

## Speech to the Goethe Institute on Monday 12 June 2017

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour and privilege to once again have a chance to say a few words at this gathering.

The Goethe Institute has been a partner with the John Warner School over many years and we have carried out a number of exciting and innovative projects all of which have been of great value to the students and staff of the school.

### **Who are we?**

The John Warner School is part of the Hoddesdon School Trust which comprises of John Warner School with 1460 students which includes a large Sixth Form and two very successful primary schools who are our two principal feeder schools. All of us have had a long history of cooperating together and that was formalised last year with the creation of our Trust. We are a community of 2,600 staff and pupils, 1400 parents and carers on three sites.

We are an all ability school who have a very profound commitment to the teaching of modern foreign languages. We have spent a considerable amount of time and effort to ensure that our children have many options in terms of their language learning.

German is a key component of our language offer to students and it is thriving, alongside French, Italian, Mandarin and Spanish.

German is seen by our students as an interesting language to learn. They are also aware of how important the knowledge of German is in terms of career prospects for the future. We explain explicitly the value of German and

repeatedly we enforce how important it is in terms of employability to have a language.

Pupils are reminded that German is a crucial language for business, science, culture and is a key to Eastern Europe. German is the UK's second largest trading partner, after the USA. From cars to toasters, phones to DIY tools, German made products from companies such as Siemens, BMW or Bosch are all around us. German language skills will throw the doors open on a whole new world of culture. Berlin is, of course, one of the most exciting cultural cities in the world, but right across the country you can enjoy Germany's massive contribution to art, design, film and theatre.

German has been very successful as students see it as providing employment prospects in German owned and led companies. The advantages of studying German, coupled with an attempt to make it into a fun activity, lie at the centre of our approach.

### **So what have we done?**

In previous years, under the auspices of the DfE and the Goethe Institute we have had a programme which ran for the teaching of computing through the medium of German. This programme ran successfully for a number of years particularly as computing was the new 'kid on the block' in secondary education and it had a very positive effect on German, though the teaching methodology was fairly conventional and required double staffing.

Growing on from that project we are very pleased to say that we have undertaken a new project with the Goethe Institute – the Digital German Network. I ought to say at this stage that we have provided French teaching to our primary schools from year 4 for a number of years. This has been highly successful both with the enthusiasm of the students and staff at primary school and also in giving other staff the opportunity to introduce language early and to benefit from the enthusiasm generated to encourage them to be even more innovative in their own teaching. Fun German in the primary school will lead to the students coming to our school with a large German

vocabulary and most importantly a love of the subject. This new Digital Project is designed to build on that enthusiasm and exploit it so much further by offering them ways to make decisions about how they learn best selecting their own favourite apps for use on a bank of ipad minis, so that they are able to compete with and learn from one another in a structured, nurturing and more important enjoyable manner.

The German teacher responsible for the project Eleanor Golland is a highly talented linguist and teacher who has led the Digital Project.

### **How did the project start in the school? (The launch event)**

We launched the project on the 28 March 2017 by hosting 21 selected students from our two partner primary schools. We chose this time as it coincided with a visit of students from our partner school in German the Maria Ward Schule. We also included students from our year 7. The German students from our partner school were brilliant with the younger children and they added an authentic dimension to the morning. Their presentation in a mixture of English and German really impressed the students and they gelled together in groups very quickly. This may have been helped by the provision of typical German snacks which were greeted with a mixed response, though general enthusiasm resulted from the first part of the morning.

The morning was a fun event but it was designed and intended to promote the German language to the primary students and to highlight the importance of German. In a number of ways it was designed to make clear to the participants what the German Digital network aims to achieve; that is to start facilitating and strengthening the learning of German in primary schools through the use of digital media.

The Maria Ward Schule's presentation allowed the majority of the primary school students to hear authentic German for the first time. They also learned about German culture and about the Maria Ward Schule school itself. It also was an attempt for us to encourage these students to take up the modern languages exchange programme which we now have.

The surprising thing about the whole event was how much the children ran it themselves. They were enthusiastic but also disciplined and you could see the primary students warming towards the whole process. Our own students, seeing this, also gained in confidence and clearly appreciated having a chance to work with younger students. These students are our Language Leaders who in recent interviews came across as overwhelmingly in favour of cross-phased support and the learning opportunities it provides for them. Their main advice for those that follow them, as they proceed through the school, is not to be afraid and that there is so much fun to be had from helping others lower down the school and within the Trust.

### **How did we get down to using the German Apps which lie at the heart of the project on the day?**

#### **1. Exploring the German apps**

The students were assigned to small groups of four students each. Each group consisted of one primary student from Cranbourne School, one primary student from Roselands School and two Maria Ward students. Each of these groups explored one of five language learning apps. Those five apps formed the basis of the German Digital Network Project and the primary students used these five apps in their weekly after-school sessions. In their small groups, the students explored the app, played the games and learned their first German words. The aim was for students to familiarise themselves with their assigned app and become 'experts'. They prepared a short presentation of the app, in which they told other students how the app worked and what they liked best about it.

#### **2. Exchanging ideas about the assigned app**

Two groups explored the same app. Therefore, the two groups got together to exchange their ideas about the app and chose a spokesperson/people to lead their presentation.

### **3. Presentation of the apps**

Each small combined group presented the app to the rest of the students. The students explained how the app worked, what they had learned and what they liked best about the app.

### **4. Feedback**

Having listened to the small groups' presentation of the five German apps, the students had the chance to verbally give feedback about the apps to Miss Golland.

### **The next phase**

The after-school sessions that form the basis of the German Digital Network Project have commenced in the primary schools with staff and students from our school taking the lead. They have been very successful and this is best expressed in the words of Miss Golland.

*The impact of the Digital Learning Network project, launched thanks to generous funding by the Goethe Institute, has been enormous. In this day and age, a child's main preoccupation is their electronic device, so harnessing this interest in combination with language learning has been a perfect pairing. The two groups of primary children I work with come skipping in to the room each week, eager to hold the tablet and playfully encounter these new German words. They gleefully shout out the vocabulary they have acquired, and excitably compete to gain the best score in the games I have had installed for them. By the end of year 6, they will have had a sustained, positive exposure to the language as well as amassed a vast bank of German vocabulary, setting them up impeccably for the academic challenges ahead. In this vein, we will not only avoid any decline in the uptake of German, rather we will see a surge in interest and in the pursuing of prestigious German studies at secondary school and beyond.*

### **Key learning points**

This project is a great success but it comes against a background of a commitment from all the schools in the Trust on the importance of language learning and the provision of a diversity of language learning. If the will is not

there from the top, then no matter how innovative the project is, if it does not have institutional support and space it cannot thrive.

The choice of the member of staff is key, it has to be somebody with enthusiasm, organisational skills and drive, a willingness to work across a number of institutions and to create a sense of adventure and interest from the pupils and build on the enthusiasm from the primary school pupils.

You will also need to use what resources there are in the primary schools in terms of speakers or sympathetic staff who can help out.

The project engenders enthusiasm and interest but it also means that the year 7 curriculum for German has to be enhanced and flexible, as these students will be entering the school with a good knowledge of German vocabulary and will need to be taught alongside students who are just beginning. Here the Language Assistants and Language Leaders are key as they can provide enrichment.

There is no doubt, as Eleanor has said, that it is the technology that fascinates the children first, they simply love it. It is for the teacher to guide and harness this enthusiasm and interest towards the study of German. In short, good old fashion teaching skills of coaxing, instructing and celebrating achievement are at the core of its success.

Language learning is powerful beyond the learning of language itself. It promotes analytical thinking, develops children's capacity for sequencing ideas and structuring information and, at the same time, engenders an appreciation of the diversity of culture within the modern world. There are tangible benefits within mathematics and music and the rigour required to be proficient in speaking, listening to or writing in a foreign tongue, immeasurably enhances children's ability to engage with others on an academic and social basis, both in the United Kingdom and across the world. It also improves academic outcomes across the curriculum with recent changes to our own examination

systems placing an ever greater emphasis on retention of key vocabulary and effective written communication.

One recent striking example we have had at the John Warner School was of a class to class group Skype session between children in year 8, that is to say 12 and 13 year olds, in our school talking to and looking at the world of children in China. The technology actually worked perfectly and the children were genuinely awestruck at both the similarities and the profound differences between their experience and those of children in Beijing. This is one instance of the ways in which we can use technology to break down barriers and to develop a sustainable interrelationship between schools and students.

As an aside to this, the empowerment of staff is profound, whilst this project was running another member of the MFL faculty who had some knowledge of Japanese wrote a bid to the Japanese government and proceeded to get funding for a Japanese Cultural Awareness Programme. This bubbling up of enthusiasm is a welcome bi-product of pushing forward initiatives.

It also provides a hugely valuable vehicle for staff development and the creation of the next generation of school leaders both in terms of the modern language faculty and across the school and the Trust.

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