

# Polish up your Polish

There are lots of Poles in Canterbury and they don't want to forget about their homeland. Denise Smith meets the enterprising team behind the Polish School

**Who would have thought that Canterbury and the surrounding villages had a thriving Polish community? Well it's true. The only problem is that children in Polish homes, going to mainstream schools, can often lose their native heritage by speaking only English and soaking up English culture.**

That's where the Polish Saturday School in Canterbury comes in. Established in October 2010 by former academic Dr Aga Gordon - with help from Jadwiga Matusz and Marta Gocek from the Polish Association in Kent - the school solves the problem. Overseen by the Polish Educational Club in Kent, the school aims to improve educational prospects of Polish children and young people by teaching them Polish language, history and culture.

The Polish Saturday School is a small enterprise which operates twice a month for two hours, staffed by Dr Gordon and four other highly qualified teachers and professionals - Marta Gocek, Kamila Lobuzinska, Sabina

Klimasz and Kasia Choluj.

Until recently, the school was run on goodwill, but in December they were awarded a small grant from the 'Awards for All' Lottery fund. This has allowed them more scope and an opportunity to pay the teachers.


The school takes children from three to 11 and currently has 19 students. Classes are small, with children divided into two age groups - 3-5 years and 5-11. They are taught to speak, read and write in Polish. They also learn Polish history, literature, geography and culture through creative and innovative methods.

Dr Gordon, now the head teacher, is a firm believer in effective learning from the very early stages and introduced the Doman method to the school, a system where children as young as three learn words and full sentences using flash cards.

Dr Gordon says: "Children under five have an incredible ability to learn. They soak up knowledge like sponges without realising it. Anyone who doesn't capitalise on a child's full potential is wasting that potential."

from mixed families about bilingualism, and Polish classes for British partners of mixed Polish-British families if they would be interested.

There is a large community of Polish people in East Kent - especially in Canterbury, Ashford, Margate and Cliftonville - but the school does not intend to limit itself only to this community. In the future it aims to exceed its educational impact on the wider community by organising multi-cultural events, raising awareness about the Polish community and bringing up a bilingual child in a multicultural society.

Classes for the Saturday school cost £4.50 per hour, or £54 per term, which covers all resources. It runs every other Saturday from 10am until noon at Thanington Neighbourhood Resource Centre. Anyone interested should call 07878 957519 or email: [polskaszkolacanterbury@gmail.com](mailto:polskaszkolacanterbury@gmail.com). 

Each year, the youngsters have a party in summer to commemorate International Children's Day - 1st June - and one in winter to celebrate St Nicholas' Day (6 December). Both of these are national celebrations in Poland.

Dr Gordon says: "There are a lot of misunderstandings about bilingualism and how to successfully bring up a child bilingually at home. Teachers at mainstream schools often feel that bilingualism is unnecessary but our school gives parents the resources and the confidence to do it right."

The school has been so successful that Dr Gordon and her team are thinking about providing classes for parents

## Dr Agnieszka Gordon

Dr Gordon, founder and director of the Polish Saturday School, provides English-Polish translation services, business consultancy and training. She is a board member of the Polish Association in Kent.



## Useful info

- Polish Association in Kent: [www.polskakent.org](http://www.polskakent.org)
- Polish Educational Club in Kent: [www.polisheducationalclub.com](http://www.polisheducationalclub.com)

