

# Why should I encourage my students to learn languages?

A document for principals and teachers



<http://learning-languages.tki.org.nz/>  
[www.ilep.ac.nz](http://www.ilep.ac.nz)

“I cannot say strongly enough how important it is for students to learn languages. I feel a professional responsibility to ensure that my students are prepared for a life beyond this community. Ensuring that our students have engaged positively with cultures other than their own through language learning is one way of 'future proofing' and truly preparing them to be active participants in the 21st Century.

Geraldine Travers, Principal,  
Hawkes Bay

### The benefits of learning languages

Learning Languages has been a defined Learning Area in the New Zealand Curriculum since 2007. Many students are curious about learning another language, or have tried it, but language learning is still not seen as an essential part of the curriculum in the way Science and Mathematics are.

Why should students be encouraged to study another language? Students will benefit in the following ways, whether the language being learnt is one that is important in New Zealand or more useful overseas:

#### Economic benefits

- The cross-cultural and communicative competence coming from language learning will be an advantage for students who go on to study or work overseas, where competition for jobs is more fierce
- Students who develop some proficiency in a different language will be able to play a role in local tourism and growing New Zealand's export business

#### Learning benefits

- Learning a language gives students a better understanding and practical grasp of their first language
- There are cognitive benefits that come from learning languages – learning a language will help with students' study in other Learning Areas
- Students experience the huge personal satisfaction and fun of being able to communicate in another language

#### Culture and identity benefits

- Learning a language gives students an understanding of another culture and of a different worldview. It allows them to learn how to be outside their cultural 'comfort zone' and to develop positive attitudes to difference
- Students will also become more aware of their own worldviews and cultural identities

#### Social and societal benefits

- Learning a language helps students learn the Key Competencies of Relating to others and Managing self, as well as giving them the confidence to make mistakes and take risks
- Cross-cultural skills will be necessary for all New Zealanders as our country continues to diversify culturally and we welcome increasing numbers of tourists, students and migrants from other countries.