

# Gazette

---

## Youngsters celebrate 25 years of learning French

9:01am Monday 11th April 2011

By Emily Roberts

---

A FRENCH playgroup, which has helped hundreds of children learn the foreign language, has celebrated its 25th anniversary.

L'école Maternelle was founded by Chansopha Biermann a quarter of a century ago, with the idea of helping children to learn French at a young age.

Since then, the idea has spread to include after-school clubs and other foreign language groups.

Around 90 children performed on stage at Everest Community College, in Oxford Way, Popley, Basingstoke, to family and friends as part of the anniversary celebrations.

In the audience was Basingstoke and Deane mayor Councillor Keith Chapman, who got up on stage with the children for a special guest appearance.

Children involved in the production sang French songs and performed short plays in either French or other foreign languages. Fiona Biermann, who runs the group with her mother, said that when the playgroup launched, it was believed to be the only one in the whole of Hampshire.

She added: "It encourages children to learn French at an early age. My mother is from Cambodia, which is a war-torn country and she understands how conflicts and misunderstandings can create war. She believes cultural understanding can help prevent that.

"She wanted her children to learn a foreign language to also give other children the opportunity to learn from an early age so that when they meet people from other countries, they aren't scared.

"We get the children to learn French, but it doesn't feel like learning because they are having fun. When children learn a foreign language at secondary school, it can be embarrassing.

"But when you are young, you are still learning your own language so the brain is already open to it."

Children at the playgroup, which meets at Chineham Village Hall in Thornhill Way, range from a one-year-old up to school age.

Miss Biermann said the celebrations also gave parents the chance to see what their children had learned. Money raised from donations on the day totalled £300 and will be given to Save the Children Fund.

© Copyright 2001-2011 Newsquest Media Group

<http://www.basingstokegazette.co.uk>