



Assessing English as an Additional Language (EAL) pupils

Information for Secondary schools

Children & Young People's Services



1. English assessment

When EAL pupils arrive at secondary school, it is advisable to contact the EAL team, who will assess them using the NASSEA English as an Additional Language (EAL) Assessment Framework and give realistic language targets, based on their level of proficiency in English. These targets should be challenging and attainable. This will enable their future progress to be accurately tracked. The tracking process will enable EAL pupils who are not on track to be identified and also to ensure that bilingual pupils are fairly represented in above-average progress groups. As research into bilingualism has shown that speaking another language can bring cognitive advantages, we would expect that as a group, they should be represented in all ability groups.

The EAL team will check reports from previous schools in order to ascertain their ability, behaviour and attendance. In some cases, their competency in their first language will also be assessed – particularly if there are concerns regarding special needs or levels of literacy. First language assessments are useful to give an indication of a pupil's strengths and needs. They can often be carried out by the EAL team during induction.

It is important not to make assumptions about a pupil's ability and place them in lower sets based solely on an assessment of their proficiency in English. Very often EAL pupils are unable to demonstrate their subject knowledge and conceptual understanding because of their limited English vocabulary, or because they have followed a different curriculum. Lack of competence in English should not be equated with low ability, but when pupils who have EAL make slow progress, it should not be assumed that their language status is the only reason they may be having learning difficulties. Clearly EAL pupils should represent the same proportion of SEN pupils as the majority population. Although they have in the past been over-represented in lists of pupils with statements, awareness has been steadily growing of the distinction between EAL and SEN.

Best Practice is for all new arrivals to be placed in a class where there are positive language and behaviour role models, as this will accelerate their English Language Acquisition.

Please note that pupils with only very basic English language skills are likely to take up to two years to assimilate language, and so care should be taken when assessing them in subject specific topics.

2. Assessments in subject areas

Assessments carried out in English language should not be relied on to demonstrate understanding of subject matter. They should be used to recognise what pupils can do, and reward achievement. An additional language will not be acquired in a predictable linear progression and can therefore not be assessed with a simple checklist but instead be based on a range of different evidence. New pupils arrive from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. It is not wise to use a 'one size fits all' approach to the assessment process.

It may also be appropriate for some assessments to be carried out in the first language, particularly for new arrivals. "Research has established that affording bilingual children the opportunity to continue to use their first language alongside English in school for as long as possible and for cognitively demanding tasks will support the academic achievement of the child and the development of an extra language." (Collier, Cummins).

Pupils should not be moved to lower sets on account of their performance in end of term assessments. Generally poor results will initially reflect a poor knowledge of English rather than cognitive ability or subject knowledge. Any assessment must take into account a range of evidence, including how long a pupil has been learning English. "The complex relationship between first language, cognitive and academic development and the level of proficiency in English will impact on the bilingual learner's ability to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills" (Marking Progress).

Please bear in mind that oral fluency can often mask a need for literacy support.

3. Pupils who arrive in Key Stage 4

Pupils who arrive from overseas can be removed from the number of pupils on role at the end of Key Stage 4 - provided they started on or after the start of the school year preceding the year of the test.

These pupils should be set high – but only entered for exams that they can achieve at GCSE. Other GCSE's can be taken later in the sixth form, when proficiency in English language has improved.

Pupils who have been in the country for less than two years at the time of public examinations can be entitled to use a bilingual dictionary (if they usually use one in class) and may also apply for up to 25% extra time.

N.B. EAL pupils who have been in England for longer, will have studied curriculum topics in English and not necessarily in their first language. Therefore using a dual language dictionary may not be beneficial!

Newly arrived pupils should have a timetable made up of carefully selected subjects, avoiding coursework heavy courses for pupils lower down the QCA scale.

Contact

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References

NALDIC Position Statement on Assessment of English as an Additional Language, NALDIC Briefing Paper – Guidance on the Assessment of English as an additional language (July 2005), 'Marking Progress' – DfES Policy Document, www.assessments@education.gov.uk
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