

Analysis on the **Melbourne Graduate School of Education Analysis of Designated Bilingual Programs in Victorian Government Schools: Footscray Primary School** (MGSE Report)

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Introduction

The recommendations from the MGSE Report feature two aspects. The first is the model of teaching of Bilingual Education at Footscray Primary School (FPS) and the second is the language that will accompany English in the delivery of instruction. This document concerns the consideration of the Second Language of delivery. The focus here will be on the current Second language taught at FPS (Vietnamese) as well as Italian and Japanese, the two languages the MGSE Report recommends the school adopt for 2021.

Part One of this document looks at the data contained in the MGSE Report. **Part Two** attempts to unpack some of the arguments and rationale for recommending a change in Second Language. **Part Three** looks at considerations the MGSE Report does not adequately address. If FPS is to deliberate on a change in Second Language of delivery, it is important to understand and articulate the reasons for doing so.

Data extra to the MGSE Report is sourced from DET Languages Provision Reports (2006 – 2018)¹ and school annual reports. Elaborations are also informed from school visits and phone conversations with Principals from other Bilingual Schools in Victoria by the Author.

Note: Due to time constraints and availability the Author's conversations with Principals from other schools this year have not always been in tandem with Jen Briggs, the Principal of FPS. In 2019 the Author visited Lalor North PS with the Acting Principal, the FPS SEIL and a fellow School Councillor. In 2020 the Author visited Bayswater PS with the Principal and a Second Language teacher. The Author also spoke with the Principal at Brunswick South last year independently.

Disclaimer: The Author is of Vietnamese heritage, an Australian citizen and did not participate in the 2019 Survey referenced in the MGSE Report.

¹ <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/teachingresources/discipline/languages/Pages/research.aspx> Retrieved 20 March 2020

Part One

1. *“The teaching of Vietnamese in Victoria had, until recently, been in significant decline. In 2006, for example, there were 1659 students learning Vietnamese... By 2012, this had fallen to 437”* p.5 of MGSE Report.

The MGSE Report does not provide data regarding Italian or Japanese for the same period. When comparing data over the same period for the three languages, all have significant decreases in student enrolments (Fig 1.1 and 1.2). When taking into consideration VSL Primary² enrolments the decrease for Vietnamese sits between decreases for Italian and Japanese (Fig 1.2).

Fig. 1.1 Primary enrolments by language (DET 2006 p.6, 2012 p.11)

	2006	2012	% Decrease
Italian	71560	42848	40%
Japanese	48347	35050	27%
Vietnamese	1638	437	73%

Fig. 1.2 Primary + VSL Primary enrolments by language (DET 2006 p.6, 2012 p.11)

	2006	2012	% Decrease
Italian	71635	43015	40%
Japanese	48368	35140	27%
Vietnamese	2198	1498	32%

2. *“There was, in the main, overwhelming support for an innovative languages program to be maintained at FPS...”* p.8

The data provided from the 2019 Survey is useful in gauging the level of support for Bilingual Education at FPS. However, although the MGSE Report strongly argues for FPS to change the Second Language to Italian or Japanese, no corresponding Survey data is provided to indicate the levels of support for these languages. The 2019 Survey contained questions to gauge interest in the Second Language for Vietnamese, Italian, Japanese or another language entirely.

² The Victorian School of Languages (VSL) is a government school which provides out-of-school-hours programs for students from government and non-government schools who cannot access the language of their choice in their mainstream school. Programs are provided outside regular school hours, usually on Saturday mornings, and are typically of three hours' duration. A student can study a VCE Unit 4 of the chosen language at the VSL.

3. *“... the decreased flow of students through to VCE Vietnamese has led to fewer teacher candidates being in a position to specialize in Vietnamese teaching at university.”* p.5

Data from the period 2014-2018 of students completing VCE Unit 4 for the three languages over a five-year period offers further insight (Fig. 2). This data appears to contradict the above statement when comparing the three languages. Except for 2016, VCE Unit 4 completions were higher in Vietnamese than Italian each year.

Fig. 2 VCE Unit 4 completions (DET 2014-2018)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Italian	229	242	255	250	236
Japanese	481	492	536	530	543
Vietnamese	307	320	224	330	409

Further analysis of 2018 total students enrolled in the three languages at secondary level relative to the number of VCE Unit 4 completion also offers insight (Fig. 3). This data shows significantly low percentages for total enrolments versus VCE Unit 4 completion for Italian and Japanese, especially compared to Vietnamese.

Fig. 3 VCE Unit 4 completions (DET 2018 p.42, 46)

	Students 7-12	VCE Unit 4	Percentage
Italian	17915	236	1.30%
Japanese	18962	543	2.90%
Vietnamese	579	409	70.60%

4. *“... the Melbourne Graduate School of Education has had no Master of Teaching graduates specializing in Vietnamese for at least the last 5 years.”* p.5

The MGSE Report does not provide data on the number of graduates specializing in Italian or Japanese at the MGSE for the period mentioned. It also does not elaborate on what language specializations are available to students over this period. A teacher who taught in the Second Language at FPS during 2019 graduated with a Master of Education from University of Melbourne (UoM) in 2018. There are currently ten institutions in Victoria that offer courses for a teaching qualification (www.vic.gov.au/choose-teaching-course). In the last 5 years Vietnamese language teachers at FPS had previously completed their education and training at Monash, RMIT, UoM and VU. The MGSE Report also does elaborate if other Bilingual Schools employ Masters of Teaching graduates with relevant language specialization.

5. *“Based on 2018 statistics—with 444 students and 33 teaching staff ... to teach 50% of the curriculum in Vietnamese to 100% of students would require FPS to secure at least 16 qualified teachers...”* p.5

Of the 33 teaching staff, 21 were classroom teachers for 20 classes with 12 support staff (FPS 2019 Annual Report). In a paired classroom model (as alluded to in Proposal A of the MGSE Report) FPS would require 10/11 classroom teachers. Support staff require different qualifications. In a Bilingual Education setting support staff can be for the First Language (English) or Second Language staff. Second Language staff can be community members who acquire the required skills through school/DET support (as elaborated by Lalor North PS staff during a 2019 visit).

For 2020 FPS has 18 classrooms, with two Foundation classes. If FPS were to adopt 50/50 delivery for 2021 in an alternative Second Language from Foundation, approximately one new Second Language teacher would need to be recruited each year (notwithstanding language staff due to phasing out of Vietnamese LOTE). The MGSE Report does not provide a transition example for maintaining the current Second Language. Below are statistics of the number of Vietnamese language staff at FPS for the period 2016-2020.

Fig. 4 Second Language staff numbers at FPS

	Vietnamese language staff	New to FPS	Left FPS by EOY
2016	5	1	2
2017	7	4	
2018	7		4
2019	4	1	2
2020	4	2	

*Note: This data is sourced from independent canvassing and input from past FPS staff. The Author understands there were no recruitment efforts during 2017.

6. *“Richmond West Primary School ... transitioned to 50% Mandarin while teaching out its former 30% Vietnamese bilingual stream.”* p.12

RWPS has offered Mandarin and Vietnamese streams from the onset of its Bilingual Education. It is currently not phasing out its Vietnamese bilingual stream but rather looking to strengthen it (as relayed by the current Principal to the Author). The school was founded in 1975 and adopted Bilingual Education early on from its inception (RWPS Annual Report 2017). The current RWPS Principal also relayed that the school may have considered phasing out the Vietnamese stream five years ago. However recent enrollment in this stream has increased.

7. “...adopts a language where the future supply of teachers is more assured and the school does not face the same challenges as Vietnamese at present.” p.12

This statement appears to simplify the reality of recruiting Second Language teachers. As figure 2 and 3 above suggests, the future supply of potential teaching candidates in the three languages discussed here do not provide strong basis for the above statement. Further, there is a possible conflating of the available number of LOTE teachers with the ability to recruit suitable Bilingual language teachers. LOTE and Bilingual Education require different teaching methods and skill-sets. It is not a given LOTE teachers will transition successfully into Bilingual teaching environments. The current Principal at Huntingdale PS has relayed that many LOTE Japanese language teachers the school recruited found the transition difficult and subsequently left. Bilingual Schools proactively scout via multiple methods (including overseas) and support potential candidates to transition into Bilingual teaching environments. For example, Bilingual Schools request undergraduate placements who have the relevant language skills. FPS has had no placements with Vietnamese language skills in recent years. Other examples include the recruitment of past Second Language teachers (Bayswater PS earlier this year) and consular partnerships (Brunswick South PS working with the Italian Consulate).

The ratio of available LOTE teachers per school can also be taken into account (Fig.5).

Fig. 5 Teacher number ratio per school (DET 2018 p.12, 50)

	Schools F-12	Teachers	Average per school
Italian	252	337	1.3
Japanese	286	351	1.2
Vietnamese	10	16	1.6

Also of note the percentage of Primary and Secondary language enrolments in the South Western Region as a percentage of Statewide enrolments reveal a concentration of Vietnamese language provision in the SW Region (Fig.6)

Fig. 6 Primary and Secondary enrolments (DET 2018 p.48)

	Students	SW Region	Percentage
Italian	P 66372	17383	26.2%
	S 17915	6361	35.5%
Japanese	P 57934	16131	27.8%
	S 18962	5409	28.5%
Vietnamese	P 1022	698	68.3%
	S 579	409	92.5%

Part Two

The MGSE Report uses selected Survey comments to build an argument for its recommendations. As requests for Survey comment were open ended (i.e. respondents were not guided in their chosen input) using this data selectively from a possible pool of 96 respondents leaves considerable room for any number of alternative interpretations and possible subjective biases. This is important given suggestions and possible interpretations the MGSE Report provides relate to the quality of Vietnamese language teachers and interpretations and framing of Survey comments.

In the main the MGSE Report's two arguments for considering an alternative Second Language appear to be the shortage of suitably skilled Vietnamese language teachers and the perception that the quality of Vietnamese language teachers at FPS over recent years have been of insufficient quality for delivering Bilingual Education. Extra to this, the MGSE Report suggests Survey respondents who value Vietnamese as the Second Language of instruction 'misunderstand' Bilingual Education.

1. *"Securing sufficient number of appropriately skilled teachers to deliver the program" p.4*

Whilst the MGSE Report provides data demonstrating the significant higher number of available Italian and Japanese language teachers relative to Vietnamese (DET 2018), it does not mention that FPS has recruited eight Vietnamese language teachers in the period 2016-2020 (Fig.4). Significantly, the school also lost eight Vietnamese language teachers in the period 2016-2019. The MGSE Report does not examine these two important factors in its deliberations. Furthermore, as a comparison, it does not highlight the number of Greek language teachers is similar to Vietnamese in 2018 (Lalor North offers a Greek Bilingual stream and are not considering changing the Second Language of delivery).

The MGSE Report identifies staff recruitment as one of the most challenging aspects in delivering Bilingual Education. As discussed in **Part One** Bilingual Schools take a multi-layered approach to recruitment. A high number of Second Language teachers in a Bilingual School are 'Native' speakers, for example many Camberwell PS French language teachers are recruited from France and Canada. At FPS two Vietnamese language teachers recruited for 2019/20 are 'Native' speakers who attained their teaching qualifications in Australia. It should be noted that these two teachers did not have their teaching placements at FPS and learned of the school's Bilingual offering through the DET online recruitment process.

However, as the FPS example demonstrates, recruitment alone is not adequate to successfully deliver Bilingual Education. Staff retention plays a significant role in the long term success of a Bilingual School. Many Second Language teachers at other Victorian Bilingual schools are permanent staff who have taught at the school over many years. Employment support (professional development) and security

(permanent vs contract) as well as a supportive working environment are crucial in staff retention. The MGSE Report does not examine these factors in its 'identification of the problem'.

2. *"Critiques of the current bilingual program... focussed on the quality of teaching, and its impact."* p.10

"If the quality of the teaching were not an issue ... then there was support for a program, irrespective of language..." p.10

As these statements are based on Survey comments (5 from 96) it is difficult to verify the quality of Bilingual Education at FPS in recent years. For example in 2019 FPS delivered approximately two hours of Vietnamese language instruction. It is debatable whether this constitutes a 'bilingual program', as defined in the MGSE Report (p.12). Moreover, the previous Principal at FPS (2011 – mid 2019) reported in late 2018 that over a period of eight years no measure of Vietnamese proficiency had been conducted.

3. *"We've taken lots on risks (with staffing the the past, and it has had impact... We've tried to sort of recruit through the universities sector too..."* p.6,7

This quote is partially addressed in **Part One** of this document. Moreover, the MGSE Report appears to be arguing that the quality of Vietnamese language teachers at FPS is of insufficient quality to deliver Bilingual Education. However, the MGSE Report does not address underlying reasons for the loss of eight Second Language teachers during 2016-2019. Therefore, it is unclear if the MGSE Report is arguing if some, or all, of Second Language teachers (past and present) are/were of low quality. Coupled with the school not having a measure of Vietnamese proficiency over an eight-year period it is difficult to ascertain the quality of teaching and its impact.

4. *"Significantly, there seems to be misunderstanding within the community that conflates "bilingual schooling" with "community language schooling..."* p.10

As this statement is based on open ended Survey comments (3 from 96) it is difficult to definitively ascertain the full reasons why respondents value Vietnamese as the Second Language of instruction. Although the MGSE Report suggests respondents are 'conflating' one aspect of language education with another, other readings are also possible. One example could be, the three Survey respondents quoted may value the relationship of the Vietnamese language to the history of the school and its local community and area as the most significant criteria to highlight to the Survey Authors. As the Survey introduction summarises the pedagogic benefits of Bilingual Education, and foregrounds this in some subsequent questions, it is possible that these three Survey respondents may not have felt the need to articulate them.

Part Three

This section highlights other aspects that the MGSE Report does not focus on - the role of leadership and relatedly, the experience of Second Language staff that were teaching during the years 2016 – 2019 but are no longer at FPS.

Leadership

What is not discussed thus far is the role of Leadership in the delivery of Bilingual Education at FPS during 2016-2019. It is entirely possible to read the MGSE Report and conclude that the role of Leadership could have had significant impacts on many of the issues the MGSE Report identifies. Issues and questions include:

- What working environments were provided to retain Second Language staff?
- Were adequate efforts made to educate First Language teachers about Bilingual Education?
- Did Leadership consider alternative models of delivery, such as gradually transitioning to a 50/50 paired classroom model? If not, why?
- Given the school was struggling in recent years with Bilingual Education why did the school not participate in the Bilingual School's Network and the Bilingual Principal's Network? This would have potentially offered valuable advice and support.

Questions like these could lead to valuable insights into the challenges FPS has faced since at least 2016. Hypothetically, if Leadership had fostered an alternative working environment that supported and retained staff would the quality of delivery been different?

Second Language Staff – Past and Present

The MGSE Report also does not take into account the experience of Second Language teachers who either left the school or were not re-contracted during 2016-2019. The report makes no mention of the circumstances and reasons for this significant loss of Second Language teachers. For any Bilingual School, this would pose significant questions.

Moreover, the MGSE Report mentions a Phase 1 group interview that included a 'bilingual/languages' member (p.4). In 2019 four Second Language teachers were at FPS. This represented an opportunity for gathering insights that appears to have not eventuated.

Sensitivity

Importantly, by suggesting that past and present Vietnamese language teachers are of low quality the MGSE Report does not acknowledge the experiences, skills and contributions of these teachers, let alone how these suggestions may affect their professional lives. Further, the MGSE Report's suggestion that Survey respondents who value Vietnamese as the Second Language do not understand Bilingual Education could be interpreted as insensitive to many in the community.

Summary

This document attempts to unpack the MGSE Report and its recommendations. In doing so it seeks to address one of the key recommendations of the report, to consider an alternative Second Language of instruction from the current Vietnamese.

The Author argues here that before this question can be considered, the school needs to better understand why the delivery of Bilingual Education has struggled in recent years. For reasons elaborated in Part One, Two and Three, the Author argues that the MGSE Report does not adequately provide sufficient insights. To consider changing the Second Language of delivery is a significant step. In light of this, going forward, this document identifies important issues still to be resolved:

- a) In the years between 2016 and 2020, FPS recruited eight Second Language teachers. What are the conditions that led to the loss of eight Second Language teachers at FPS in the years between 2016 and 2019?
- b) What avenues were taken regarding recruitment in recent years and how can this be strengthened going forward?
- c) Given the challenges in recruitment for Bilingual Schools generally, what efforts can the school take to retain Second Language teaching staff going forward?
- d) What efforts did Leadership take to foster staff integration and effective communication during 2016-2019?
- e) The number of Greek language teachers is similar to that of Vietnamese (DET 2018, data on Macedonian is not available). If the main reason to consider an alternative Second Language is the number of Vietnamese language teachers, can a comparable study of Bilingual Education delivery at FPS and Lalor North PS in the years 2016-2019 provide valuable insights?
- f) Importantly, if the above can be adequately addressed, the Author also asks: Can FPS articulate why it is considering an alternative Second Language?

References

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NOTE: The current name of the Department of Education and Training has changed over the years. DET has been used as a general abbreviation referring to the Department.