develop in consort with the modern, with the modern taking over in due course. True economic wellbeing derives from the modern, not the ancient. Classicists can afford a wry smile when they read that, particularly in the light of the research carried out recently into career paths taken by students of classics over the years.<sup>28</sup>

### Dealing with the challenge

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, ways in which universities have embedded employability into their Classics curricula, including practices at the University of Roehampton (Barrow, Behr, Deacy, McHardy, & Tempest, 2010) and the work carried out by Bracke with Classics students engaging with local schools and communities at the University of Swansea (Bracke, 2013; 2016; 2018). For a more general overview of the employability of Classics students, see (Holmes-Henderson & Tempest, 2018).



In the absence of Department for Education support, teachers and others have tried to cover the gap. For a long time, the only organization which was taking a serious interest in addressing the gap was the Cambridge School Classics Project, under the directorships of Bob Lister and Will Griffiths. More recently, the charity Classics for All has had huge success with introducing classical subjects into state-maintained schools; over the last ten years it reports that it has supported 564 state-maintained primary schools and 483 state-maintained secondaries (Classics for All, 2021). There have been others involved as well, often working in a personal capacity.<sup>29</sup> My own interviews with several non-specialist would-be Latin teachers indicates the challenges those teachers face in getting Classics into their schools (Hunt, 2020; 2018b). Not all are successful: sometimes the battle defeats the teacher (McMillan, 2022). What the evidence shows is that the introduction of classical subjects in secondary schools can be highly dependent on institutional support, and that there can be no greater institutional support than the Department for Education.

### Reasons to be cheerful

In the past 35 years or more there have been occasional interventions favourable to classical studies in state-maintained schools: the development of the *Cambridge Latin Course* in the 1960s-1970s was seed-funded by the Nuffield Foundation with the support of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (Forrest, 1996). In 2000, the Department for Education and Employment<sup>30</sup> awarded a £5 million grant to develop ICT-based courses in mathematics, Latin and Japanese, won for Latin by the Cambridge School Classics Project (Lister, 2007). In 2013, as we have seen, the Department for Education pulled the policy levers which allowed the teaching of ancient languages at Key Stage 2. The support of classical subjects in English schools by the Government can be said, therefore, to have been rather piecemeal, with occasional windfalls among long periods of drought.

The newest interest shown by the Department for Education is the Latin Excellence Programme, announced by Gavin Williamson, then Secretary of State for Education (2019-21) on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021 (Department for Education, 2021). £4 million has been

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Harvey's description of her peripatetic model for teaching Latin across several schools in Watford, UK (Harvey, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Now called the Department for Education.

allocated to the setting up of Latin in state-maintained non-selective schools, for the period 2022-2026, with a review to follow for possible continuation. The Programme, is to be modelled on the Mandarin Excellence Programme and is designed to fill the gap at Key Stage 3, and take students up to Key Stage 4 and GCSE entry. Reaction to the programme was varied, with the media curious to know why Latin should be chosen to receive such largesse at a time of dwindling finances for schools more generally.<sup>31</sup> The winner of the tender to operate the Latin Excellence Programme was the Centre for Latin Excellence, a part of Future Teacher Training, formerly Pimlico SCITT, of the Future Academies Trust.<sup>32</sup> The Centre for Latin Excellence will recruit 40 schools, resource them both with Latin course materials and a contribution to staffing costs, train the teachers, and monitor and evaluate the programme over the next four years. The resources seem to be going to be based on the existing resources used within the Pimlico Academies multi-academy trust and are not those commonly-used in the Classics classroom<sup>33</sup>. Examples may be found on the Oak National Academy website<sup>34</sup>, and, if anything, they typify a traditional grammar-translation approach to teaching Latin, with extensive use of PowerPoint slides and teaching videos. Although I, as a teacher-educator, have some apprehensions about the methodology and the accuracy of some of the material, we should remain hopeful that the Department for Education's initiative will be successful in encouraging more state-maintained schools to put Latin back and start to fill in the Classics Gap for at least some students.

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<sup>31</sup> For an account of the reactions, see Hunt (2022b).

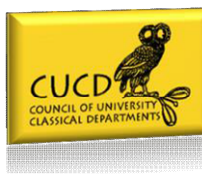
<sup>32</sup> For the Centre for Latin Excellence, see <https://latinexcellence.org/> (accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022). Unsuccessful bidders included Hands-Up Education and a consortium based on the textbook *De Romanis*. A consortium involving Classics for All chose not to bid.

<sup>33</sup> See [https://drive.google.com/file/d/189g3rS\\_cPSez6k\\_WAzRefM4tiTSTCQ/edit](https://drive.google.com/file/d/189g3rS_cPSez6k_WAzRefM4tiTSTCQ/edit) for details (accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Oak National Academy was created in April 2020 as a rapid response to the coronavirus outbreak. Teachers from leading education organisations developed freely-available digital lesson resources for all subject areas of the National Curriculum, including Latin. For details, see <https://www.thenational.academy/> (accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2022).



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