

## Language teaching under further threat

### Teacher shortage threatens language lessons

By Liz Ivens

A PRIVATE school headteacher has warned that languages could fall off the curriculum within a decade because the country will run out of staff capable of teaching them.

Katherine Vintiner forecasted that schools would face a "perfect storm" in which teachers trying to teach a language in the primary years would not speak it fluently because they themselves had not been taught.

The principal of Hampton Court House School said latest figures that showed a rapid decline in the uptake of modern foreign languages schools are "shocking but sadly not surprising".

The annual British Council report showed there had been a more than 60

per cent fall in numbers taking GCSE French in the last two decades from 331,000 in 2003 to 131,000 in 2023.

In England, state schools do not have to teach those aged five to seven a language if they choose not to. It only becomes compulsory for children aged seven to 11 to study a language.

Ms Vintiner said: "In practice, many schools are barely able to offer a language even when it becomes compulsory, with some only able to offer 30 minutes a week."

"Add to that the growing problem of finding suitably qualified language teachers and you have a perfect storm. In too many schools, children are being taught a language by a teacher who, while enthusiastic, cannot even speak the language fluently themselves."

...not be happening. Yes, it was quite a moment."  
Charles III: The Coronation Year will be screened on Boxing Day 26 at 6.50pm on BBC One and iPlayer.

She added: "We face the very real prospect of a vicious circle of seeing languages drop off the curriculum altogether because not enough people are studying them and becoming proficient enough in them to continue their studies and then teach others and so on."

"That could happen within a decade or even sooner and that would be a great tragedy."

Languages have not been compulsory in England beyond the age of 14 since 2004. Ofsted has noted the number of entries for GCSEs in modern foreign languages has "declined significantly" since that time.

In 2019, the exam regulator Ofqual reported entries for modern foreign language exams had almost halved since 2022.