



WoLLOW Conference: 3rd June 2026

Highgate Junior School

Dramatis personae [in order of appearance]

Philippa Studd, Principal, Highgate Junior School

Steffan Griffiths, Head of Norwich School, co-founder of WoLLOW

Abbie Dean, teacher of languages and WoLLOW at Norwich School, co-founder of WoLLOW

Soofia Amin, Assistant Head Teacher, Kensington Primary School, Newham

Dick Hudson, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, University College, London

Rachel Quick, Principal, The Wherry School, Norwich

5 Highgate Junior School pupils

A Highgate Junior School parent

Eva Eppler, Reader in Linguistics at the University of Roehampton

Emma Marsden, Professor of Language Education, Department of Education, University of Oxford

John Cloughton, co-founder of WoLLOW

Mukhtar Mukhlis, former pupil of King Edward's School, Birmingham, WoLLOW teacher, student at King's College, London

The Conference was attended by over 75 people: teachers from the state and independent sector, academics, representatives of HMC, ASCL, Leigh Academies Trust, the EAL Academy, and 20 Chinese TESOL students from University College, London, led by Dina Mehmedbegovic.

Philippa Studd, Principal, Highgate Junior School

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to our junior school here at Highgate School. Thank you to all for making the effort to come over to Highgate and we're really happy to have you here. I am Philippa Studd and I'm the principal here at Highgate Junior School I want to start by sharing a brief anecdote as to why I'm so excited to be involved in hosting this WOLLOW conference. I am a huge advocate and lover of the WOLLOW programme. I'm unashamed about that.

During my interview for the principal of the junior school job, I was asked what I would teach the pupils if I was successfully appointed to the post. I knew that I'd want to teach each Year 3 class, of which there are five, and each Year Five class, of which there are five, for 25 minutes a week. It was really important to me to be able to know all the children in this rather large junior school setting. I wanted to teach them something that allowed me to get to know them as individual pupils. I wanted it to be something which conveyed my own passions as an educationalist, so reading and language learning being my two big factors. I wanted to teach them something that allowed me to get to know them as individual pupils. I wanted it to be something which conveyed my own passions as an educationalist. And I wanted it to be something that they really enjoyed and looked forward to each week. And, by lucky chance, I came upon WoLLoW and it does all that, And the children absolutely love it.

Steffan Griffiths, Head, Norwich School, co-founder of WoLLoW

WoLLoW started out as a discussion between John Cloughton and me about how the language departments – English, MFL, Classics - in school might work together for the greater good. However, as it evolved, we came to see that WoLLoW could do other things we hadn't envisaged. First, WoLLoW works in a context that's specifically set up for pupils with additional needs. Because it's inclusive, because it's fun, because it's open-ended, it seems to work for people who have felt excluded from more traditional modes of language learning. We didn't realise that at the start but that's been a really exciting perspective to it.

Another bonus is the involvement of home and heritage languages: languages that aren't traditionally offered in schools are represented and the marginalised child is brought into the centre of your classroom.

Why does it work? Because it's fun and because it's detailed and accurate and effective. Abbie Dean has created all the resources and has put a lot of work into each lesson, the presentations, the worksheets, the crib sheets. This gives you confidence in classrooms. And it has opened up more areas of the curriculum, from languages, all languages into history, into geography, into Maths. There really isn't a part of the syllabus that you can't do through a multilingual, multicultural approach. And that has almost become a way of seeing, which is exciting. And the dimension that comes in is PSHE, an intercultural understanding, and just the way that we appreciate other people in our school and the way we appreciate other cultures. This may just be the most powerful thing that any educator can seek to be doing. We really do think that WoLLoW is a powerful educational tool right across the curriculum.

Abbie Dean, teacher of languages at Norwich School, co-founder of WoLLoW, and resource wizard.

As a central principle, we are trying to get our pupils engaged and enthusiastic, have fun and be curious about languages. The National Curriculum has the same aspiration as we do, but it wasn't quite happening in my classroom. WoLLoW is also an opportunity to really bridge that gap between Year 6 and Year 7, the great problem of transition when pupils primary experience is so inconsistent. We look at skills, we look at giving them a great experience of language learning, not just European languages, how all languages work and how languages are linked. We want them to arrive at Year 7 with those skills and the engagement, the enthusiasm to really tackle language learning in Key Stage 3.

We want our pupils to be curious about languages and to be excited about languages. We want them to see how languages work. So, we don't teach them the grammar of a particular language but show them that there are grammars that unite languages. We show them that they share language families, that there are patterns that we can spot. We teach these problem-solving, pattern-spotting skills and that is what makes a good linguist. And it's really easy to teach because you do not need to be a languages teacher. As long as you're passionate about literacy, then you can pick up a WoLLoW lesson and teach it.

We also want to celebrate linguistic diversity, cultural diversity and that is the jewel in the crown of WoLLoW. We want to show them that it is important. We really want the language curriculum to show them that they live in a global world. They're already experiencing lots of languages in their classroom, in their community, in our country that perhaps they haven't thought about before. There is also the importance of linking with other subjects. We use maps, geography is in every lesson. We use history, we look at timelines. Why are our languages as they are? Why do our languages spread around the world? It really is interdisciplinary in that area.

When the pupils spot something, they are so excited. And they're the most excited when they look at the board and they spot their own language. I was teaching a girl in Year 2 from Sri Lanka. She looked at the board and she saw Sinhala numbers one to ten. She leapt out of her seat because she hadn't seen that before. She hadn't seen herself being represented.

We look at sign-language and we also look at braille. The lesson on braille is really excellent. It's one that my kids particularly like. And I get in some braille books and we go through them and they start to use it themselves by colouring in the dots. Inclusion is also key to our programme. We want our pupils to be proud of their multilingual communities: there are lessons about Multilingual Me, Multilingual Manchester and the lessons can be adapted for anywhere.

In the end, what do we think we do?

- We are exploring, trying to make kids curious and we're having fun.
- We're talking about our identity and about our heritage and about our experiences.

- We are improving literacy, pattern-spotting, problem-solving, key skills in literacy, not just in languages.
- We do oracy: discussion is at the heart of WoLLoW lessons. We want the pupils to be centre stage, to be the expert in the room and to share their learning through talking.
- WoLLoW is about equality and inclusion, the celebration of diversity.
- WoLLoW talks about empire and migration.
- WoLLoW links with all subjects, geography, history, RE, Maths, Science, PSHE.
- WoLLoW is a wonderful way to show our EAL pupils that they are valued in our classroom because they have amazing ability in languages.
- WoLLoW addresses community cohesion.
- WoLLoW works really well for SEND pupils.
- WoLLoW is perfect material for partnership, whether it is teachers or senior pupils who are doing the teaching.

How can it work in your school? You just need to be brave and go for it. We know that it's easier at Key Stage 2 than it is at Key Stage 3. although that's not to say it is easy at Key Stage 2. There is so much demand on your curriculum time. However, you can try these:

- You can teach it as the language curriculum.
- You can teach it as a lesson alongside your language lessons.
- You can teach it as a club.
- You can bring it into different parts of the curriculum.
- You can use it in your English provision, focusing on literacy, where our words come from and the history of English.
- You can use it with PSHE focusing on belonging and citizenship and communities within our school.
- You can use it as a stand-alone lesson, as in European Day of Languages.
- You can teach it at certain moments in the year: the end of Year 9 when pupils are not going to do French next year, after the SATs exams, in the period after internal exams.
- You can also share it with parents. This is an excellent way to get families involved in school in a way that possibly they haven't been able to before.

Soofia Amin, Assistant Head Teacher, Kensington Primary School

My head teacher at the time said to me, 'I want us to promote all the languages'. I was like, 'Great, how do we do that?' I couldn't find anything. What came up more and more in my research was multilingualism, which nobody spoke about at that time to me. All I heard was EAL in schools. The more I learned about multilingualism, the more I shared with staff, the more our practice changed. Suddenly teachers were going into the classrooms and, instead

of seeing their class as half empty because so many pupils were EAL, they were messaging me, 'Soofia, most of my class speak three, four languages.' So, the classes weren't empty. They were full. That was the first thing we noticed. And another thing we noticed was it was like a light, as if we had struck a light and everything was on fire. People were excited that they suddenly had these multilingual children, whereas before it was a struggle.

And then in 2021, Kensington Primary decided to do a whole school approach to multilingualism. I kept saying to my head teacher and the leadership team, 'I don't know, nobody's doing this. How can we have a whole school approach to multilingualism? I don't see what it looks like.' And that's where I met Professor Roberto Filippi from UCL, who came to my school and said, 'Actually, Soofia, this is exactly what we need.' And so, the idea developed into a big flourishing multilingual curriculum. And that's how I came upon WoLLoW. In 2023, I put WoLLoW into the curriculum.

I started talking to families in their different language groups. These are some of the things that I heard from them. 'My child only replies in English, so there's no point in us using our home language.' 'My home language would hold them back in school.' This is a really predominant belief that parents hold. 'I don't want my child to have an accent.' 'I don't think my language is important for their education.' That's completely wrong. Research showed that children that are strong in their home language will outperform in English further on down the line, especially if the parents are supporting their literacy in their home language.

All languages have equal status in a multilingual approach. Now, all children are really proud and they openly boast about their languages. Before a child's identity was lost. Now they feel that they have unique skills. Languages are viewed as a strength, and a child feels happy and secure in school.

And what was really interesting was the impact on my own perception. I was born and brought up here. I'm from India originally, so my parents spoke Urdu. And I always thought 'I'm a monolingual'. Until I started doing this work and working with universities, I thought that I was monolingual. I didn't even count Urdu as part of this. So, I had my own self-discovery of, 'Oh my goodness, I speak Urdu, that's amazing. It's a different script. I did a GCSE in it. I've got an A. And why did I not think it was a language?'

In our communication curriculum, we put in Promoting First Languages. This is PFL, not MFL. And that's where I discovered WoLLoW. With WoLLoW, we're looking at how languages work and the history of languages. And all together, children use all their languages, so it's part of teaching and learning as well. We launched WoLLoW in 2023 and from Year 1 to Year 6 we use WoLLoW in the PFL lessons. These PFL lessons don't happen every week, but they will have a PFL lesson every couple of weeks in each year group. In the beginning, we put the WoLLoW curriculum into Year 4 to Year 6, but now we've gone down to year 3 to Year 2 to

Year 1, thinking about language awareness. what a language looks like. Teachers are really creative with this.

We do workshops with families and show them what we're doing. So, we did a whole series of workshops on WoLLoW. Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 children and their parents had lessons on WoLLoW, Sanskrit, Hindi and Urdu. They all came in and they took part in these lessons with their child and it changed parents' perceptions about their own languages. An Italian father said 'It was fascinating to learn how children from multi-language backgrounds actually perform better in secondary level exams than those who identify as one-language children.'

As part of this, we created a multilingual library that is organized and maintained by our children. We have over 35 languages currently in our library with over 150 books. These are donated by parents, the community, staff, anybody who goes on holiday. It's really hard to manage, it was absolute mayhem in there when we first opened it. And the children heard that it was going to be closed – it wasn't - but they actually demonstrated in the playground. They actually raised a petition. I came in one day and there was a petition. I thought, 'That's not a bad thing, because now they take ownership of it'. I see a lot of children showing other children their languages here. A lot of children are curious about languages, just like through WoLLoW, so this just extends into the library.

So, what is the impact of WoLLoW at Kensington? This is a Year 5 teacher:

'The WoLLoW lessons are really engaging and are a great resource to teach children about languages, where they come from, what links they can make with their own languages. It provides an incredible depth of knowledge about the history of English language and many other languages.'

They might just have stand-alone WoLLoW lessons, but sometimes they use some of the ideas and include them in other lessons as well. This is from a Year 5 pupil:

'I love the fact that we get to learn about different languages and find out exactly where they come from. I really wish we could do more of these lessons. It is so exciting to be able to link our own home languages to the ones we are learning about in class.'

Dick Hudson, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, University College, London

I am here as one of the members of CLiE (Committee for Linguistics in Education), and the Chair of the UK Linguistics Olympiad). We're really, really pleased to support WoLLoW. We see WoLLoW very much as the modern representative of Language Awareness, a movement that was invented in this country. It hardly exists in our schools but it's very strong

internationally, very strong. A lot of governments like the government of Finland, for example, build language awareness, a British invention, into its national curriculum.

Rachel Quick, Principal, The Wherry School, Norwich, a special school for autistic pupils

Languages are part of our broad and balanced curriculum. That curriculum includes understanding the world in which we live for a group of learners for whom this is a huge challenge. If we remove that, we have removed a fundamental educational right for them. We can't say that a modern foreign language is not for a SEN child. We should be reflecting the global reality and normalising multilingualism. That's the world in which our children are growing up. And my young children are fascinated by languages and cultures beyond the European context, Japanese or Chinese culture. We only have to look at the films they choose to watch, the music they listen to. That lies beyond our own experience.

It is fascinating to watch our children learn in a language beyond English through WoLLoW. They slow down. Whereas at other times, we are looking for pace, with another language they will stop. They'll think and then they'll speak. And you see the anxiety around communication drop. And that's something that we too can practise with our young people when we're dealing with basic social communication. Again, pupils can grow in confidence.

Why did we choose WoLLoW? We were seeing increased anxiety about languages, in particular, languages because of the fear of failure, trying to do something in a foreign language. So, we had disengagement, lots of learners basically not in the classroom. Parents were saying that I was wasting time getting them to do French or Spanish. Can they go do something else instead? So, the disengagement was not just from the child but equally from the parents. And yet we wanted to do have a positive engagement with MFL, wanted them to do a GCSE. So, what did we do? We found WoLLoW and lifted some of the primary level WoLLoW lessons into the school.

But alongside taking some of the primary WoLLoW approaches into the school, we changed the approach. The pupils are crawling around on the floor, investigating, sitting, doing different things that actually challenged what a child thought that learning was about and how they worked to perform as a learner. So, all we are doing is contributing. We have floor books, great big art books and we all contribute together. We might put things on it: Post-it notes, photographs, quotes, various different elements, so that actually it's shared learning. And that again is a change for autistic children because collaborative learning is a different approach.

Philippa Studd

WoLLoW works really well as part of a whole school approach and that's how we get the buy-in. A few years ago, we put into our school priorities that we really wanted the children to see themselves in the curriculum. And this relates to their sense of belonging, which is clearly an important issue in the wider curriculum debate.

WoLLoW is something that really does bring the classroom to life and allows me to know the pupils as real individual people.

The aim of the Key Stage 2 curriculum here is to enthuse and inspire the children to really enjoy learning foreign languages, to see the benefits and advantages of learning languages far beyond just learning vocabulary and grammatical conjugations. and to think about the culture, about the skills around language learning like oracy and collaboration, about social and current affairs. So, the emphasis here in the junior school was based on making sure that they went up to the senior school really excited to learn languages.

For me, the gauge of how much they enjoy WoLLoW is when I go into this class on a Friday morning. They're all rushing over to their pegboard and all the pegs go onto yellow because they're so excited about being able to spend 25 minutes doing WoLLoW. At the end of every lesson, they say, 'Oh, how is it over already? It's only been 25 minutes.' I take that as a gauge that they do really enjoy learning it.

If you can persuade your senior leadership team to let you give it a go, the proof will be in the pudding because it is so easy to deliver. You get all the schemes of work, you get the crib sheets. Anyone can do it. Staff enjoy doing it, even as a cover lesson, because it's super easy and interesting and fun. I think that will basically sell itself and I've had nothing but positive feedback about it.

5 Highgate Junior Pupils

Each one of the pupils gave an account of something that had particularly interested them from the WoLLoW lessons: cuneiform, language families, creating your own language. They ended by summing up why they enjoyed WoLLoW lessons:

- 'Our class loves WoLLoW because it is entertaining, fun, and different from other lessons.'
- 'I like it because I can use a creative side in my brain.'
- 'I like it because it's never repetitive and it always feels exciting.'
- 'I like it because we learn how language is formed and why they have so many cognates.'
- 'I like it because we discover all the different languages spoken in our school. And I like it because it really interests me to learn about how language evolved and how it first started.'

A Highgate Junior School parent

My daughter just told me, 'I look forward to all these Fridays', so I asked whether it was because the weekend was coming. And she said, 'No. It's WoLLoW day.' And she explained to me and she loves your lesson so much. For me, I think they are able to connect some dots, not only between the cultures, but through their own small histories. My daughter was exposed to many transitions, changes between countries, schools, neighbours and I think through WoLLoW, she's able to establish her identity, her own voice and listen to the other voices, learn about new things. She's always so enthusiastic, so excited about learning new things from her friends, from all the teachers. And I'm also a great advocate of WoLLoW, giving us all these things.

Eva Eppler, Reader in Linguistics at the University of Roehampton, member of CLiE

I've been a WoLLoW fan since day one. I think the programme is absolutely excellent and really brings more foreign languages into the foreground and makes them fun again. And I think we've heard quite a bit today that languages are not always fun.

Emma Marsden, Professor of Language Education, Department of Education, University of Oxford

I used to be a French and Spanish teacher in a secondary school. I then was an academic at the University of York for 22 years and a month ago I moved to the University of Oxford where I continue my work as a Professor of Language Education. I have been chairing the Modern Languages Working Group in Northern Ireland who have taken a different decision to England. They are going, at key stage two, with a language and cultural awareness through multilingualism curriculum. That's why I'm here, in part. I've been following WoLLoW from a distance for a long time and WoLLoW has been incredibly useful in my work. The aims of the proposed Northern Ireland curriculum are likely to be along the lines of:

- Linguistic expression of culture and cultural expression through languages other than English.
- Language families, variation and use over time and place.
- Learning strategies.
- Intercultural communication strategies.
- Constructs and meta-language about how other languages work.
- Language knowledge, skills and communication in another language.

As you can see, WoLLoW is really useful in addressing many of these aims.

Abbie Dean, reporting the research of Dr Sophie Vauzour, Associate Professor, University of East Anglia.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09571736.2025.2591315>

The first thing is that pupils, when they talked about WoLLoW, expressed in her research that they were curious and that, through the WoLLoW lessons, they had a sense of wonder. And I think that word 'wonder' is something that WoLLoW really aspires to create. They were interested in the connections with their friends, but they were also interested in the connections that they found within themselves. talking about understanding their own journey. Then this provided the motivation to want to learn languages and that is essential as we start our language learning journey.

When it came to multilingualism, pupils were quite sceptical because they hadn't had a chance to talk about it before WoLLoW lessons. If somebody said, 'Well, I speak French.' Oh really, do you? Can you write it, prove it?' There was an element of suspicion, but through WoLLoW they were able to discuss it, they were able to really have meaningful conversations with their friends. This then led to a bit of a shift. Now they wanted to celebrate their own linguistic ability, but also that of other people. This emerged through this real celebration of multicultural awareness and multilingual awareness in our classrooms. Now they think it's really cool when their peers know a language. So, they are shifting their understanding of themselves, but also their understanding and acceptance of their peers and the people in their classrooms and their communities.

Pupils grow more confident in sharing sentimental memories about their cultures and identities. The key point there is that sentimental things, things that are important to them, an intrinsic part of their identity. If they're willing to share, then we get that cultural element: we get to know our pupils and they get to know each other.

And finally, this last bit about teachers really enjoying it. Perhaps a teacher would be a bit frightened to teach a WoLLoW lesson because they don't have all the answers, because they're not sure about the history of English. I don't know all the languages that we come across in WoLLoW lessons. So, it's a unifier in that I can say to my pupils, I don't know. You don't know. Let's find out. We are all in this together. The expert in the room isn't me, it's probably my pupil who can speak Persian. And so, it's a different approach and it does take a little bit of bravery to start off but actually, once you give it a go, kids quite like it when you don't know something. In fact, they love it. It is a really nice way to run a lesson. And quite often I just sit down and let them talk about it.

John Cloughton, co-founder of WoLLoW

I believe that if we can be teaching our pupils, particularly when they're young, to understand each other, to value each other, to feel that they belong themselves, that they have a sense of identity, that could be the most precious thing. So, WoLLoW is not just to do with learning languages, it's about the very nature of the society in which our children will grow up. I have shown three slides: the Curriculum and Assessment Review aims for multicultural awareness and understanding, diversity and inclusion. That is what WoLLoW is doing. Prince Charles, speaking to the US Congress emphasised the importance of these issues, even if the US President doesn't agree, or understand. So, he must be in favour of WoLLoW. In 1975 Lord Bullock wrote in his report on languages that the inclusion of heritage languages was vital to our curriculum. For 50 years we have been ignoring those words but WoLLoW changes that.

Mukhtar Mukhlis, student at King's College, London, former teacher of WoLLoW

I've never been taught WoLLoW. I've only ever been on the delivery end of it and yet I feel like I have learned so much and had so much opened up to me because of it. It made me realize how much I was missing out on in my primary education language and how missing out in this way caused so much confusion later on. I have always felt like there's been a sense of disconnect or a sense of having lost myself for a big part of my conscious years. And a lot of the artistic work I'm doing right now is working with other people who also find themselves between different cultures and struggling to find other ways to reconnect or to express their sense of identity. As I do more and more of that, I realise how much WoLLoW has in common with the arts education stuff that I'm doing right now.

Languages, like art, are a way that people find a sense of identity, a way that people reconnect with home when they aren't necessarily in an environment that feels like home. And when art and languages aren't given due regard, it's easier for you to be erased. And when your identity becomes erased, it's easier for you to become assimilated. And when you're assimilated, there's no diversity of ideas. And when there's no diversity of ideas, well, that's not a good thing. In sum, I really, really appreciate the work that WoLLoW is doing for people, both people my age and younger pupils who have been in or are in the same or similar situations as me, I think it's doing the right job and doing the right work in giving them the space they need to counteract this assimilation by platforming who they really are and not what they feel like they should be.

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