

Testing English in a bilingual programme

Comunidad de Madrid

Spain



In an agreement with the Comunidad de Madrid, Spain, Cambridge English Qualifications are being used as an external assessment of the effectiveness of the region's bilingual programme.

In order to raise levels of English in state schools across the region, the Comunidad de Madrid implements a bilingual education programme based on a CLIL approach (Content and Language Integrated Learning), where up to 50% of the curriculum is taught in English. When first launched in 2004, 26 schools took part, but now over 400 schools – some 300 primary and around 100 secondary – implement the programme, representing around 50% of all school places in the region. The Comunidad sets a standard target of Level A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for pupils leaving primary school within the bilingual system, with those achieving this level going on to a 'bilingual section' at secondary school, where up to 50% of classroom teaching is in English, and a special advanced syllabus is provided for the English language classes. Students below A2 level continue to receive a bilingual education, but with fewer subjects taught through the medium of English, and a less-demanding English language syllabus.

In 2010, when the first cohort of Madrid Bilingual Programme students reached the end of primary education, the Comunidad turned to Cambridge

Assessment English to provide exit tests which could benchmark the levels being attained by these students in all skills against the CEFR. In the first year, 1,660 students took either A2 Key for Schools or B1 Preliminary for Schools. In 2017, this had grown to almost 13,000 students.

As the Madrid Bilingual Programme expanded into secondary schools, B2 First for Schools and C1 Advanced were added to assess pupils in the fourth year of secondary education (the last year of compulsory education), thereby measuring English proficiency before students enter Bachillerato (a two-year post-compulsory course leading to university entrance). In 2017, over 1,200 students sat C1 Advanced, and over 3,000 took B2 First for Schools. A further 4,000 took A2 Key for Schools or B1 Preliminary for Schools in secondary education.

The use of Cambridge English Qualifications within the bilingual programme has prompted significant teacher training for the schools involved, and widespread changes to school curricula in order to absorb the new English content required. Such has been the success of the agreement, which is now renewed annually by public tender, the numbers of students tested continues to expand every year.

In addition to the results, Cambridge English provides the Comunidad with a detailed report each year on the performance of their students, with recommendations for future development within the programme.

The Comunidad de Madrid signed an agreement with Cambridge Assessment English to provide an exit test for primary school students, and to assess secondary school students before they take the Bachillerato.