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Rethinking the ‘one community – one home, heritage, and community language’ model: diversity in complementary education

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ABSTRACT

Greek complementary schools (GCSs) in the UK are widely understood as institutions for maintaining Greek language and culture among the Greek Cypriot and Greek diasporic communities in Britain. However, recent migration and mixed marriages have significantly diversified their populations. This mixed-methods study provides the first sector-wide mapping of the languages spoken in UK GCS communities beyond Greek and English and of the national origins beyond Cyprus and Greece among pupils' families and teaching staff in 2024/2025. A school-level online questionnaire investigated pupils' family backgrounds and linguistic repertoires. The questionnaire was completed by 32 schools (51.6% of all UK GCSs), yielding quantitative estimates for 2,736 pupils (40.9% of sector enrolments). Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 respondents representing nine schools. Survey findings show substantial heterogeneity. Pupils from mixed-heritage and non-Greek Cypriot/Greek backgrounds accounted for nearly half of enrolments on average. Parental origins spanned over 47 countries, with the UK and Albania most frequently reported, while 25 additional home languages were reported, most commonly Albanian. Interview data corroborate these patterns but suggest that diversity is often institutionally muted within Greekness-centred environments. Albanian heritage emerged as a salient site of tension, alongside examples of pupil agency and locally developed inclusive practices.

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Introduction: “Greek, a language that I have wanted to learn all my life”

At the end of the 2024/2025 school year, Konstantina (pseudonym), a teacher at a large Greek complementary school (GCS) in London, received a handwritten thank-you card from one of her pupils. In it, the pupil expresses gratitude for being supported to learn Greek, “a language I have wanted to learn all my life”, and promises to continue using it “now that I know it better thanks to you” (Figure 1). What makes this message particularly striking is that it was written by a pupil whose family background sits outside the ethnic categories through which GCSs have conventionally been imagined. Both of the pupils’

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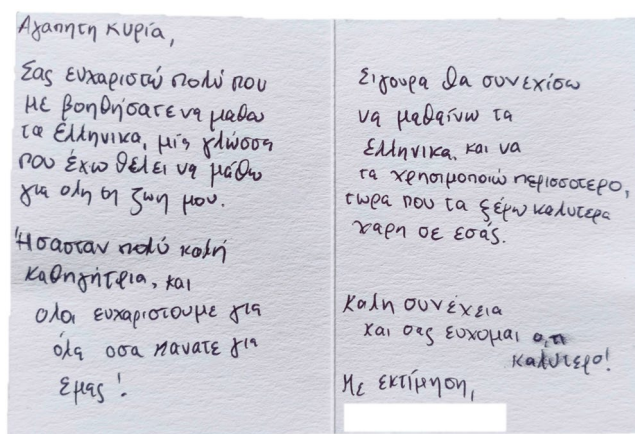


Figure 1. Thank-you card given to a teacher at a london GCS by a bulgarian pupil (reproduced with permission of the teacher and the pupil). English translation: “dear miss, thank you very much for helping me learn greek, a language that I have wanted to learn all my life. You were a very good teacher, and we all thank you for everything you did for us! I will definitely continue learning greek, and I will use it more, now that I know it better thanks to you. All the best, and I wish you the very best! with appreciation, [pupil name redacted]”.

parents are Bulgarian. Before settling in the United Kingdom, the family had first migrated from Bulgaria to Greece, where they lived for several years, and when the Greek financial crisis hit in the early 2010s, they onward migrated to the UK. After establishing themselves in London, they enrolled their child in the GCS where Konstantina teaches. The pupil has flourished academically in the school. Unlike other children, who often discontinue attendance after completing the Modern Greek GCSE, the card writer remained in the school, progressed to A Level, and is (at the time of writing this article) preparing to sit the Modern Greek A Level examination, revising independently at home.

The example above points to a potential mismatch between the kinds of pupils who attend GCSs today and the assumptions that have historically structured these institutions. Greek complementary education has largely operated within what I term the “one community – one home, heritage, and community language (HHCL)” model, which presupposes a relatively homogenous Greek-speaking diaspora and positions Greek as the shared HHCL alongside English as the dominant societal language and, in some cases, the language in which GCS pupils are more proficient. The presence of pupils with more complex linguistic repertoires, linked to family compositions and migration trajectories that extend beyond Cyprus and Greece, such as the pupil who wrote the card in Figure 1, challenges this model by highlighting forms of diversity that it does not readily accommodate. In this context, existing curricula and classroom practices may not fully reflect or engage with the lived realities of GCS communities.

Yet, despite these potential consequences, the scale and composition of diversity within GCSs remain unknown in empirical terms. This is unsurprising, as, while similar forms of diversification are likely to be present across other CSs, there remains limited empirical research on pupils who attend CSs without a direct ethnolinguistic affiliation to the respective target language. The present article constitutes a first attempt to address this gap. The findings presented below, while focused on GCSs, therefore have broader relevance for

other UK CSs undergoing comparable developments such as Arabic CSs serving families from across the Arabic-speaking world (Soliman & Khalil, 2024) or CSs teaching languages such as Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Romanian, whose speaker populations increased significantly between 2011 and 2021 due to the same factors that brought about the increase in the number of speakers of Greek in the UK (Karatsareas, 2024).

Drawing on a mixed-methods design, the article pursues three interrelated aims: first, to map the range of languages spoken in GCS communities beyond Greek and English, providing the first sector-wide snapshot of multilingual repertoires in pupils' families; second, to document the national origins of pupils' families and teaching staff beyond Cyprus and Greece, offering empirical insight into the extent and distribution of non-Greek and non-Greek Cypriot backgrounds across schools; and third, to explore how linguistic and national diversity is perceived, evaluated, and managed by school leaders. I argue that, despite increased diversity, pupils' broader multilingual repertoires risk being rendered invisible across both complementary and mainstream educational contexts, albeit in different ways.

Greek complementary schools in the UK: institutional and demographic context

Early GCSs were established in the UK by members of London's Greek diaspora in the early twentieth century (Mettis, 1998). The network expanded considerably following the rapid growth of the Greek Cypriot community, first with increased migration in the late 1950s and early 1960s and later after the 1974 war, which led to further large-scale displacement from Cyprus (Christodoulides, 1967; Kountouris, 2015). What Voskou (2021: 203) describes as the historical mission of GCSs was "a way of fulfilling immigrants' wish to forge ethnic identities and transmitting the Greek heritage and ethnic characteristics to the following generations" in an attempt to alleviate concerns regarding a "gradual de-hellenisation of the children", and to protect them from assimilation to the British linguistic, cultural, and broader societal milieu. This ideological framework underpinned the sector for decades. Over time, GCSs became a key diaspora pillar (Wei & Hua, 2013) for, and at times a site of contestation between, local Greek-speaking communities, the UK's Greek Orthodox Church, and the states of Cyprus and Greece.

Contemporary GCSs are part-time, community-run institutions that operate outside mainstream school hours (most commonly on Saturday mornings and weekday evenings) and use premises that are either borrowed or rented, including church halls and mainstream school buildings. By the 2024/2025 school year, the GCS sector comprised 62 schools and 6,684 pupils, with enrolments showing a gradual recovery following earlier declines in school numbers from their 2005/2006 peak (MESY, 2026). GCSs are financially sustained primarily through tuition fees and local fundraising, and are organised through school committees with governance varying by affiliation, including schools linked to Greek Orthodox parishes and others associated with parent associations. While both the governments of Greece and of the Republic of Cyprus historically supported GCSs through teacher secondments and the provision of teaching materials, the Republic of Cyprus has emerged as the principal national actor sustaining the sector following Greece's withdrawal from overseas educational provision after 2011 (Law 4027/2011). This role is exercised primarily through the Cyprus Educational Mission (Κυπριακή Εκπαιδευτική Αποστολή; KEA), a

London-based department of the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth of the Republic of Cyprus (MESY), which supports schools through staffing, pedagogical oversight, and coordination across the network. The Republic of Cyprus also provides direct financial support through annual budget allocations. In 2026, the allocation amounted to €720,000 (Ministry of Finance, the Republic of Cyprus, 2026: 657).

The Greek Cypriot and Greek communities have therefore been traditionally perceived as the primary providers, users, and beneficiaries of out-of-hours Greek-language education in the UK. This assumption is echoed, among others, in the curriculum produced for GCSs by MESY (Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, Republic of Cyprus, 2023), where Cyprus and Greece are presented as the two homelands of pupils attending GCSs and, more broadly, as co-constituting the Greek diaspora in the UK, referred to through the term *παροικία* ‘diaspora community’. The curriculum states that its aim is “the cultivation of an emotional connection between the children and young people of the diaspora community and their homeland, Cyprus and Greece” (p. 6), positioning Greek-language education as a key vehicle for diasporic attachment to these two national reference points. At the same time, the curriculum emphasises that educational work in GCSs should be carried out “with respect for and acceptance of every form of otherness” (*ibid.*), without, however, specifying what kinds of difference may be present within GCS communities or how such heterogeneity should be pedagogically recognised or addressed.

This conceptualisation also has clear linguistic implications. By construing Cyprus and Greece as the two homelands of a single diaspora and the UK as the diaspora setting, it implicitly aligns with an expectation that pupils are largely bilingual in Greek as the HHCL and English as the dominant societal language. This orientation is also reflected in the curriculum itself, which states that pupils “grow up knowing two languages – English and Greek” (MESY, 2023, 7). The curriculum can therefore be read as a representative example of a broader line of thought in the study of complementary education which I term the “one community – one HHCL” model, which I briefly introduced above. This analytical framing presupposes diasporic communities that are largely or even entirely homogeneous in their defining characteristics (ethnicity, culture, religion, history) and unified around a single emblematic language, most typically a standardised form that is official in the community’s country of origin. This framing leaves little conceptual room for the possibility that some members of GCS communities may have additional cultural affiliations beyond Greek Cypriot/Greek and British, or indeed no Greek Cypriot/Greek or British backgrounds at all, and, by extension, that their linguistic repertoires may include more languages than Greek and English. What is particularly notable in the Greek case is the way this model is underpinned by an ideology that symbolically brings together Cyprus and Greece within a single imagined community (Anderson, 2006) referred to as Hellenism (Philippou & Klerides, 2010). In this sense, the model does not simply posit one language per pre-existing community but actively produces the community itself as singular, coherent, and bounded through a single language.

However, the demographic profile of the UK’s Greek-speaking diasporas has undergone profound change since at least 2010 as a result of the financial crisis in Greece, which produced large-scale emigration (Damanakis et al., 2014; Pratsinakis et al., 2021; Anastasakis et al., 2022; Pratsinakis et al., 2025). In the UK context, data from the Office for National Statistics show that the Greek-born population of England and Wales rose by 133% between 2011 and 2021, increasing from 34,889 to 80,122 individuals (ONS, 2013, 2022, 2023a).

Over the same period, the number of census respondents identifying their ethnicity as Greek increased from 43,875 to 77,575, representing a rise of 76.8%, while those reporting Greek as their main language increased from 50,205 to 76,675 (a 52.7% increase). Both the ethnicity and main language measures may include individuals of Greek Cypriot background, and therefore do not isolate post-2011 migration from Greece as clearly as the country-of-birth measure. In the case of ethnicity, the census allows respondents to identify as “Cypriot (part not stated)” or “Greek Cypriot”, but some may instead opt for “Greek”. In this respect, it is notable that between 2011 and 2021 the number of individuals identifying as “Cypriot (part not stated)” declined from 15,296 to 8,417, while those identifying as “Greek Cypriot” increased from 25,891 to 46,051. The country of birth measure, therefore, more clearly captures recent migration flows, including the marked increase in migration from Greece to the UK between 2011 and 2021, and as such provides a more precise picture of the post-2011 diversification of the UK’s Greek-speaking communities.

A non-negligible share of ‘new’ migrants from Greece consists of onward migrants, that is, people who had previously migrated to Greece from third countries and later moved to the UK, often after acquiring Greek citizenship – like the Bulgarian family mentioned above. Albanians form the most prominent group within this category (Karamoschou, 2018; Karatsareas & Ndoci, 2024; Ndoci & Karatsareas, forthcoming). Of the 86,791 Greek passport holders recorded in England and Wales in 2021, 13,546 (15.6%) were born in Albania (ONS, 2023b) and have complex linguistic repertoires that include at least three named languages: Albanian, Greek, and English. The contemporary Greek-speaking diaspora is therefore markedly more heterogeneous than earlier imaginaries allow.

These broader migratory shifts are increasingly visible in Greek-language education initiatives in destination countries such as the UK, Germany, the USA, Australia, and elsewhere, where Greek schools are being reshaped by the arrival of post-2010 migrants and their children (Panagiotopoulou et al., 2019; Koutsogiannis et al., 2024). Across an emergent body of work documenting what Lytra refers to as “the heightened internal diversities of Greek schools abroad” (Lytra 2022, 73), attention has centred primarily on teachers’ views and experiences of these changes as well as on the pedagogical challenges of teaching Greek across increasingly mixed cohorts (especially the differentiated linguistic profiles of newly arrived pupils vis-à-vis second-/third-generation heritage learners) alongside wider questions of curriculum, assessment, and teacher education (Mattheoudakis & Maligkoudi, 2024). Other works have begun to broaden the lens to community-level and policy dimensions of Greek-as-a-HHCL education, including leadership, parent and student perspectives, and sustainability strategies (Ganuza et al., 2025, 2026; Aravossitas & Oikonomakou, 2026).

Within this literature, pupils whose linguistic repertoires extend beyond Greek and the majority societal language of the local context are acknowledged (Karatsareas, 2021; Chatzidaki, 2024, 2024) but tend to remain largely analytically peripheral. Recent work by Panagiotopoulou et al. (2025), however, begins to foreground these trajectories by tracing an onward migrant pupil’s educational biography across Albania, Greece, and Germany and examining how the pupil’s multilingualism in Albanian, Greek, English, and German was devalued in both the German and Greek school systems with Albanian being completely ignored across both educational contexts. In the Greek system, while Greek served as the language of education, the pupil’s Albanian heritage remained marginalised and invisible.

It must also be added that, alongside post-2010 mobility, there is widespread anecdotal evidence within the UK community that rising rates of mixed marriage are further

diversifying the linguistic and cultural profiles of pupils who attend GCSs (Hellenic TV London, 2013). In some cases, such as families in which one parent is Greek Cypriot or Greek and the other British, pupils may fit the relatively familiar profile of Greek–English bilingualism. In other cases, however, mixed marriage may involve a Greek Cypriot or Greek parent and a non-British parent of another national background, with the child growing up in the UK in a family where, in addition to Greek and English, at least one further HHCL may be present, used, and socially meaningful. Taken together, these developments create the possibility that a non-trivial subset of GCS pupils may be navigating multilingual repertoires and plural affiliations that exceed the dominant Greek–English bilingual template, with potential consequences for how HHCL education is conceptualised, supported, and experienced in GCS settings.

Materials and methods

Conducted between March and July 2025, the study combined a school-level survey with semi-structured interviews. The study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Westminster and MESY via the Centre of Educational Research and Evaluation of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute.

A questionnaire was designed in Greek to capture the key sociolinguistic and demographic information relevant to the study. More specifically, it elicited information on several domains: the size of the pupil population in each responding school; the national origin and migration trajectories of pupils' parents/carers; the languages other than Greek and English spoken among pupils' families; and, the national origins and languages of teaching staff. It was addressed to Heads of GCSs, who were best placed to report on school demographics given their oversight of day-to-day operations and their role as key keepers of institutional information. One response was requested per school. Participating schools received a £30 GiftPay voucher.

A key consideration in the design was to group Greek Cypriot and Greek pupils, parents/carers, and staff into a single category to mitigate concerns that reporting differences between Greek Cypriot and Greek proportions might affect decisions about financial or in-kind support provided by the Republic of Cyprus. This approach shaped questions like “How many pupils at your school do you estimate come from families in which both parents/carers are of Greek or Greek Cypriot origin?”. Although a more fine-grained breakdown would have been desirable, this was not pursued as the study's primary aim was to map languages spoken beyond Greek and English. In that respect, combining Greek Cypriot and Greek pupils and parents/carers was not methodologically problematic, as Greek varieties would be expected across all possible configurations (both parents/carers are Greek Cypriot, both are Greek, or one is Greek Cypriot and the other Greek).

The design of the questionnaire also considered the likelihood that some GCSs might not readily hold, in a retrievable format, the types of information sought by the study. KEA recommends that GCSs complete an individual registration form for each pupil, which records pupils' nationality, place of birth, religion, and mother tongue, alongside parents'/carers' places of birth. However, how consistently these forms are used across GCSs or whether, when used, the data are aggregated centrally in a way that supports retrieval and analysis are unclear. Respondents were therefore asked to provide numerical estimates,

percentages, or both, depending on the question. They were also invited to provide brief qualitative responses where appropriate, for example by listing which additional languages were spoken by pupils and families, and by indicating the countries of origin of pupils' parents/carers and staff beyond Cyprus and Greece. Respondents were explicitly informed that approximate figures and qualitative responses were acceptable, provided they reflected their informed knowledge of the school community, and that no verification of responses would be undertaken.

The quantitative data were analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics using descriptive statistical procedures. The analysis focused on frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations at the level of the school, examining patterns relating to pupil backgrounds, migration trajectories, languages, and staff diversity. Percentages were interpreted in relation to total school populations in order to facilitate comparison across schools of different sizes. These procedures were selected because the quantitative component of the study was exploratory in nature. The aim was not to produce statistically generalisable findings or to undertake inferential statistical testing, but rather to identify sector-wide patterns and points of variation.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with questionnaire respondents. An interview guide was designed to ensure a degree of consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on issues of particular relevance to their institutional context. Interview questions focused on participants' perceptions of national and linguistic diversity within their school communities, institutional responses to diversity, and the challenges and opportunities associated with diversity in GCSs.

Eleven respondents expressed interest in being interviewed: nine women and two men, representing nine schools (in two cases, two representatives from the same school were interviewed). Eight respondents were from Greece and three from Cyprus. Four of the represented schools were in London and five were located in other parts of the UK. In total, ten interviews were conducted in Greek. Seven took place online via Zoom using an institutional account, and three were conducted face-to-face (two on school premises and one in a restaurant). Each participant received an additional £30 GiftPay voucher on behalf of their GCS in recognition of the time devoted to the interview. Online interviews were audio- and video-recorded using Zoom's inbuilt recording functionalities, while face-to-face interviews were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder.

Interviews lasted on average 30 minutes and 50 seconds (range: 16 minutes 25 seconds to 42 minutes 9 seconds). Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and manually corrected, resulting in a corpus of 42,915 words. Interview participants are referred to using pseudonyms alongside anonymised school labels.

The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). They were read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data, and initial codes were generated inductively to capture recurring patterns and salient issues in participants' accounts. These codes were then refined and grouped into broader themes that reflected shared orientations across interviews. Throughout the analysis, attention was paid not only to the content of participants' responses, but also to the ways in which diversity was evaluated and discursively framed. Interview accounts were treated as situated and institutionally embedded, shaped by participants' roles within GCSs as well as by the demographic composition of their school communities, including the proportion of mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils enrolled in their settings.

The questionnaire, the quantitative dataset, and the interview questions are available online at https://osf.io/3cq5v/overview?view_only=a50f09560e7248dea19a316bea49e7fd

Quantitative findings

Size of schools and composition of pupil populations

Completed questionnaires were returned by 32 GCSs, representing a response rate of 51.6%. Not all respondents were able to provide complete data on family background for their entire school population. Twenty-three GCSs (71.9%) supplied figures covering 100% of their pupils, while the remaining nine (28.1%) provided partial data only. Thirteen schools were in London, out of a total of 29 London-based GCSs (44.8%), while 19 were outside London, out of 33 non-London GCSs (57.6%). Although this difference was not marked, when considered alongside insights gained from the interviews, it may tentatively suggest that schools outside London were more inclined to engage with the study, perhaps because greater distance from London as a de facto centre of sector decision-making and coordination, including through KEA's London base, can foster a sense of being more peripheral to, and less directly connected with, ongoing developments across the GCS network. By contrast, schools in London may not have felt the same need to engage, given their closer proximity to key community structures, institutions, and networks.

School size varied considerably, ranging from 13 to 385 pupils, with a median enrolment of 47 pupils and a mean of 85.5 pupils ($SD = 89.2$). Overall, responding schools provided data for a total of 2,736 pupils, representing 40.9% of the total enrolled pupil population for 2024/2025. This percentage was calculated by comparing the total number of pupils reported by the heads who responded to the questionnaire with the sector-wide enrolment figure of 6,684 pupils reported by MESY (2026). School size did not appear to correlate with whether a school was located in London or outside London. Among the five largest schools (210–385 pupils), three were based in London and two were located elsewhere in the UK; among the five smallest schools (13–20 pupils), three were likewise based in London and two were outside London.

Across the sample, pupils from families in which both parents/carers were of Greek Cypriot or Greek origin accounted on average for 49.0% of enrolments ($SD = 20.4\%$). This average masks substantial variation at the school level. The proportion of pupils from exclusively Greek Cypriot or Greek families ranged from as low as 14.3% to as high as 90.9%. However, in only a small minority of schools did pupils from families in which both parents/carers were of Greek Cypriot or Greek origin constitute more than three quarters of the pupil population. This was the case in 2 GCSs (6.3%). Conversely, in 15 schools (46.9%), this group accounted for less than half of the pupil population.

Pupils from mixed-heritage families, defined as families in which only one parent/carer was of Greek Cypriot or Greek origin, formed a comparably large proportion of enrolments. On average, mixed-heritage families accounted for 43.3% of pupil populations ($SD = 20.0\%$), with proportions ranging from 4.5% to 85.7%. The median proportion of mixed-heritage pupils was 39.1%. Therefore, in a typical GCS, mixed-heritage pupils represent a substantial segment of the school community.

Pupils from families in which neither parent/carer was of Greek Cypriot or Greek origin were present in the majority of schools that returned completed questionnaires, specifically in 18 GCSs (56.3%). Fourteen schools (43.8%) reported 0% of pupils in this category. On average, this group accounted for 4.5% of enrolments ($SD = 5.6\%$), with school-level proportions ranging from 0% to 20%. While numerically smaller, their presence across a wide range of schools indicates that GCSs are not exclusively attended by pupils with Greek Cypriot or Greek family backgrounds.

When mixed-heritage pupils and those from families with no Greek Cypriot or Greek parent/carer were considered together, they accounted on average for 47.8% of pupil populations ($SD = 19.9\%$). In several schools, this combined group constituted a majority of enrolments, reaching up to 85.7%. Mixed-heritage pupils and non-Greek Cypriot/Greek families represented more than half of the pupil population in 13 schools (40.6%), and more than 40% in 18 schools (56.3%). Therefore, at the aggregate level, pupils from families that did not have a fully Greek Cypriot or Greek background represented nearly half of the GCS pupil population. Among the five schools with the highest proportions of mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils (range: 73.08%–85.7%), four were located outside London and one was in London. All five of these schools were small or medium-sized, with pupil populations ranging from 21 to 83.

These figures are based on a categorisation that groups together pupils from mixed-heritage families and those with no Greek Cypriot or Greek parental background. This categorisation is intended as an analytical simplification that aligns with the study's primary aim of identifying the extent to which UK GCSs include pupils whose family backgrounds extend beyond the traditionally assumed Greek Cypriot and Greek core. In this sense, grouping together pupils from mixed-heritage and non-Greek backgrounds allows for a broad mapping of diversity beyond this core. At the same time, the distinction necessarily brings together analytically distinct family configurations, as pupils with one Greek-speaking and one non-Greek-speaking parent/carer may share characteristics with both those with two Greek-speaking parents/carers and those with no Greek Cypriot or Greek background. The categories should therefore be understood as heuristic rather than as reflecting homogeneous social or linguistic experiences.

The data presented in this section is summarised in [Table 1](#). The relatively large standard deviations observed across measures indicate substantial variability between schools, suggesting that diversity is unevenly distributed across the sector rather than uniformly present. While some GCSs remain relatively homogeneous, others are characterised by markedly diverse pupil populations, pointing to differentiated institutional profiles within the sector.

Parents'/carers' countries of origin beyond Cyprus and Greece

Respondents were asked to list the countries of origin of pupils' parents/carers beyond Cyprus and Greece. Schools reported a broad and diverse set of parental origins, amounting

Table 1. Pupils' family backgrounds (N = 32 GCSs).

Family background	Mean (%)	SD (%)	Median (%)	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)
Both parents/carers Greek Cypriot or Greek	49.0	20.4	48.8	14.3	90.9
Mixed-heritage (one parent/carer Greek Cypriot or Greek)	43.3	20.0	39.1	4.5	85.7
Neither parent/carer Greek Cypriot or Greek	4.5	5.6	0.0	0.0	20.0
Mixed-heritage and neither parent/carer Greek Cypriot or Greek combined	47.8	19.9	46.4	4.5	85.7

to 47 distinct countries. Thirty GCSs (93.8%) reported at least one country of origin beyond Cyprus and Greece. Parental national diversity is therefore a near-universal feature of GCS communities.

The extent of this diversity varied substantially across schools. One school reported parents/carers originating from 17 different countries, and one from 16 countries. A further school reported 9 countries, while three schools reported 8 countries. Twenty-four schools reported 7 or fewer countries; see Table 2. Of the six schools that reported the highest numbers of countries of origin (8 and above), five were located in London and one was located outside London. With the exception of one small London-based school (33 pupils), the remaining five were large, with pupil populations ranging from 123 to 385.

Some countries were reported consistently across a large number of schools. The UK was the most frequently reported country, listed by 22 schools, followed by Albania (18 schools), Italy (8 schools), and Bulgaria and Romania (each reported by 7 schools). See Table 3 for the remaining 42 countries. Albania was notable not only for its overall frequency but also for its distribution across schools with differing levels of diversity, as it was reported by three of the seven schools that listed only one country of origin beyond

Table 2. Number of parents'/carers' countries of origin beyond Cyprus and Greece reported per school (N = 32 GCSs). Schools could report multiple countries.

Number of countries reported	Number of schools	Percentage of schools
17	1	3.1
16	1	3.1
9	1	3.1
8	3	9.4
7	2	6.3
6	2	6.3
5	1	3.1
4	4	12.5
3	4	12.5
2	4	12.5
1	7	21.9
No countries reported	2	6.3

Table 3. Parents'/carers' countries of origin beyond Cyprus and Greece grouped by frequency of reporting (N = 32 GCSs). Schools could report multiple countries of origin.

Country/-ies	Schools reporting (n)	Schools reporting (%)
United Kingdom	22	68.8
Albania	18	56.3
Italy	8	25.0
Bulgaria, Romania	7	21.9
India, Spain	6	18.8
Ukraine	5	15.6
Germany, Poland, Russia	4	12.5
Moldova, Turkey	3	9.4
Egypt, France, Hong Kong, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Netherlands, Serbia, Thailand	2	6.3
African countries, Arab countries, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, China, Czechia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Lebanon, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, USA, Zambia	1	3.1

Cyprus and Greece, by two of the four schools that listed two countries, and by three of the four schools that listed four countries. Albanian-origin parents/carers and pupils therefore form a recurring presence across both less and more demographically diverse GCS communities.

Languages spoken in pupils' families beyond Greek and English

Schools were asked to estimate the proportion of pupils' families according to their home language practices, distinguishing between families who spoke mostly Greek, mostly English, Greek and English equally, and other languages in addition to Greek and English at home. Across the schools, families reported as speaking mostly English constituted the largest category on average, accounting for 48.7% of families (SD = 21.0%, median = 53.5%, range = 10.0% – 90.9%). Families reported as speaking mostly Greek accounted on average for 34.1% (SD = 19.7%, median = 34.5%, range = 0.0% – 76.3%), while families reported as using Greek and English equally accounted on average for 21.6% (SD = 17.5%, median = 18.8%, range = 0.0% – 68.7%).

Families reported as speaking other languages constituted a smaller, but non-negligible, proportion of school communities. On average, this group accounted for 11.3% of families (SD = 12.0%, median = 9.1%, range = 0.0% – 50.0%). While in several schools this category represented only a small proportion of families, in a minority of cases it accounted for a substantially larger share. For example, in the 32nd GCS (252 pupils), families of 50% of pupils were reported as speaking another language at home in addition to Greek and English. The corresponding proportion was 42% in the 1st LGCS (123 pupils) and 38% in the 10th LGCS (13 pupils). In the 28th GCS (230 pupils), the proportion was reported as 22%.

Table 4 summarises school-level responses relating to pupils' home language practices. The figures should be read as descriptive indicators of different reported patterns of language use rather than as directly comparable or mutually exclusive statistical categories. That is, the category "other languages in addition to Greek and English" should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive from the preceding categories. Rather, it captures the presence of additional linguistic resources within pupils' repertoires that may co-occur with different dominant language patterns. In other words, the use of other languages may combine with contexts where Greek is mostly used, where English is mostly used, or where Greek and English are used equally.

Schools were also asked to report which additional languages were spoken in pupils' families. Overall, 23 GCSs (71.9%) reported at least one additional language. The number of additional languages reported per school varied widely. One school reported 13 languages, two schools reported six languages, one school reported five languages, and five schools reported four languages. Fourteen schools reported three languages or fewer. Of the nine

Table 4. Reported home language practices in pupils' families.

Home language practices	Mean (%)	SD (%)	Median (%)	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)
Mostly Greek	34.1	19.7	34.5	0.0	76.3
Mostly English	48.7	21.0	53.3	10.0	90.9
Greek and English equally	21.6	17.5	18.8	0.0	68.7
Other languages in addition to Greek and English	11.3	12.0	9.1	0.0	50.0

Table 5. Additional languages reported as spoken in pupils' families beyond Greek and English (N = 23 GCSs). Schools could report multiple languages.

Home language(s)	Schools reporting (n)	Schools reporting (%)
Albanian	16	69.6
Italian, Romanian, Spanish	6	26.1
Russian	5	21.7
Bulgarian, French, German, Polish, Turkish	4	17.4
Ukrainian	3	13.0
African languages, Arabic, Chinese	2	8.7
Belarusian, Creole, Hungarian, Indian languages, Irish, Japanese, Moldovan, Portuguese, Serbian, Slovak, Thai	1	4.3

schools that reported four languages or more, eight were located in London and one was located outside London. Schools in this group varied considerably in size, ranging from 13 to 217 pupils. The non-London school reported in this group had 140 pupils. Therefore, while multilingualism beyond Greek and English was widespread, the breadth of linguistic diversity differed substantially between schools.

Twenty-five additional languages were reported. It is, however, likely that the actual number of distinct languages present was higher, as some respondents used labels such as “African languages”, “Indian languages”, or “Creole”, which may encompass more than one named language. These labels are retained in the reporting because they reflect the categories provided by respondents and therefore constitute part of the empirical record of how linguistic diversity was described within schools. Retaining them also avoids introducing speculation about which specific languages were intended, while preserving comparability across schools' self-reports. With these caveats in mind, the most frequently reported language was Albanian, which was listed 16 times across schools. Italian, Romanian, and Spanish were each reported six times, followed by Russian (five times). Bulgarian, French, German, Polish, and Turkish were each reported four times, while Ukrainian was reported three times. A further set of languages was reported less frequently; see [Table 5](#).

National origins of teaching staff

Data on teaching staff indicated that the majority of GCSs employed teaching teams that were predominantly of Greek Cypriot or Greek origin. Nevertheless, 12 schools (37.5%) reported the presence of small numbers of staff who were either of mixed heritage or of non-Greek Cypriot and non-Greek origin. Two schools reported employing mixed-heritage staff, eight reported employing non-Greek staff, and two reported employing both mixed-heritage and non-Greek teachers. Where present, the number of such staff members was generally low. Ten schools indicated that they employed only one member of staff in this category, while two schools reported employing two such staff members. In all cases, these staff members constituted a small proportion of the overall teaching team. The non-Cypriot and non-Greek national origins reported for mixed-heritage and non-Greek teaching staff were limited to four countries. Albania was the most frequently reported, cited by nine schools, followed by the United Kingdom, reported by three schools. Bulgaria and Romania were each reported by one school.

Qualitative findings from thematic analysis

In what follows, the number of participants associated with each theme is provided to give an indication of their relative distribution across the dataset. These figures, however, are not intended as measures of frequency in a quantitative sense but as aids to interpretive transparency.

Muted diversity and the mission of GCSs

All interview participants described their GCS communities as diverse in terms of pupils' national backgrounds and linguistic repertoires, corroborating the quantitative findings. Two participants also referred to religious diversity, noting the presence of pupils from non-Greek Orthodox families. National and linguistic diversity was not presented as exceptional or marginal but rather as a routine, taken-for-granted feature of everyday school life, a stance that is understandable given the relatively high proportions of mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils in the schools represented in the qualitative sample ($n = 9$ GCSs; mean = 53%, median = 62%, SD = 21%, range = 27–79%). At the same time, in the interviews with six participants, diversity was generally framed as institutionally muted, that is, present in the social fabric of the school, but not necessarily articulated, foregrounded, or systematically addressed through explicit school discourses, institutional policies, or organised practices.

The school has great diversity. It's just not manifested, not seen, and not heard. If you don't ask, you'll never know. – Konstantina, teacher at 11th LGCS (385 pupils, 30% mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils)

I don't know to what extent they are given the opportunity to express these things. I would say that the way a child expresses their other identity within this school is somewhat diminished. – Christoforos, Coordinator of 10th LGCS (10 pupils, 62% mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils)

Eleonora's comment that "multiculturalism isn't promoted in Greek schools in general" further pointed to a broader orientation shared across the interviews. Participants treated it as largely self-evident that the remit of GCSs was to promote Greek language and culture, and to sustain a sense of Greekness (and, to a lesser extent, Cypriotness) among Greek Cypriot and Greek pupils growing up in the UK. Within this framing, linguistic and cultural diversity beyond Greek and English was not necessarily denied but it was often positioned as secondary to the core aims of HHCL education. The muted status of diversity was therefore not a matter of silencing or erasure but, rather, reflected the fact that GCSs were widely understood as institutions with a specific identity mission in which Greek language learning was intertwined with the transmission of cultural, historical, and religious traditions. In this sense, pupils' wider multilingual repertoires are not only under-recognised but risk being rendered effectively invisible within school practices that prioritise Greek.

Division of labour and educational complementarities

In the accounts of two participants, the prioritisation of Greek and the muted status of diversity within GCSs were underpinned by an implicit division of labour between

complementary and mainstream education, with the recognition, inclusion, and celebration of diversity constructed as something that was largely left to mainstream schools (referred to in Greek as “the English school”). Within this framing, “the English school” is responsible for organising events such as cultural days and other initiatives that highlight pupils’ diverse backgrounds, and, as a result, GCSs were need not take on responsibility for celebrating the full range of their pupils’ national and linguistic affiliations. There is, however, a pitfall to this arrangement, as mainstream schooling may allow symbolic recognition of pupils’ diverse backgrounds, but it does not support their heritage languages and multilingual selves through which such identities are often lived, negotiated, and transmitted across generations.

At the English school, children maintain their own national identity, but they speak English.
– Eleonora, headteacher of 21st GCS (56 pupils, 27% mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils)

The celebration of multiculturalism in mainstream education was therefore construed as compatible with linguistic assimilation, whereas GCSs were positioned as the institutional space in which HHCL maintenance could properly take place. However, this also meant that pupils’ multilingual repertoires beyond Greek were at risk of being rendered invisible across both educational contexts. Mainstream schools might recognise diversity without sustaining the languages associated with it, while GCSs might sustain Greek but remain less attentive to pupils’ other languages and identities. In this sense, the perceived division of labour between mainstream and complementary education can inadvertently produce a hierarchy in which English, in addition to the majority language of British society, is the language for celebrating public multiculturalism, Greek is the privileged language of HHCL education, and other home languages are left without a clear institutional home (at least in the cases where families do not also enrol children in HHCL schooling for the other language(s) spoken at home).

Centring Greekness

At the same time, two participants suggested that the centring of Greekness could at times take a hegemonic form, particularly through everyday institutional practices that normalised and imposed a singular national narrative as the only legitimate one. Participants referred to practices such as prayer during assemblies and the commemoration of Greek national anniversaries, which functioned as routine rituals of belonging and identity formation.

For instance, right now with the graduation ceremony, it’s mainly the Greek and Cypriot elements being showcased. On other occasions, however, it could be more apparent, because there are other nationalities as well, and they can contribute. – Marina, teacher at 1st LGCS (123 pupils, 40% mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils)

While practices such as the ones described by Marina were aligned with the mission of GCSs and were valued by many participants as integral to the purpose of HHCL education, they could also contribute to an institutional environment in which other languages, identities, and cultural affiliations present within pupils’ families became less speakable or less legitimate. This was likely to be particularly salient for pupils with heritage from national groups that are stereotypically positioned within Greek and Greek Cypriot nationalist

imaginaries as enemies. In the quantitative survey, Turkish parental origins were reported by 9.4% of schools, and German and Italian origins by 12.5% and 25% of schools, respectively.

When asked whether they had witnessed or were aware of instances of racism or other forms of discrimination occurring in their GCSs against mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils, participants generally responded negatively, indicating that such phenomena were not present in their own school settings. The one recurring exception concerned Albanian heritage with several interviewees referring to incidents or wider community attitudes directed at Albanian pupils, parents/carers, or members of staff. One participant recounted a case in which an Albanian child experienced sustained negative treatment by their teacher, including being spoken to in demeaning ways and being repeatedly told that, because they were “not Greek”, they could not be expected to learn Greek properly. The same participant reported that some parents had questioned whether an Albanian teacher could be trusted to teach Greek language, history, and culture “properly” to their children, despite the fact that the teacher had been educated and professionally trained in Greece and was a native speaker of Greek. Two other school representatives described how an Albanian member of staff had not openly identified as such until they were formally required to provide documentation for employment purposes, while another example concerned a parent who appeared hesitant to state their Albanian origin on a registration form until they were reassured by the school management team that there was no stigma attached to doing so. These accounts resonated with the well-documented presence of anti-Albanian racism in Greece (Gkolfinopoulos, 2007; Shehu, 2021), including in educational settings (Androulakis et al., 2018), which has been transplanted, at least in part and in some forms, into the UK’s diasporic context.

Pupil agency and everyday performances of plural belonging

Six participants recounted how pupils themselves often made their multilingual and multicultural backgrounds present, salient, and socially meaningful through their own agentic identity work. This was particularly evident in accounts where pupils explicitly named aspects of their non-Greek heritage, publicly articulating their ‘othernesses’ in ways that suggested pride.

I have a child who even wears the eagle around his neck and says, “Miss, I didn’t come last time because I went to celebrate Albania’s Independence Day”. We discuss it, and they tell us about their Albanian heritage. – Ioulia, Headteacher of 1st LGCS (123 pupils, 40% mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils)

The little boy comes in wearing shirts that say ‘Albania’ on them and tells us, “This is my dad’s country”. [He says,] “I really like learning Greek, but my dad’s country is Albania”. And he is very proud to be Albanian. – Isidora, headteacher of 22nd GCS (83 pupils, 77% mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils)

The openness of Ioulia’s and Isidora’s pupils stands in stark contrast to the earlier accounts of the Albanian parent and the Albanian teacher who reportedly concealed their backgrounds until required to disclose them. The pupils did not simply possess non-Greek heritages but actively performed and claimed them within the GCS space, often through highly visible symbols as well as everyday narrative talk. Material signs such as the double-headed eagle, the national symbol found on the Albanian flag and worn as a pendant on a

necklace, and the Albania-branded t-shirt functioned as identity emblems that made heritage publicly legible, signalling pride and a desire for recognition. Importantly, pupils framed these identity claims as compatible with participation in the GCS. Isidora's pupil explicitly coupled enjoyment of learning Greek with an affirmation of Albanian belonging, suggesting that the two were not experienced as contradictory. These examples may therefore be read as suggesting that, in at least some settings, children perceive some scope for the projection of non-Greek identities within the school environment. Alongside the institutional centring of Greekness, there thus appear to be interactional moments in which pupils can express aspects of their multilingual and multicultural selves.

Towards inclusion: emergent practices and structural constraints

Reflecting on the existence of these spaces, five participants elaborated on what might be gained by more explicitly recognising pupils' non-Greek heritages within GCSs. Several interviewees articulated inclusion as a positive pedagogical and social resource capable of enriching the school community, and framed diversity-oriented activities as a form of community-building through which pupils' different backgrounds could become shared knowledge rather than private, non-disclosable information, strengthening social cohesion, mutual respect, and an explicit valorisation of plural belonging in the school setting.

It's very good, because first and foremost they realise that they aren't just from Greece and Cyprus. They are also from other countries, and they are proud of them, of their heritage, and they aren't ashamed to say, "Yes, miss, I am from Albania, I am from Belarus, I am from Russia, I am from France, Italy, Spain, Portugal. I am also from these countries, and I am proud to be from these regions too, and I want to learn my language". And at the same time, we learn that we live in England and we are citizens of Britain, and we live here as law-abiding citizens. – Ioulia, Headteacher of 1st LGCS (123 pupils, 40% mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils)

Participants therefore recognised clear benefits in making space for non-Greek heritages within GCSs, which was seen as a pathway towards increasing happiness and engagement, foster cohesion, and support a form of belonging (including civic belonging) that accommodated multiple identities rather than requiring pupils to silence aspects of themselves in order to participate.

In that connection, five participants provided multiple examples of emergent inclusive practices that were already implemented in some GCSs, often dependent on local initiative. Some practices were informal and classroom-based, typically led by individual teachers who created opportunities for pupils to draw on their linguistic repertoires and family backgrounds as part of their everyday learning. One headteacher described an activity in which pupils passed around a globe-like ball, identified their countries of origin on the world map printed on it, and shared a word from a language associated with each of the countries they named. Other examples involved structured getting-to-know-each-other sessions early in the school year, where pupils were invited to bring items connected to their family heritage such as clothing, toys, or food and use them as prompts to talk about countries, languages, and cultural practices. Participants emphasised that pupils generally engaged willingly in such activities and that they were rarely reluctant to speak about these aspects of their lives when explicitly invited to do so. In some cases, inclusive work was linked to broader institutional initiatives. One participant described integrating the school

into the EU Senior Ambassador Schools programme and using this framework to foreground pupils' diverse backgrounds, creating a sustained space for pupils and families to contribute artefacts, dances, and food as forms of heritage representation. Such initiatives were also connected to pedagogical strategies that treated pupils' multilingual repertoires as legitimate learning resources, for instance by drawing parallels between Greek, English, and other HHCLs through matching, translation, and multilingual poster-making.

At the same time, three participants consistently framed the sustainability and expansion of such practices as constrained by the adverse conditions under which GCSs operate. Limited instructional time emerged as a key obstacle, as many schools met only once a week for half a day and were therefore compelled to prioritise Greek language teaching in order to cover core curriculum content. Within this compressed timetable, opportunities for additional activities, particularly those that might more readily enable cultural expression such as arts-based work, were described as difficult to organise or maintain. Participants also pointed to the practical limitations of school infrastructure and resources, alongside the absence of structured guidance or sector-wide support on how diversity-oriented initiatives could be developed in a systematic and pedagogically meaningful way. As a result, inclusive practices were often positioned as contingent, relying on individual teacher initiative and on opportune moments within classroom interaction rather than being embedded as stable institutional commitments.

Implications

These findings carry important implications for GCSs. They suggest that institutional visions of homogeneity no longer reflect the demographic realities of many schools and also that pupils' multilingual repertoires risk falling between institutional domains, being neither fully recognised nor systematically supported across complementary and mainstream educational settings. The presence of substantial proportions of mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils calls for pedagogical frameworks that move beyond implicit Greek–English bilingual assumptions and for abstract policy commitments to “otherness” to be translated into concrete practices that institutionalise inclusion rather than leaving it to the chance initiative of individual teachers. This may involve rethinking how HHCL is conceptualised by schools and policymakers within the sector, systematically mapping pupils' full linguistic repertoires at enrolment, and embedding structured opportunities for pupils to draw on all their languages as learning resources. Rather than thinking of Greek and English as the only two languages of relevance for the teaching of Greek, GCSs could adopt pedagogical approaches that recognise pupils' multilingualism as an asset (Choi & Lee, 2025), incorporate translanguaging practices into classroom interaction (García & Kleyn, 2016), and design activities that create opportunities for pupils to mobilise connections between Greek, English, and their other languages (Silvestri, 2025). Such shifts would not dilute the mission of Greek language maintenance. Rather, they could strengthen it by situating Greek within pupils' broader multilingual selves (Henry & Thorsen, 2018), enhancing motivation, identity affirmation, and long-term engagement.

The presence of pupils with no Greek Cypriot or Greek background also raises important questions about how learners are positioned within GCS classrooms. At first glance, such pupils might be seen as analogous to additional-language (L2, L3, L4, ...) learners within

a HHCL education setting. However, this characterisation is not straightforward. These pupils are not necessarily engaging with Greek in the same way as additional-language learners in other settings, as their participation in GCSs is shaped by the institutional, social, and affective dynamics of complementary schooling, including community belonging, migration trajectories within the family, and prior exposure to Greek in transnational contexts. This points to a configuration that has received relatively little attention in the literature, which has more often examined HHCL learners in additional-language contexts rather than the reverse. The presence of such learners in GCSs therefore raises important pedagogical questions regarding differentiation, curriculum design, and the extent to which teaching approaches developed for HHCL learners can accommodate increasingly diverse learner profiles.

These implications extend beyond the Greek case. HHCL schools across different contexts are increasingly shaped by diverse migration patterns, including onward mobility, and mixed families, challenging 'one community – one HHCL' models. Research has begun to document similar processes of internal diversification elsewhere; see, for example, Szczepek Reed et al. (2020) on Arabic schools, Danjo and Moreh (2020) on Japanese schools, and Curdt-Christiansen and Huang (2021) on Chinese schools in the UK. HHCL schools can no longer be understood as operating within neatly bounded ethnolinguistic communities but as nodes where complex, transnational populations with diverse linguistic profiles intersect. Addressing this gap requires moving beyond compartmentalised approaches to language education and towards pedagogical frameworks that engage with pupils' full multilingual repertoires across contexts. HHCL schools are uniquely positioned to do this and to pioneer pedagogies that are not merely bilingual but explicitly multilingual, foregrounding pupils' dynamic repertoires and the ways in which these are drawn upon in learning, identity work, and intergenerational transmission. The study therefore speaks to broader debates in applied linguistics concerning the multilingual turn (Conteh & Meier, 2014, May 2014) and the move from fixed linguistic ideologies to repertoire-based and resource-oriented perspectives (Busch, 2012, 2015). By aligning HHCL education with contemporary multilingual theory and practice along those lines, HHCL schools can better respond to demographic change while modelling inclusive and forward-looking approaches to language education more broadly (Barkhuizen et al., 2026).

Limitations and further research

This study has two main limitations. First, the quantitative data rely on self-reported school-level estimates that could not be validated against centrally aggregated records, as no sector-wide system currently exists for collating demographic information across GCSs. One interviewee suggested that some schools may have underreported the proportions of mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils because of concerns about how such data might be used by MESY or the Republic of Cyprus in relation to school support. It is therefore plausible that the actual proportions are higher than those reported here. Even allowing for this possibility, however, the findings still point to substantial diversity and challenge long-standing assumptions of demographic homogeneity.

A second limitation concerns the positionality of the data sources. Both strands draw on data provided by Greek and Greek Cypriot participants, reflecting the current

composition of GCS leadership. Beginning with headteachers was a strategic choice, as they are best placed to provide school-level demographic and institutional information and are key community gatekeepers. However, this means that the findings largely reflect institutional accounts of diversity rather than the perspectives of mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils, families, and staff themselves. For example, participants offered explanations for why such families enrol children in GCSs, but these are not reported here because they represent teachers' interpretations rather than families' own lived experiences, motivations, and decision-making processes.

Future research should therefore centre mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils, families, and staff. Key questions include why families with no exclusive Greek Cypriot or Greek background choose to enrol their children in GCSs; what prioritising Greek-language education means for the status, transmission, and affective value of other languages within family repertoires; and, whether families actively support the development of these other languages, for example by enrolling children in other HHCL schools, or whether such languages are at risk of marginalisation. Further questions concern the experiences of mixed-heritage and non-Greek pupils in GCSs and how they navigate their multilingual and multicultural identities within Greekness-centred institutional environments as well as the experiences of mixed-heritage and non-Greek educators and the challenges and opportunities they encounter in their roles. There is also a clear need for ethnographic work within GCSs that could function as in-depth case studies focusing on classrooms, staff interactions, and school events. Such work would allow closer examination of interactional practices across the everyday life of the school, including between staffs, pupils, and parents/carers, as well as the informal norms and locally developed inclusive initiatives that emerge within and beyond the classroom.

Finally, future research would benefit from adopting an even more holistic view of pupils' linguistic repertoires by focusing not only on the languages spoken within pupils' families but also including the languages pupils learn in other educational contexts such as mainstream schooling. Such an approach would help to better understand how pupils actively draw upon the full range of their available linguistic resources in the process of learning Greek.

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