

Children with SEND deserve authentic inclusion in the foreign languages classroom, report warns

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Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities should be given

equal opportunities to learn languages, a new report argues.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that children with SEND are often removed from language lessons, because the subject is perceived as "difficult", an assumption that is further exacerbated by trends with GCSE subject choices. Instead of withdrawing children with additional needs from the foreign languages classroom, opportunities should be provided for them to thrive within it.

Evidence shows learning new languages can be possible and hugely beneficial for many children with developmental differences, learning difficulties and a range of additional needs.

Foreign [language learning](#) develops students' linguistic awareness, speech skills and knowledge of grammar. Learning a new language can also provide opportunities to develop [social skills](#) and interact with peers, and the emphasis on [communication skills](#) can help children with SEND to grow in confidence and bolster their motivation to interact with others.

Dr. Katie Howard from the University of Exeter, examined existing research about learning a [second language](#) as part of the [report](#), published in the journal *Support for Learning*. Her analysis concludes that not only is possible for learners with additional needs to learn another language, but it can be a hugely enriching part of their education.

Dr. Howard said, "Language learning is not only possible for children with SEND but may yield myriad and unexpected benefits. It is important that children are not routinely removed from the foreign languages classroom but instead are provided with opportunities to develop a second or third language. There is a pressing need for greater collaboration in both research and practice in order to improve the experiences of students with SEND in the foreign languages classroom.

"Opportunities to celebrate diversity in the foreign languages classroom—whether that is neuro-ethnic, cultural, or [linguistic diversity](#)—should be taken wherever possible. This will help to nurture a [learning environment](#) where all students feel valued and, in turn, encouraged to make the most out of their language learning education."

The report says normalising multilingualism and language learning in more monolingual countries like England should be a high priority, particularly given that almost 1 in 5 primary-aged pupils in England speak English as an additional language.

Despite the many advantages, the report acknowledges that there may be certain challenges for pupils with SEND within the foreign languages classroom. It makes evidence-informed recommendations to support students with different needs, including strategies to alleviate foreign language anxiety and adopt multi-sensory approaches to language learning.

Dr. Howard said, "By not giving students with SEND access to, or support within, the foreign languages classroom, we are in danger of ignoring the wealth of strengths they bring and precluding them from the opportunity to learn a skill for life."

More information: Katie B. Howard, Supporting learners with special educational needs and disabilities in the foreign languages classroom, *Support for Learning* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/1467-9604.12449](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12449)

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