

Notes from a visit to Highgate Junior School, 8th January 2025

Abbie Dean and I visited Highgate Junior, where we were hosted by the Head, Philippa Studd, and about a dozen Year 5 pupils. We also watched Philippa deliver a lesson to a Year 5 class on the history of the English language in general, and Norman French in particular.

- Highgate Junior runs from Year 3 to Year 6 with 5 form entry.
- The pupils study French in Years 3 and 4, Spanish in Year 5 and a carousel of languages – Russian, Chinese, German and Spanish in Year 6. The vast majority of pupils then go to the Highgate Senior School where they study French in Year 7 plus one language from the languages they have studied in the Year 6 carousel. Philippa also teaches Portuguese in Year 3 as a means of getting to know the pupils in their first year.
- Philippa teaches one 25-minute WoLLoW lesson to each of the five Year 5 classes, as a particularly effective and enjoyable way of getting to know her pupils. It is effective because the lessons involve a lot of interaction with the pupils and the resources mean that Philippa already has a ready-made lesson plan.
- The pupils to whom we spoke had very diverse linguistic backgrounds: the five pupils who showed us round – a random sample of pupils - spoke Persian, Korean, Hindi, Mandarin and French, and Hebrew, Turkish, Italian, Polish, Chinese were also mentioned as languages the pupils knew from life outside school.
- The pupils were unanimous in the enthusiasm they expressed for WoLLoW – although the presence of the Head – also their teacher – might have influenced their response.
- The pupils mentioned the following as key elements of their experience of WoLLoW:
 - whereas the study of a language can be stressful – the need to get things right, the fear of getting things wrong, the pressure to learn – they said that WoLLoW didn't feel like that: there were no wrong answers.
 - In a WoLLoW lesson everyone can be good. There is a sense of equality.
 - WoLLoW is more about talking and sharing – oracy – than it is about being taught, as in other lessons.
 - WoLLoW has lots of fun activities and has greater flexibility than other subjects.
 - WoLLoW gives pupils a 'space to share' things about themselves and their own lives.
 - WoLLoW lessons allow pupils to teach each other and to work together in groups.
 - WoLLoW offers the chance for each pupil to take a lesson.
 - WoLLoW allows pupils to link languages with other subjects, like History.
 - There was a feeling that 25 minutes was too short a lesson and pupils would like, if possible, to spend more time on one subject/topic/language.

John Cloughton
January 2026