

Polish for Leaving Certificate Blended Learning Project

**Internal review on year 2 of the
Blended Learning Project in CMETB Schools**

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on behalf of PPLI and CMETB*

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Introduction

This review documents how the Polish for Leaving Certificate Blended Learning Project has evolved and highlights challenges and solutions, and areas that require further work so as to enhance the effectiveness of the project in the coming years.

Project Rationale

The provision of Polish as a Leaving Certificate subject poses a challenge for post-primary schools, due to lack of a critical mass of students in one single school. To address this challenge, Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) is partnering with Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB) to deliver Leaving Certificate Polish via a blended learning approach to students who would otherwise not have access to this new subject.

This approach is in line with the *Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education (2017-2026)*¹ which recognises “the need to diversify beyond current curricular languages and support the new Irish in maintaining and growing their own capacity to speak their own languages”. The strategy recommends the piloting of a number of actions to introduce lesser taught languages into schools, including blended learning models.

“Pilot a variety of options for introducing lesser taught languages into schools. Such a pilot should consider the introduction of languages offered as full or short courses, shared classes/blended learning models, employment and allocation of peripatetic teachers, and support for non-curricular and lesser taught Leaving Certificate languages in school.”

Languages Connect (Action 22.A.4)

Project Beginnings

Patrick McArdle Principal of Beech Hill College Monaghan approached CMETB to support the setting up of a school cluster to facilitate the provision of Polish as a Leaving Cert option. The project was initiated in 2021 when PPLI, together with CMETB and H2 Learning, set up a project working group led by Paddy Flood, Director of Schools CMETB and Dr Kenia Puig i Planella, Education Officer PPLI.

The working group set out the following project aims:

- Provide Polish, one of the new curricular subjects for Leaving Certificate, to students in their school via a blended model.
- Ensure equity of provision - giving access to a subject that students would not otherwise have.
- Prepare scaffolding for the blended learning courses that is effective, inclusive, and engaging.
- Motivate young people to enhance their development of a range of competences.
- Provide insights for the development of future blended learning courses in other languages.

¹ *Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education (2017-2026)*:
<https://assets.gov.ie/79116/5a5cb48b-09e1-464e-9a2e-4ff231cb090b.pdf>

The first Polish eTeacher was recruited by PPLI and an approach was developed using lessons learned from the Gaeltacht eHub project² which is coordinated through the Gaeltacht Unit of the Department of Education and supported by H2 Learning.

Participating Schools

An initial 6-week taster blended learning module was implemented from March to April 2021 for Transition Year students in CMETB schools. The rationale for this was to familiarise students with the new methodologies involved in blended learning and to give them insights into what the LC course is about.

Building on this, PPLI implemented a full course in the senior cycle in four CMETB schools for Polish students from September 2021 to June 2023. 17 students participated in the project from the following CMETB schools:

- Coláiste Dún an Rí, Dunaree, Co. Cavan
- St. Mogue's College, Bawnboy, Co. Cavan
- Breifne College, Cavan
- Beech Hill College, Monaghan

Project Launch

The project was launched at the Garage Theatre in Monaghan³ on 7th March 2022 by Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys TD (Cavan-Monaghan). The event was attended by students, teachers, school principals, CMETB management and local councillors. The Polish embassy was also represented by General Consul Grzegorz Sala. A video showcasing the blended learning model was also launched at the event.⁴



Figure 1: Official launch of Blended Polish Project.

² Independent evaluation of the Gaeltacht e-Hub Pilot Project: <https://assets.gov.ie/126987/1a193fc1-ff42-41c4-9cba-a4bf1b4a64d2.pdf>

³ Department of Education Press Release: <https://ppli.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Minister-Foley-welcomes-announcement-of-new-Blended-Leaving-Certificate-Polish-course.pdf>

⁴ Polish Blended Learning Launch video: <https://vimeo.com/682908603>

Polish for Leaving Certificate

The 180-hour course, delivered over two years, employs a mix of online, face-to-face, and self-directed learning. The course covers all aspects of the new Leaving Certificate Polish specification, and the blended model of learning means students can access online language classes and have regular visits in school from their eTeacher. Each participating school has a designated eMentor who supports the eTeachers and monitors the engagement and wellbeing of the students at school level.

Every week three hours of Polish classes were delivered to the senior cycle students:

- One hour of online learning for all students together.
- One hour of face-to-face learning, where a teacher visits a different school each week.
- One hour of independent learning, where students are supervised by e-mentors.

Collaboration and Partnership

The Polish Blended Learning Project is a collaborative effort between Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI), Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB), and H2 Learning which has been very important in the context of implementation. The partnership's strengths and the role of continuous professional development (CPD) are key factors contributing to the project's success.

The collaboration brought together a diverse range of expertise and resources. PPLI and CMETB's understanding of the educational landscape and H2 Learning's proficiency in digital learning solutions created a framework for delivering the Polish language course effectively. The collaboration allowed for the development of a comprehensive programme that catered to the varied needs of the schools, teachers and students involved, with the aim of achieving both engagement and academic success.

Continuous Professional Development

The CPD sessions provided by H2 Learning were tailored to the specific needs of this project. Teachers were trained not just in online teaching methodologies but also in using specific tools and platforms such as Teams and OneNote that were integral to the blended learning model.

H2 Learning supported the development and delivery of effective CPD for the eTeachers involved in the project. This was crucial for teachers to adapt to the blended learning model, which combined a blend of online, face-to-face, and self-directed learning. The CPD took place online over a number of weeks, with teachers engaging in activities between the sessions. Sessions were delivered by Education Officers, PPLI Associates and experts in online/blended learning from H2 Learning.

The areas covered included:

- Creating presence in online classes
- Blended Learning: The 5 Es and ABC model
- Building blocks and tasks in online classes
- Playlists and choice boards
- Assessment and reflection
- Facilitating discussion and student participation
- Microsoft Teams and OneNote
- Edpuzzle and Flipgrid in online and blended classes.

Project Development

In 2022, PPLI recruited an additional Polish teacher as the numbers of schools and students increased. Six schools and 46 students are currently involved in the project, an increase from 4 to 6 schools and 17 to 46 students since 2021.

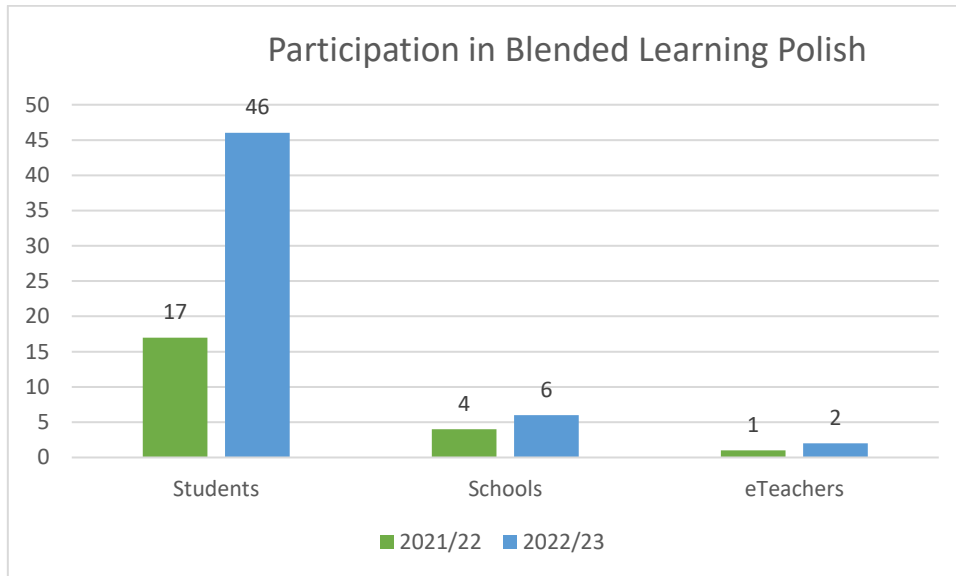


Figure 2: Participation in Blended Learning Project.

The following CMETB schools are participating in the 2023/24 school year:

- Coláiste Dún an Rí, Dunaree, Co. Cavan
- St. Mogue's College, Bawnboy, Co. Cavan
- Breifne College, Cavan
- Beech Hill College, Monaghan
- Inver College, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan
- St Bricin's College, Belturbet, Co. Cavan

The academic results achieved by the first cohort of students to sit the Leaving Certificate Polish exam in 2023 were very positive and demonstrated a high level of attainment, meeting or surpassing the expectations of the schools and the students themselves.

The hope is that this mode of provision will become available to students in more schools, and that this would enable Polish speakers to maintain literacy in their home language. This project is a community response to the Programme for Government to embrace diversity in Cavan and Monaghan ETB.

"It is our goal that this will become available to students in more schools and that this would enable significant numbers of Polish speakers to maintain literacy in their home language. I would like to recognise the work of Post-Primary Languages Ireland and CMETB in bringing this programme to fruition, and I look forward to seeing the benefits it brings to our students."

Minister for Rural and Community Development Heather Humphreys TD

Evaluation Feedback

Evaluation Process

During May and June 2023, a series of surveys, interviews and focus groups, as well as a review of relevant documentation was carried out to capture the views of the project team, eTeachers, eMentors, school leadership and students. This review provides a synopsis of the feedback provided along with some recommendations for further improvement.

The Polish Blended Learning Project has been very successful to date, with effective use of blended teaching and learning strategies, and strong collaboration between schools. The eTeachers, eMentors and students were very happy with the project, the students have been engaged and enjoyed it. The eTeachers have indicated that they have learned a lot and are still learning. In general, the school leadership are very positively disposed to the project and reported that many Polish parents and students are now choosing CMETB schools in the area because of this opportunity. Maintaining effective communication, early planning, and providing support from eMentors can enhance the experience of Polish language classes in schools.

Impact on Students

Participating schools have expressed a high level of satisfaction with the programme. The school leaders are very pleased to offer this opportunity to their students and are grateful for the commitment and hard work of the Polish eTeachers, who were commended for excellent liaison with the participating schools throughout the year.

"I felt the programme was very well suited to our cohort. Continuing as is, would be recommended."

eTeacher

Schools have observed that the project provides participating students with a sense of cultural validation and personal inclusion within the school community. This is particularly valuable for students whose native language is Polish, as it allows their culture and language to be appreciated and celebrated within an educational context.

"The project provides an opportunity for students to feel their language and culture were valued and they themselves were valued and included in the school community."

Deputy Principal

Schools report that their students are not only enjoying the learning experience but are also deeply committed to their native language studies, showcasing a high level of engagement and enthusiasm.

"Students are enjoying their native language and are very much committed to it."

eMentor

The programme is seen as highly accessible and provides students with the potential to secure higher points in the Leaving Certificate examination, thereby possibly enhancing their future academic and professional prospects.

“Having this programme in the school will only increase the opportunities for our students who speak Polish at home. It keeps as many doors as possible open for them.”

Principal

School Engagement

The schools reported that the programme has worked very well for students. The project provides an important opportunity for students of Polish families to take a subject that the schools would not have the resources to provide on their own.

This year has shown significant improvement in the relationship between the eTeachers and the schools. The eTeachers have reported that they are feeling much more relaxed compared to previous years. The current blend of two online sessions per week, along with either one face-to-face meeting every three weeks or self-directed work, seems to be the most effective format. There have been some challenges, notably issues with the punctuality of online lessons, which need to be monitored by the eMentors.

In general, schools are actively participating in the project. The project is most effective in schools where a designated classroom is allocated. Consistency, such as booking the same room for online classes and minimizing timetabling conflicts, is crucial.

“The programme can impact on teacher allocation and room space. Providing a room/office for the lessons is also a challenge as our school building is not big enough to meet our needs.”

Principal

The students also suggested that the classroom or space that they use is identifiable with Polish language posters or engaging activities to create a positive and welcoming learning environment.

One notable issue was a drop in attendance at one school due to a clash with other subjects. While the programme is integrated into the main school timetable, sometimes other school activities or events are given precedence. It is also important that the eTeachers can post results directly into the school VS Ware), rather than relying on separate emails.

The schools strongly recommend that the project continues as it currently operates. However, they would like to see the project extended to provide access to other languages and subjects (Lithuanian was suggested in particular).

“The project has excellent potential-subjects that struggle with numbers would be ideally suited, shared teacher and students get a chance to study a subject they might otherwise not get.”

Principal

The eTeacher visits each school about once each month and conducts an in-person class with the Polish students. This time is used for self-directed classes in the other schools. In general, the eTeachers are made feel welcome when they come to the school (mainly by the eMentor). However, they can sometimes feel detached from the school, as they are not a full-time member of staff. This could be addressed by inviting them into the staff rooms to interact with other teachers or inviting them to staff social gatherings so as to foster a sense of belonging. There is also a perceived lack of awareness of the project among teachers of other subjects in the schools. Thus, there is a need to embed the programme more within the cultural of the school and not to see it as something separate.

Blended Learning Approach

The eTeachers reported that they are comfortable with the balance between live online, face-to-face and self-directed lessons. They believe that the blended approach optimises the benefits of distance and in-person delivery methods. Regular online lessons enable frequent check-ins, progress assessments, and the opportunity to provide immediate feedback.

Simultaneously, scheduled face-to-face interactions are important, offering students a sense of connection and engagement that purely digital communication may lack. These in-person sessions help the eTeachers to foster a well-rounded and holistic learning experience, while also underlining that the subject is part of the school curriculum offering.

From the student's perspective, the blended learning approach has worked well. The students felt comfortable with the combination of online classes, in-person classes, and self-learning activities. The interactive components, such as the whiteboard and games during the live sessions, are well-received. There is an even split in student preference between online and face-to-face sessions, with the latter being considered important for fostering relationships.

Overall, they felt connected to other students on the course but had limited opportunities to get to know more about their fellow classmates, who resided in other schools. Students highlighted the importance of face-to-face interactions for building strong relationships with their teachers. The face-to-face classes provided a forum for students to engage more deeply with the material, clarify doubts, and connect with the eTeacher on a more personal level. These sessions are used for activities such as group projects, oral assessments, and cultural activities that enrich the students' understanding of Polish language and culture.

“Perhaps an extra in-school visit per month might be more beneficial to replace one of the self-directed sessions.”

eMentor

The eTeachers are seen as being proactive, consistently updating and modifying content rather than relying on fixed textbooks. A lot of time is spent on lesson preparation, and they utilise a wide range of teaching and learning resources and used websites and apps to help students to work together.

Among the students, there is a clear preference for the live and in-person sessions, with only 4 out of 17 students reported a preference for self-learning modules. While this approach can be highly effective for some learners, particularly those who are motivated and disciplined, it does not suit every student's learning style.

Role of the eMentor

The eTeachers have reported strong collaboration with eMentors in most schools. eMentors perform a wide range of duties from ensuring student attendance in Polish classes to troubleshooting technical issues. The eMentors play a critical role in ensuring that students are submitting assignments and participating in online lessons. They provide much-needed guidance, support, and accountability for students throughout the course. The students indicated that they were comfortable asking for help when needed.

“Ensuring our three students attend their Polish lessons and submit assignments does require monitoring and thus increases the workload of a member of staff within the school.”

eMentor

In general, the eMentors understood their role and were satisfied with the information that they were provided to perform their role. Despite that, 25% of the eMentor respondents would like more information on their role.

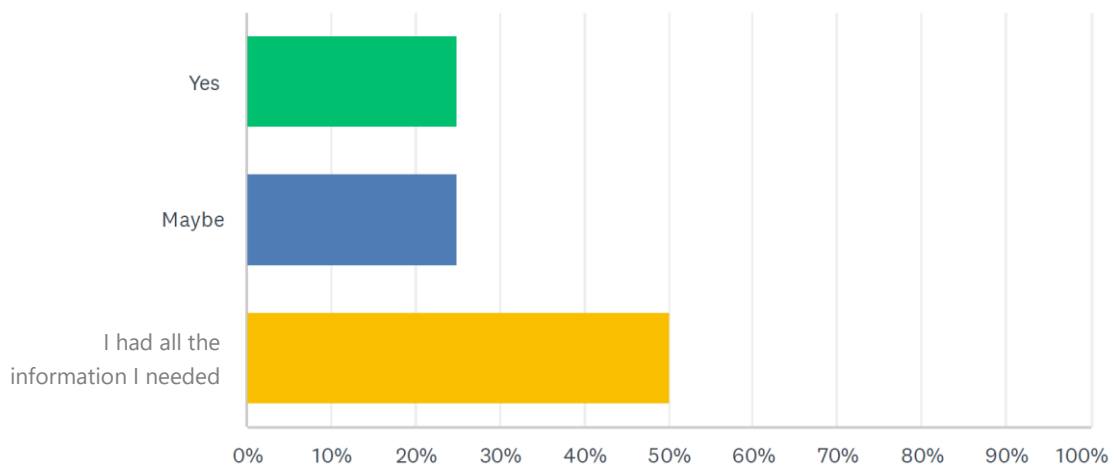


Figure 3: Satisfaction with eMentor information.

In one school where there is less engagement between the eTeacher and eMentor, there have been issues with student punctuality and engagement. There were specific instances where the eMentor was unavailable during live sessions due to scheduling issues, which hampers the effective running of the programme.

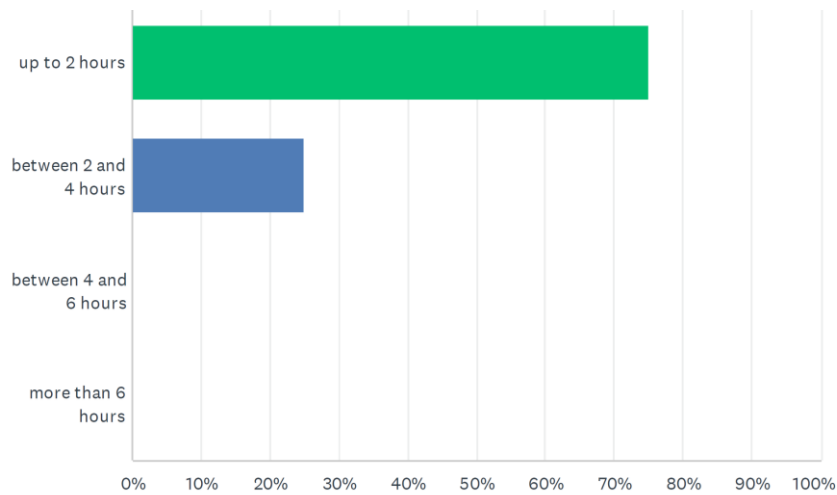


Figure 4: Average time per week spent by eMentors on the project.

The eMentors devote 2 to 4 hours per week to the project. This allocation is made as part of their post of responsibility within the school. One school suggested that this time could be increased particularly where there is a larger group of students participating in the school.

“Extra time being made available to a member of staff in each school to coordinate the tuition would be beneficial.”

Deputy Principal

The continuity of keeping the same eMentor from year to year is preferable, as this has allowed the eTeacher and eMentor to build a relationship and understanding of what needs to be done.

The eTeachers feel that it is essential for them to have the eMentors' mobile phone contact details so that they can be contacted directly and at short notice if for example a student hasn't turned up to a scheduled online class.

Technology

CMETB has been proactive in providing devices, connectivity and Microsoft 365 and Teams support in order to facilitate student engagement with the online classes.

The eTeachers stressed the importance of schools having access to reliable technology as being vital to the smooth running of this project. It is essential for students to have dedicated and charged computers with functioning cameras, to avoid unnecessary delays during class time. Headphones are also a must, and each student should have access to these tools for every online class.

Microsoft Teams is used as the main platform for delivering online live and self-directed lessons. In the main, Teams has worked well and is seen as reliable by both the eTeachers and students. The coordination of Teams needs to be streamlined with school platforms so that students can find their lessons with ease.

“There were some IT issues initially, but these have now been addressed.”

eTeacher

The eTeachers highlighted the significant improvement in internet connectivity following the installation of routers in each corner of a school, underscoring the importance of this factor. The model

of students bringing their own devices, as seen in one school, appears to be working effectively. Student feedback indicates that technical rarely arose and did not affect their experience. Where issues did occur, there was a designated person in the school to help them.

Continuous Professional Development

The ongoing support ensured that teachers could continually refine their methods and address challenges as they arose. This ongoing development is vital in a rapidly evolving educational landscape, especially when dealing with technological tools and methodologies.

The CPD was also important in equipping the eTeachers with the necessary skills and confidence to effectively manage and deliver lessons in this new format. Through CPD, teachers were able to enhance their instructional methods, incorporate various digital tools, and engage students in more interactive and effective ways. This professional growth directly translated into better learning experiences for the students. CPD enabled teachers to be responsive to the needs of their students. They could tailor their teaching strategies to suit diverse learning styles and needs, making the educational experience more inclusive and effective.

The eTeachers have found the CPD to be very helpful in supporting them to develop and continuously improve their blended learning approaches over time. They would like this to continue this approach and to have opportunities during the year to engage with the project team.

“The sessions provided a framework to ensure we develop quality courses that lead to best outcomes for students. This enables us to build and expand on the courses we can deliver.”

eTeacher

Regular CPD sessions also fostered a sense of community among the eTeachers. Sharing experiences and strategies not only enhanced individual teaching practices but also contributed to the collective knowledge and success of the programme.

Timetabling

The timetabling of the lessons to coordinate with individual school timetables was flagged as an issue by both the schools and the eTeachers.

“The biggest challenge is the timetabling issue. If CMETB principals could all agree on the time of the Polish lessons before all other subjects are timetabled, then locally each principal could ensure the Polish students' classmates were doing non-exam subjects at this time.”

Principal

There is a need for early and effective communication between CMETB/PPLI and the schools. Information about the slots for the Polish classes should be sent to the schools well in advance of the new school year. It is essential to coordinate timetables to prevent scheduling conflicts with other subjects. Early planning will allow for a more structured and smoother implementation of the Polish classes, ensuring that students can attend without conflicts with other academic responsibilities.

“Our three students are missing tuition time in other Leaving Cert subjects in order to avail of the Polish lessons. This is quite a concern to them and their teachers.”

Deputy Principal

Schools would also like to build in the TY Taster module into their TY calendar at the beginning of the school year. The schools also expressed some concern about future provision and timetabling, particularly if the number of students or subjects is to grow in the future.

“The TY taster dates need to be established in August and included in school calendar with times and dates set.”

eMentor

It should be noted though that if a school has a sufficient cohort for a particular subject, they should consider running their own classes in consultation with PPLI.

“I am not sure how many hours should be made available for it. It sometimes effects our timetabling depending on when the classes will be held. If numbers grow, this may become an issue.”

Deputy Principal

Parents/Guardians

The eMentors play an important role in keeping parents up to date at school level and contact parents if required, for example if the eTeacher is concerned about the student’s engagement in classes. They communicate with parents using the VSware school management information system or other school apps to update parents/guardians. They also help promote the classes on offer and encourage parents to consider their son/daughter's participation in the online classes as a Leaving Cert option. The eTeachers would like to have further access to the school VSware or apps so that they can communicate directly with parents in collaboration with the eMentor.

Parent-teacher meetings are carried out by the eTeacher over the phone, which seems to have worked well but there were instances where schools did not effectively communicate the dates for these meetings to eTeachers, which needs to be rectified in future planning.

Outdoor Days

As part of the blended approach, two outdoor days were organised for the students. These outdoor days were designed to provide immersive learning experiences that complemented their language learning journey. The outdoor days encouraged teamwork and collaboration among students and gave them an opportunity to interact with their peers. This facilitated open communication and a more comfortable learning atmosphere during regular classes.

The eTeachers and eMentors felt that the outdoor days played an important role in strengthening the bond between them and their students. By participating in activities together, they developed more meaningful relationships which has helped in improving the teacher-student dynamic.

Student Attainment

The results of the 2023 Leaving Certificate Polish exam reflected a high level of achievement among the participating students. Altogether 19 students that sat Leaving Certificate Polish (2 students joined the course in addition to the 17 that started in 2021). 8 of these students attained H1, 6 students attained H2, and 4 students attained H3. While one student received a H7, this can be attributed to their absence from classes since the previous November and highlights the impact of consistent participation in the Polish classes.

The results were in line with or exceeded the teacher expectations and the students themselves expressed broad satisfaction with their results. Notably, two of the students were part of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) course, underscoring the inclusive nature of the programme which accommodates various learning pathways.



Figure 5: Results achieved by participating students in LC Polish.

Potential for other Subjects

The schools recognise the potential for the project to be adapted or expanded for subjects that traditionally pose challenges related to teacher provision or having insufficient numbers. Subjects such as Applied Maths, Chemistry, Physics, and Economics as well as other language subjects such as Lithuanian were identified by schools as desirable for this approach. This model offers the dual benefit of facilitating shared teaching resources while simultaneously providing students with the opportunity to study subjects they might otherwise not have access to or interest in pursuing.

“We are very pleased to offer this project to our students. However, we have no students who qualify for Polish tuition for the Leaving Cert of 2025. A survey would be needed re other languages.”

Principal

The effectiveness of this model in Polish serves as a blueprint for adapting its strategies to other languages and subject areas. The blended learning model, initially implemented for Polish language

teaching, could be expanded to other subjects and student groups. The initial cohort also included two Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students who successfully completed the course.

Communication Strategies

The Polish Blended Learning Project's success is largely due to its effective communication strategies among eMentors, eTeachers, schools, and parents/guardians. These strategies play a crucial role in keeping all stakeholders informed, engaged, and collaboratively involved in the students' education. Here we outline how these communication methods contribute to the project's effectiveness.

Communication between eMentors and eTeachers

- *Regular Updates and Check-ins:* eMentors and eTeachers maintain regular communication to monitor student progress and address any challenges promptly. This includes discussions about student engagement, attendance and performance.
- *Direct Contact Channels:* The provision of direct contact details, like mobile numbers, facilitates immediate communication between eMentors and eTeachers. This is particularly important for resolving urgent issues, such as a student's absence from an online class or if there is a last-minute issue in the school.
- *Feedback and Support:* eMentors provide feedback to eTeachers on the students' classroom experiences, which helps in tailoring the lessons more effectively to student needs.

Communication between eMentors/eTeachers and Schools

- *Integration into School Systems:* eTeachers and eMentors work closely with school principals/deputy principals to integrate the Polish lessons into the main school timetable, ensuring minimal conflicts with other subjects.
- *Staff Meetings and Presentations:* eMentors often present updates and insights about the Polish classes during staff meetings, increasing awareness and understanding among their colleagues.

Communication with Parents/Guardians

- *Regular Updates via School Platforms:* eMentors use the school communication platforms like VShare and school apps to keep parents informed about their children's progress and engagement in the Polish classes.
- *Parent-Teacher Meetings:* eTeachers conduct meetings over the phone with parents, providing them with direct feedback on their child's progress and addressing any concerns.
- *Promotional Activities:* eMentors and eTeachers engage in promotional activities to encourage parental support and student participation in the Polish classes.

Student Engagement

- *Formative Feedback:* eTeachers provide timely written and/or oral feedback to learners on the work submitted online through Teams and OneNote. The feedback is designed to provide encouragement and suggestions for improvement.

- *Student Feedback:* Students are encouraged to provide feedback on their learning experience, which is used to continually improve the teaching methods and content.
- *Interactive Online Tools:* The use of interactive tools during online sessions, like whiteboards and educational games, helps keep students engaged and makes learning more enjoyable.
- *Outdoor Days:* The outdoor days provide an opportunity for students to interact with their peers and their teachers in an in-formal setting. This facilitates open communication and a more comfortable learning atmosphere during the regular classes.

The project's communication strategies are multi-faceted, involving regular, direct, and effective interactions among all stakeholders. These strategies not only facilitate smooth operational management of the programme but also foster a supportive and inclusive educational environment. Through consistent and open communication, the project is able to maintain engagement, address challenges promptly, and ensure the overall success and positive impact of the Leaving Certificate Polish Blended Learning Project.

Challenges and Solutions

The implementation of blended learning models presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities. As the participating schools strive to integrate online and traditional teaching methods, various challenges have arisen ranging from student engagement to technological infrastructure. The following section outlines some of the challenges that have arisen, how these have been addressed, and steps which continue to be taken to ensure that the blended learning course is effective, inclusive, and engaging.

Student Engagement and Performance

Ensuring consistent student engagement and performance in a blended learning environment presented a challenge. The eMentors have implemented regular attendance monitoring and interventions for disengaged students. This has led to increased punctuality and timely submission of assignments. The eTeachers are also adapting teaching materials for various proficiency levels and providing clear guidance for self-directed activities, which has led to improved student engagement. The effectiveness of these measures is regularly assessed through periodic progress checks, ensuring a responsive and adaptive learning environment.

School and Staff Integration

Integrating blended learning into the school culture requires commitment from the entire school community. Engaging school leadership and teachers in the project has been critical. This has involved putting more focus on establishing effective communication channels with eTeachers and integrating them into school activities, such as staff social events. Regular presentations by eMentors can help inform the general staff about the project's progress and goals. Continuous feedback from schools, students, and teachers is crucial for identifying areas for improvement.

Balancing Blended Learning Modalities

Striking the right balance between online and face-to-face interactions is a challenge in blended learning delivery. The balance between online and face-to-face interactions has been optimized. A mix

of online lessons for timely feedback and engagement, coupled with regular in-person classes for personal connections and deeper understanding, has been established. Outdoor days and bonding activities have also allowed the eTeachers and eMentors to interact directly with students, enhancing the overall learning experience.

Role and Consistency of eMentors

The role of eMentors is crucial in supervising and supporting students. Each school now has a dedicated eMentor who consistently supports students during online and self-direct classes. eMentors maintain regular contact with eTeachers, ensuring coordination and immediate resolution of any classroom or personal issues. The continuity of having the same eMentor year after year has strengthened the mentor-student relationship.

Technological Infrastructure and Training

A key challenge is providing and maintaining robust technological infrastructure so that students can log into their classes seamlessly and without delay. CMETB technical support includes ensuring reliable internet connectivity and integrated access to Microsoft OneNote, Teams, and Office 365. The provision of devices to students with headsets has really helped with minimising technical issues. This has greatly enhanced the online learning experience for both students and the eTeachers. The provision of a workshop to familiarise students with online learning tools at the beginning of the school year is also important.

Timetable Coordination

Effective timetable coordination within and between the participating schools is essential to prevent conflicts with other subjects and ensure maximum learning opportunities. This has been addressed through early planning, proactive resolution of scheduling conflicts, and ensuring adequate room availability. School principals/deputy principals meet with the Director of Schools to initiate this planning process and schools commit to adjusting their own timetables to integrate with the agreed LC Polish schedule. The inclusion of the Taster module in the Transition Year calendar also requires careful planning to integrate seamlessly into the overall timetable of each participating school. It should be noted that the coordination of timetables would become more complex if there were more schools or subjects delivered in this way.

Continuous Training and Support

Continuous training and support for the eTeachers has been fundamental for the success of project. This includes workshops for eTeachers to keep them updated with using various blended teaching methodologies and tools to help address student engagement and performance. Introductory workshops for eMentors help keep them abreast of their role in supporting their students at school level and the importance of close collaboration with the eTeacher.

The successful implementation of the Polish Blended Learning project involves close collaboration between the project partners PPLI, CMETB and H2 Learning with the participating eTeachers, eMentors and students to address various implementation challenges. This partnership approach helps create a dynamic and effective learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of students, teachers, and the school community.

Review Findings

Over the past two years, the Blended Polish for Leaving Certificate Project, a collaborative initiative between Post Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI) and Cavan Monaghan Education and Training Board (CMETB), with the support of H2 Learning has made great strides in providing access to a subject that students would not otherwise have. Aligning with *Languages Connect: Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education*, this project has successfully implemented a blended learning model for teaching Polish at the Leaving Certificate level.

The following summary highlights the findings based on the feedback from participating schools and students and illustrate the project's contribution to enhancing language education provision.

Impact on Students

Students have exhibited high levels of engagement and enthusiasm, enjoyed the learning experience and demonstrated a commitment to their home language studies. The project has provided students with a sense of cultural validation and inclusion within the school community, recognizing the value of their language and culture. This has also offered them the potential to secure higher points in the Leaving Certificate examination, enhancing their academic and professional prospects. It is important that schools provide a dedicated space and create a positive and welcoming learning environment for participating students using classroom decorations or posters.

Blended Learning Approach

The balanced mix of online, face-to-face, and self-directed learning has been well-received by both eTeachers and students. The approach optimizes the benefits of both distance and in-person delivery methods. In-person sessions have been crucial for building strong relationships and deepening students' understanding of the Polish language and culture. The eTeachers have been proactive in updating and modifying content to enhance the learning experience. The addition of the outdoor days has strengthened relationships between the students, eTeachers and eMentors as well as enriching their language learning experiences.

School Engagement and Collaboration

The schools have actively participated in the project. The project has allowed schools to offer Polish to students of Polish families, a resource they wouldn't have otherwise. There are indications that this is leading to Polish parents and students choosing CMETB schools. The blend of online and face-to-face sessions has proven effective. Close collaboration between the schools, coordinated by the CMETB Director of Schools has been significant in the smooth implementation of the project and helped minimize timetable conflicts. Within the school, it is important that the Principal, leadership team and staff are aware of and engaged with the project. The Polish eTeachers would welcome further inclusion in the schools and in staff social activities to foster a sense of belonging.

Role of the eMentor

eMentors have played a critical role in the project, ensuring student attendance and participation in Polish classes, and providing necessary support. Their consistent presence has been vital for maintaining the smooth running of the programme. The strong collaboration between eMentors and eTeachers has enhanced the student experience overall and helped address student engagement and wellbeing. It is vital that each participating school has a designated eMentor to supervise students' work

and ensure they are submitting assignments and participating in online lessons. Further evaluation would be required to ascertain how the eMentor role is resourced within each school.

Technology

The use of Microsoft Teams for delivering lessons has been effective, with improvements made to internet connectivity to enhance the online learning experience. The team in CMETB has been proactive in dealing with any technical issues that have arisen. The provision of devices with headphones in a dedicated physical space has been vital to the smooth running of the online lessons. Where students have been provided with individual devices (preferably laptops with headsets) for online lessons, they have had a more positive learning experience overall.

Timetabling

Advance planning to integrate the Polish classes into the main school timetable to avoid scheduling conflicts has been a key element of the project implementation. The early and effective communication between CMETB/PPLI and the schools has facilitated smooth timetabling implementation and helped minimise timetabling conflicts. Schools should be provided with the dates for the Taster module at start of school year so that it can be built into the Transition Year calendar.

Training and Support

Continuous training and support for eTeachers has been instrumental in the success of the project. Regular CPD sessions have enabled the eTeachers to refine their teaching methods and engage students effectively. This has ensured that the eTeachers are well-equipped to manage and deliver lessons in the blended format. An introductory workshop for eMentors would enhance their understanding of their role and clarify what is expected of them.

Potential for Other Subjects

The project's success in providing equitable access to Polish for Leaving Certificate and the potential for its expansion to other language subjects and student groups is a testament to the effectiveness of this collaborative and innovative approach to language learning. The project has already begun to include Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students.

It would be important to continue to gather data on the effectiveness of the blended learning approach in Polish and use this information to consider potential implementation in other language subjects. This Polish blended learning model can provide a basis to explore the feasibility of applying blended learning strategies to other subject areas.