

C'est Chouette

French for Children

By Barbara Gleave



'Chouette French' is a new and exciting local venture offering out-of-school French classes for children from 18 months to 11 years. It is run by Barbara Gleave, a well-qualified and experienced teacher of Primary French who lives in West Kirby.

"I chose the name 'Chouette' (shweht) for my children's French groups because of its double meaning," Barbara explains. "First, 'une chouette' is an owl. Second, 'chouette' is an adjective meaning great or super, so the phrase 'C'est chouette!' means 'It's great!' and it's my intention for children to agree that learning French in this way is great fun."

Barbara has a good stock of real French children's books and was delighted to find a picture book called *Chouette, pas chouette!* in a Limoges bookshop this summer. So simple is the text that children can read the entire book in their very first French session!



The children who attended the free taster session in Birkenhead children's library at half-term were certainly proud of this achievement. They also sang songs, chanted a finger rhyme, counted up to 10, played a game, learned some animals names and tried on masks to become *un singe* and *un panda*. After-school classes start at the library in mid November, and sessions are also planned for West Kirby, Heswall, Greasby and Hoylake.

Young children quickly absorb a foreign language and begin to use frequently used phrases in very natural way. Two-year-old Benjamin comes to Parent and Tot sessions with his granddad. He's as happy to count to 10 in French as in English and after watching

dolls and teddies act out *Boucle d'Or et les Trois Ours* (Goldilocks and the Three Bears), he replayed the scenes repeating '*Ahhh! Je me suis brûlée!*' in Goldilock's voice as he tasted the hot porridge.

As an Advanced Skills Teacher for Primary French, Barbara spent part of her week visiting other primary schools to help them embed French into the curriculum. She was also a National Trainer for 'Implementing the Primary Languages Entitlement'. Next year it will be a statutory requirement of Primary schools to teach a foreign language consistently and in sufficient depth so that the pupils make substantial progress over the four years of Key Stage 2.

Now she is based in Wirral, Barbara hopes that her knowledge and experience can assist local primary schools ensure that they meet the DfE's requirements. Teaching a 3rd and 4th year of a foreign language may be daunting for the non-specialist, but there are great resources available, online support and free training, including courses abroad. "I spent two weeks in Besançon in 2001 on an intensive 'French for Young Learners' course," says Barbara, "and such courses are still available."

"I can show teachers that teaching French is not a chore; children love learning a foreign language. Forget '*la plume de ma tante*'; these days it is such fun, for the pupils and the teachers!"

If you would like your child to learn French in a fun activity group, please contact Barbara to find the nearest suitable venue for your child. Or see the website for more information.

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