

## **What attending a bilingual school has meant for our children: Our perspectives as parents on bilingual education**



There was a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction among teachers and parents in Spain with the outcomes of the traditional model of teaching a foreign language at school, based on only limited evidence of pupils developing an accurate command of their foreign language by the end of their education.

By contrast, a bilingual education approach offered an early start, a significant increase in learning time in the curriculum, and the opportunity to learn other subjects (history, biology...) through the medium of the additional language. It therefore comes as no surprise that bilingual education has been embraced enthusiastically by parents, students, and educational policy-makers in Spain. We count ourselves among those enthusiastic followers of this education.

Being firm believers that enrolling children in a bilingual school from an early age was a good option for them, from the year our children turned three, both of them attended a bilingual state-run infant and primary education school (C.P. Ventanielles) and continued bilingual education through an equally bilingual state-run secondary school (I.E.S. Pérez de Ayala) in Oviedo, in the north of Spain. Both these schools are involved in the agreement signed in 1996 between the Ministry of Education and Science and the British Council to introduce an integrated curriculum in Spanish state schools.

We were first drawn to the school by our desire for our children to acquire a high proficiency in English and by what we thought to be the opportunity for our son and daughter to develop a strong bilingual–bicultural identity. And we have certainly been very pleased as our children have indeed grown highly proficient in English and are open-minded individuals. Today we can say that this programme has exerted a positive influence on our children’s oral, written, and intercultural competence in English.

We value the academic quality and career-related advantages of the bilingual programme and think that being fluent in an additional language opens doors to extra professional opportunities. In addition, we see today how this education has given our children a broader outlook about another culture and another way of life and has brought them closer to different races and nationalities, helping them enjoy greatly the experience of visiting English speaking countries. The Erasmus programme that our oldest son had the opportunity to enrol in thanks to the involvement and dedication of his Bilingual English Project teachers allowed him to travel and learn about other cultures, understand the world around him, and accept differences. He cherishes this as one of the best opportunities and experiences he has had in his pre-university school life.

Our son is now in his first year at University and our daughter is currently in tenth grade at school. We can confidently say that as a result of our decision to put them in a bilingual school they are highly competent in English, they are more tolerant individuals and they display creativity and a passion for learning. The education they have received is a gift to them for which we will always be grateful.