



Dear Families,

### **A message from School Council President**

On Wednesday 15 April we held a closed extraordinary school council meeting that was dedicated to the subject of bilingual education at Footscray Primary School. The bilingual program is something we hold with pride and carries historical significance but has also experienced challenges over the years for various reasons. During this meeting members of council were invited to present information on the best direction of the school for the best benefits and outcomes for our students.

Continuing the Bilingual program has always been an aspiration of School Council which was mirrored in its agreement in a previous meeting to retain bilingual education at Footscray Primary School.

Following discussion a further decision, which was not made lightly, was that in order to run a successful and sustainable bilingual program we need to adopt a commonly taught target language to ensure that the program is set up for success. This included provision of a high number of quality bilingual teachers, and more accessible language continuation pathways into secondary and tertiary studies.

The design and development of a high quality LOTE program will run in parallel with an extensive community consultation for an alternative target language.

Whilst it is with great sadness that I report Vietnamese will no longer be the bilingual language, it is with a great sense of optimism that I look forward to the school developing and delivering a Vietnamese LOTE program that will honour and exemplify the rich culture, traditions and language of our Vietnamese community. I am sure these programs will not only complement each other but, together, will reinforce and exemplify our commitment to multiculturalism and improved student learning outcomes. I will now hand over to Jen Briggs to provide her Principal update on this subject.

**Regards**

**Raylene Varone**

**President – Footscray Primary School Council**

### **A message from School Principal**

I have spent the last 12 weeks researching best practice in Bilingual Education and I am really excited about the opportunities we are going to be able to provide for the children of Footscray PS. I want to assure you that my vision is not short-sighted, and my intention is to develop a strong, sustainable bilingual program that proudly represents the West into the foreseeable future.

My research has led me to the firm belief that our best chances of success in assuring our students graduate with high academic outcomes and second language proficiency is to



adopt a target language that is one of the most commonly taught languages in the state. These languages are Chinese – Mandarin, Italian, Japanese, Indonesian and French.

I have presented my findings on the operational considerations to School Council and invited members to present alternate views, ask questions and make comments to ensure we had considered all options. On Wednesday night, we made the emotionally difficult decision to adopt a new target language for our Bilingual Program which will commence for Foundation students in 2021. Our Vietnamese language learning will continue as an innovative, comprehensive LOTE program for our current cohort of students.

Language learning is not the only way to develop intercultural awareness and connection. I will provide dedicated time for our talented Vietnamese staff to establish ongoing learning partnerships with the Vietnamese community. We will build on current partnerships and create new opportunities for our students to immerse themselves within the Vietnamese culture that is such a significant part of our community. My vision for FPS is to be the hub of our community and I see enormous potential to develop these links between our students and our Vietnamese community.

Throughout Term Two, we will work with our school community to research each of the most commonly taught languages, define our objectives for the Bilingual Program, and select the language that is most likely to provide high-quality continuity of learning, accessibility to pathways beyond primary education and a sustainable program.

Please continue reading for questions and answers that unpack the grounds for my recommendations to School Council and to clarify how our journey forwards might look from here. As always I invite you to please email me on [briggs.jenny.r@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:briggs.jenny.r@edumail.vic.gov.au) to share your feedback and questions or to schedule a time for a phone chat.

**Jen Briggs**  
**Principal – Footscray Primary School**

### **What will language learning look like in 2021 and beyond at FPS?**

Foundation students in 2021 will participate in a 50/50 Bilingual Program. This means 50% of the Victorian Curriculum will be delivered in the newly adopted target language, and the remaining 50% in English. The benefits of bilingual education are well-evidenced including increased academic achievement, improved memory and executive function, and increased capacity for further language learning.

We will develop targets and measure student outcomes in three areas;

*Language Proficiency Outcomes* - Children who participate in an immersive bilingual program from their first year of primary school are likely to graduate Year 6 with a Year 9 or 10 level language proficiency. I am truly excited about our future in this space and the outcomes we can deliver for our children and the local community.



*Academic Outcomes* – We will continue to strive for excellence in all areas of curriculum achievement for our students. Students in the bilingual program will be exposed to the full Victorian Curriculum and assessment against these standards will be consistently measured to continually improve our practice. Language learning strongly aligns with the transdisciplinary themes and core values of the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme.

*Cultural Outcomes* – The Victorian Curriculum and the IB Primary Years Programme place emphasis on the importance of intercultural awareness and understanding of the multitude of cultures that make up our global and local communities. Both our Bilingual and LOTE programs will deliver these learning experiences for our children.

Our current students will continue to learn Vietnamese up to 2 hours a week as they move through their time at Footscray PS. There a number of options for this model, however, anything above 2 hours a week creates significant operational and financial issues. There is an option to provide Vietnamese LOTE as one of the specialist subjects to students in the bilingual stream also and we can present these options during our community consultation phase across this year to hear your thoughts on this.

Once we have selected our target bilingual language, we will begin a rigorous recruitment process with the aim of having a teacher from Term 4 this year dedicated to developing and promoting our program ready for 2021.

### **How do we determine who makes the decisions?**

This is a tricky one so I thought I would try and add some clarity here. I hope I have shown in my short time at FPS that my leadership stance is based on human relationships, collaboration, and open communication.

When a decision is operational, meaning it impacts on financial and human resources, the Principal reviews the evidence, crunches numbers and makes the decision based on what is best for the students and the school. In this case, the model of bilingual education and choice of language were both impacting significantly on the human and financial resources of the school and the learning outcomes of our children.

I chose to include the school council in this discussion to ensure I had considered all the evidence available before making such a significant decision. The choice of language, if kept within the parameters of what I consider operationally viable, is very much something that can be decided through community consultation.

### **Why a commonly taught language?**

When I make decisions on programming, I look at where it is already working and support this with current research. I visited and spoke with many Principals within the Bilingual Network and have formed some strong collegial relationships with them. Whilst all of the schools agree that recruitment is their major challenge, they are all running fully staffed, high performing programs. The common thread is that their target languages are within the top six commonly taught languages in the state.



When a language is widely taught it naturally flows through to creating a larger recruitment pool of qualified teachers. Bilingual teachers are not always trained language teachers however the Language Teacher Workforce Data gives us an indicator of the number of teachers available. I have included data below from the 'Languages Provision in Victorian Government Schools, 2018'.

Table 1. Victorian Languages Teacher Workforce Data

Language	Total Qualified Language Teachers
Japanese	351
Italian	337
French	307
Chinese (Mandarin)	290
Indonesian	276
German	140
Auslan	80
Spanish	59
Greek	17
Vietnamese	16
Other	45

There are many other benefits in adopting a commonly taught language.

### *Collaboration Opportunities*

If we adopt a common language, it is likely that we will share a language with one of the other Victorian Bilingual Schools. This would allow us to form teacher professional networks, develop strong partnerships with agencies and universities to strengthen our recruitment pool, share resources and learning experiences, and develop cross-school assessment and moderation practices.

### *Learning Pathways*

Adopting a commonly taught language creates greater opportunities for our graduating students to continue to study the language at their chosen secondary school and into university. Our precinct secondary school, Footscray High, delivers two of the most commonly taught languages, Japanese and Italian.

### *Available Resources*

The Department of Education and Training have many resources available online for teachers covering curriculum, professional learning, pedagogy, and online assessments which are available for the most commonly taught languages.

### **What will community consultation look like?**

We invite anyone who has a strong interest in selecting the bilingual language to join our bilingual subcommittee by emailing [footscray.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:footscray.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au) or calling the office.



The subcommittee will work with myself and an independent consultant engaged by DET, Ian Claridge, to extensively research each of the most commonly taught languages and make a recommendation to School Council to narrow the choice of languages from five to three. If the recommendation is endorsed by School Council, we will begin a comprehensive community consultation to make the final decision on the target language we will be adopting from 2021 onwards. There will be many other aspects of the Bilingual Program that we will take to community consultation and I will release more about this throughout the term.

**This is a combined message delivered to you in collaboration between Raylene Varone and Jen Briggs**