

# (R)evolution in Classics

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THIS ARTICLE IS based on a presentation given by Aisha Khan-Evans and Steven Hunt at the JACT INSET Day in September 2009. The title reflects the process of transition which we feel both the provision and assessment of Latin are currently undergoing. We hope that the process will continue to develop our subject, making it stronger than at any time since the advent of the National Curriculum. In the presentation, we described some of the conditions under which several schools had successfully introduced Latin, and how schools were developing links with each other to improve the overall provision of Classics in their area. Next we considered the resources available to schools to set up, develop, and sustain Classics. Finally, we encouraged members of the audience to think how they might be able to help others introduce and develop Classics in their own schools.

### **Classics restored**

Since the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 Classics has inhabited a precarious place in state schools as well as many

independents. Many Classics departments were closed down or reduced in scale. Head teachers in state schools had to ensure pupils' entitlement to the foundation and core subjects and the necessary allocation of timetable space and teaching staff. As a result, the total numbers taking Latin at GCSE dropped from 16,023 in 1988 to 10,908 in 1998, with the biggest fall in the state sector. Present numbers show that the decline seems to have stabilised at around 10,000 candidates each year (EdExcel, 2008). However, this total figure may disguise both the number of pupils who study Latin up to GCSE, but who do not take the exam, and those who take the IGCSE or go straight on to AS level.

Some schools, however, have been able to reverse the downward trend. As early as 1992 Thornton successfully reintroduced Latin to Reading School. She identified three criteria which she thought were necessary for its reintroduction and survival: support from the senior management team, financial backing and publicity (Thornton, 1992). She modestly did not mention that the most important resource was, of course, herself. Reading was, and is, a grammar

school. Thornton thought that what she was able to achieve might not be so easy to replicate elsewhere, particularly in the comprehensive sector. She conceded 'for the majority, access to the Classical world will only ever be through literature in translation and through the study in English of the social, economic, religious, political and archaeological aspects of that world,' and she continued:

'In contrast, only a minority [...] will have the will, the ability and the time to study Latin and Greek in depth. I suspect and hope that these subjects *can* be nourished and perpetuated but I think it will be as adjuncts to Classics-in-translation.'

(Thornton, 1992, p. 9)

By contrast, it has been *Latin* which has taken root once again in the comprehensive sector, rather than Classical Civilisation. In 2008 The Cambridge School Classics project noted that 137 maintained schools had started Latin since 2005 (CSCP, 2008). The Roman Society receives in the region of twenty grant applications each year for schools who want to start up Classics. Most of these applications are for the development of Latin courses. The Gifted and Talented scheme has been a major motivating factor for the introduction of Latin, as well as, in some cases, the *Minimus* course in feeder primary schools. Sometimes the teachers of these Latin classes are themselves not trained Classics teachers, or even Classics graduates. They may have studied Latin at school. They are often MFL or English teachers. Their common feature is that they are determined to allow their pupils access to the richness of the Latin language and Roman literature and society.

#### **Short timetable allocations – a possible solution**

There are many different curriculum models for the teaching of Latin in our schools today. However, until this year external assessment followed a traditional framework. The present GCSE Latin examination consists of four papers in total: two compulsory language papers and either two literature papers or one literature paper and one civilisation paper. Matthews and Matthews (2009) pointed out the difficulty for some schools on a short timetable to prepare their pupils in sufficient depth for this examination. For A. Matthews, with a reasonable timetable allocation for Latin, there is sufficient time to prepare his pupils to the highest levels in order to

take the exam. By contrast, J. Matthews' timetable allocation means that it is a struggle to ensure her pupils have the same chance to pass. Accordingly, she has come up with a possible solution. She teaches a short-course in Latin GCSE which assesses just the two language papers, and a short-course in Classical Civilisation GCSE, which assesses the Civilisation elements they have encountered through their study of the *Cambridge Latin Course*. In other words, the pupils will effectively gain a 'full' GCSE in what J. Matthews calls 'Classics.' With the advent of alternative examinations to the GCSE, J. Matthews' solution may no longer be necessary.

#### **New examinations – more solutions**

The examination boards have just begun to offer short course GCSEs for assessment in 2010 for the first time. This is perhaps in recognition of the need to accommodate the different types of curriculum provision in schools today. It is a welcome, if overdue, development. OCR is introducing short-course GCSEs in Latin, Classical Greek, Classical Civilisation and Ancient History. AQA will offer a short-course GCSE in Classical Civilisation. As we write this article, we hear that JACQA has accredited WJEC's Level 1 and 2 examinations in Latin, Roman Civilisation and Latin Literature for first examination from 2010. The Cambridge Schools Classics Project (CSCP) continues to offer its graded test certificates for the completion of each of the books of the *Cambridge Latin Course* – an inexpensive way to show recognition of pupils' achievement as they progress through the course. Some schools are exploring the IGCSE, IB and Cambridge pre-U examinations, some of which offer Latin and Ancient Greek language options, as well as Classical Civilisation topics. All of these forms of assessment show a willingness on the part of the examination boards to recognise the diversity of pupil experiences when they learn Classical subjects in schools today.

#### **Successful practice**

ICT has had a significant impact on the teaching of Latin in secondary schools. At Barking Abbey School, a comprehensive in East London, pupils have been learning Latin for eight years with no specialist Latin teacher, using the online CSCP. Around 60 pupils are learning Latin in Years 8 and 9, with 6 pupils currently studying for

GCSE. Two pupils recently continued to A-level under the same scheme, which utilises video-conferencing as well as other online support such as e-marking of pupils' work. They both achieved a grade C – testament to their own and their teachers' (both 'real' and 'virtual') dedication and hard work.

Off-timetable Classics can often lead to the establishment of a fully-timetabled Classics department. At Saffron Walden County High School, a comprehensive in Essex, online learning was the impetus for a new department. From 2007, online Latin had been offered at GCSE, with Classical Civilisation at A-level. The popularity of these subjects led to the appointment of a part-time Classics teacher in 2008 with Latin offered off-timetable. Continued enthusiasm for Latin by the pupils and significant parental pressure encouraged the school to appoint a full-time Classics teacher in 2009. Pupils who show an aptitude for modern languages in Year 7 are offered places on the Latin course in Year 8. Vacancies are filled by any others who wish to join. In Years 8 and 9, around 30 pupils are studying Latin off-timetable. The Classics teacher is given time in lieu for teaching at lunchtimes and after school. Parents make a financial contribution to these classes. At GCSE the school funds the Latin course, which now becomes fully-timetabled. Currently 20 pupils are in Year 10. The teacher is ambitiously looking forward to the next steps: to have the Year 8 and 9 Latin classes allocated a normal timetable slot, to build up A-level numbers, and to develop Classical Civilisation.

The support of the leadership team is a significant factor as to whether Classics can survive in a school. At Holland Park School (a comprehensive in West London), a new head teacher thought that offering Latin would be a mark of distinction for his school. The leadership team had started teaching off-timetable Latin in 2008, with the aim of extending the learning experience for pupils outside the national Curriculum framework. The success of this venture led to the appointment of a full-time Classics teacher in charge of their own, generously-funded department in 2009. Latin is offered to the top two Year 7 classes on timetable. Currently 45 pupils are studying Latin at GCSE. The teacher is very committed to equal opportunities in what is a diverse school community and offers an after-school Latin club for those who would not otherwise be selected to study Latin.

Classical Civilisation can be the stimulus for schools to begin to offer Latin. At St. Marylebone High School for Girls, a comprehensive in Central London, a non-specialist teacher had provided the incentive for the introduction of Classics in the school. AS-level Classical Civilisation had been offered by one of the History teachers, while Latin was offered to a small number of Gifted and talented (G & T) pupils off-timetable. In 2009 the school appointed a full-time specialist Classics teacher. All pupils now study Classical Civilisation in Year 8. Latin is on-timetable, with the GCSE short-course offered simultaneously in Years 10 and 12. The department aims to get Latin fully established on the timetable so that there is progression through from Year 8 to the Sixth Form. A second Classics teacher is receiving training through the Graduate Teacher Programme.

A link with a local primary school can be an effective way to promote the study of Classics in the secondary school. At King Edward VII School, a comprehensive in King's Lynn, the Classics teacher has made a link with the G & T co-ordinator from a local primary school. Together they have organised an after-school Latin club for G & T Year 6 pupils from each of the six feeder primaries. This arrangement has several aims: that the needs of G & T pupils are met; that more pupils choose to take Latin at GCSE; and that there is greater co-operation in the transition of pupils in Year 6 in the primaries to Year 7 in the secondary. The Latin club is itself run by 'Language Leaders' - Year 11 and 12 pupils – which neatly addresses some of the opportunities brought about by the specialist language status of the school.

A link between two neighbouring schools often provides opportunities not just for the pupils in the school where there is no

specialist Classics teacher, but also for the pupils in the 'host' school. At St Mary's School, an independent in Cambridge, specialist Classics teachers are offering Classical Greek lessons to G & T pupils from St Bede's, a comprehensive. After-school lessons take place at St Mary's starting in Year 10 with the aim of completing the GCSE in two years. Around 15 pupils in each year are taking the course. Apart from offering Classical Greek to pupils who might not otherwise have the opportunity, the link enables a viable set to exist within St Mary's and brings with it the chance for a more exciting classroom dynamic.

CSCP noted that 20.4% of all secondary schools offered Latin (CSCP, 2008). This encouragingly high figure does not, however, necessarily mean that all children even in a school which offers Latin are able to take it. Meanwhile, the concentration of schools which offer Latin in London and the South East means that there are locations in the UK where access to Latin is very limited or non-existent. Independent / State School Partnerships have been promoted by the Department for Children, Families and Schools since 1998. This may be one answer to the problem of how to widen access to Classics. The latest awards, totalling £4 million, have been made to 23 projects throughout the UK, aiming "to raise the aspirations of gifted and talented pupils and encourage more disadvantaged children to go to university" (DCSF, 2009). A partnership funded in this way between King's College School, an independent in South London, and Coombe Girls' and Coombe Boys' Schools, two nearby comprehensives, is proving very successful in providing opportunities for pupils to study Latin. In a similar fashion, but arranged privately, at Mill Hill School, an independent in North London, specialist Classics teachers have linked with the neighbouring Mill Hill County High School, a comprehensive. Latin is offered at both GCSE and A-level at Mill Hill for those who want to take the subject to examination level. Although there is a little organisational difficulty in co-ordinating timetables, it does mean that taking Latin to GCSE is a real option for pupils from the comprehensive. In addition, for both schools, Latin classes at A-level become economically viable.

Sometimes it is something much simpler – and cheaper – which gives the stimulation that is necessary to build a department. At Rooks Heath College, a comprehensive in Middlesex, a visiting speaker so inspired the pupils that numbers choosing Latin in Year 9 doubled. The college is now introducing GCSE short-courses in Classical Civilisation and Ancient History to complement the Latin.

### Support

Financial assistance is available to start Classics courses in schools. The Roman Society, the Hellenic Society, Friends of Classics and The Classical Association will all consider written applications for grants for the purchase of text books and other resources.

Advice and teaching resources are available to teachers who wish to develop Classics in their schools. At primary level two groups support Classics teaching. The *Minimus* books, website, INSET and pupil events are popular introductions to Latin and the Roman world; the Iris Project helps to organise University students to teach Latin in primary schools in London and around Oxford, arranges Classics events and publishes a Classics magazine. At secondary level several organisations provide invaluable assistance. CSCP offers a huge range of printed and digital resources, online Latin courses at GCSE and A-level, personal INSET and an annual conference. Nelson Thornes provides distance learning Latin and Classical Civilisation courses. Oxford Outreach organises events, study days and teacher support. Local branches of the Classical Association often run competitions and lectures for school pupils and offer the chance for teachers to network. There are several national associations to support teachers. The Joint Association of Classics Teachers (JACT) organises INSET courses, publishes the *Journal of Classics Teaching and Omnibus* magazine for Sixth form pupils, and offers a website with further information and links. The

Association for Latin Teaching (ArLT) organises an INSET day and an annual residential conference and maintains an up-to-date website. The OCR examination board and the Times Educational Supplement both have 'community' pages where Classics teachers can share resources, ask questions and communicate with each other. Details of the annual Summer schools in Latin, Ancient Greek and Classical Civilisation are posted on the JACT website. These very popular courses cater for all age groups and at all levels of experience and take place throughout the UK. Bursaries are often available.

### Conclusion

It will come as no surprise that there is no fixed way to set up Classics departments in schools. However, a number of factors exist which seem to us to be considerations of no little importance. The support of the leadership team is crucial. Charitable bodies can help with financial support. Publicity is very important. Digital resources allow pupils to learn in ways which were unthinkable ten years ago and enable them to extend learning out of lesson time. Curriculum models are very varied, with a tendency for new-start Latin lessons to be offered off-timetable. With ambitious and dedicated teachers, it is possible to move to on-timetable teaching over a few years. Training and courses exist for non-specialists. Links between schools can be ways to provide learning opportunities for pupils in schools without Classics teachers. The examination boards have developed a variety of forms of assessment to cater for pupils

learning Classical subjects in these different situations. Twenty years ago the future for Classics in schools looked bleak indeed. Today there is much enthusiasm to reintroduce Latin and the supporting structure is in place. Can we dare hope that 2010 offers the chance of a renaissance in Classics teaching in the UK?

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Didacticists Anonymous