



EMBARGO



PRESS BRIEFING

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English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England

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The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Unbound Philanthropy and The Bell Foundation have commissioned two reports by Professor Steve Strand and Professor Victoria Murphy of the University of Oxford to analyse the evidence on the achievement of pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and to review the literature on effective interventions to raise the attainment of pupils with EAL.

- Professor Strand's report presents an in-depth analysis of the most recent England National Pupil Database (NPD) from 2013 to address the question, 'Who are the most at-risk groups of EAL learners and what are the predictors of low attainment for these learners?'
- Professor Murphy's report is a systematic review of international research into interventions designed to improve EAL children's English language and literacy in order to identify the most promising programmes and interventions.

Together, these ground-breaking reports represent a comprehensive overview of the issues relating to EAL facing schools today. This Research Brief provides an overview of their key findings. The executive summaries and both full reports can be accessed on the EEF website from Friday 30th January.

BACKGROUND:

What is EAL?

Any pupil that speaks a language in addition to English at home falls into the EAL category. This means it includes children who were born in the UK and speak English fluently if they also speak another language at home. In addition it includes recently arrived immigrants who speak no English at all. In 2013-14 just over 1 million children fell into the EAL category. They account for 16.2% of all pupils, a proportion which has more than doubled since 1997 (7.6%) and which is forecast to continue to rise. EAL will, therefore, be a key characteristic of student bodies in many schools for the foreseeable future.

Funding for EAL

Local authorities working with their schools forum maintain discretion about how to distribute the money they receive from central government to their schools. They can decide if a specific EAL factor is included in the money delegated to schools and then schools can spend it how they wish. This funding formula also applies to academies and free schools in the local authority, although they receive it directly from the government. Pupils are eligible for EAL funding if they entered the English state school system within the past three years and funding is limited to a maximum of three years per pupil. In 2014-15, £243m¹ was made available by local authorities for EAL provision and the per-pupil amounts delegated to secondary schools from local authorities under the EAL factor ranged from £0 to £4,500. 22 local authorities did not include an EAL factor in delegating money to schools.

¹ <http://www.naldic.org.uk/research-and-information/eal-funding>

In the past, significant additional funding has been directed by central government to address EAL-classified pupils' language learning needs. Until 2011/12, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) funding was ring-fenced to spend on meeting the needs of bilingual learners and underachieving ethnic minority pupils but this requirement has now been removed.

Under the current system there is no direct accountability mechanism regarding schools' use of EAL funding. This contrasts with the requirement on schools to annually account fully for their use of Pupil Premium funding and to evaluate its impact. Professor Strand warns in his report against complacency that good academic progress for EAL pupils is a given: *'even if the level of need were not rising as rapidly as it is, there is no guarantee that EAL students will continue to make such good progress unless schools continue to receive, and to use appropriately, funding to address EAL learning needs.'*

KEY FINDINGS

1. The attainment of EAL pupils varies widely

At the end of reception (age 5) only 44% of EAL pupils are recorded as having achieved a good level of development compared to 54% of non-EAL pupils. However by age 16, this gap has narrowed significantly with 58.3% of EAL pupils achieving five A*-C GCSEs compared to 60.9% of non-EAL pupils.

By some measures EAL pupils achieve higher results than non-EAL pupils. For example, EAL pupils are slightly more likely than their peers to achieve an A*-C pass in mathematics at age 16.

However, these average attainment figures mask a huge range of outcomes for different groups of EAL pupils. Many of the factors associated with risk of low achievement are the same for EAL pupils as their non-EAL peers. These include (roughly in order of impact): having an identified Special Educational Need (SEN); being entitled to a Free School Meal (FSM); living in an economically deprived neighborhood; attending school outside London; and being summer born (and therefore young for their year-group).

In addition, EAL pupils are significantly more likely to underachieve compared to their non-EAL peers if the following factors apply to them:

- i. Entry to England from abroad during a Key Stage at school – on average, such EAL pupils were 12 months behind their non-EAL peers.
- ii. Changing school during a Key Stage at school – on average, EAL pupils who joined their primary school in Years 5/6 had significantly lower achievement than those who joined in Years 3/4.
- iii. Being from particular ethnic groups. EAL pupils in the ethnic groups of White Other, Black African and Pakistani have markedly lower outcomes than their non-EAL peers. Speakers of Somali, Lingala and Lithuanian have especially low outcomes at aged 16

2. Almost half of schools with a majority of EAL pupils are located outside London

Pupils recorded as EAL are very unevenly distributed across the country and across schools. At one extreme almost one-quarter (22%) of schools have less than 1% EAL pupils. Over half of schools (54%) have less than 5% EAL pupils. At the other extreme, in 8.4% of schools (1,681) EAL pupils make up the majority of the school population.

While 919 of the 1,681 schools with more than 50% of pupils recorded as EAL are located in London, a large number are located in the West Midlands, North West and Yorkshire & the Humber.

This indicates that concentrations of EAL can be very specific to small local areas and schools, even if the total numbers are low in broader geographic area. It is therefore important to consider EAL data at school level, not just Local Authority or regional level when identifying and targeting EAL support.

3. High proportions of EAL pupils in a school do not have a negative impact on the attainment and progress of other pupils

This study finds that the percentage of EAL pupils in a school has a minimal association with student attainment and progress once student background is taken into account. The finding is consistent at both Key Stage 2 (age 7-11) and Key Stage 4 (age 14-16). There is no evidence that non-EAL pupils suffer from attending a school with a high proportion of EAL pupils.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The current definition of EAL, which is used to determine funding, covers a wide range of pupils with varying needs and outcomes. It includes bilingual children who are fluent English speakers and new migrants who may not speak English at all. Crucially, *it gives no indication of a pupil's proficiency in the English language.*

The report demonstrates the wide variation in outcome between pupils categorised as EAL. It also identifies certain groups of EAL pupils that are at particular risk of low attainment. It argues that, in relation to school funding, the EAL flag “may be a poor basis for targeting funding” and to focus instead on these identified high risk factors, with funding being made available to schools to target pupils with these characteristics.

Based on these research findings, the Education Endowment Foundation, Unbound Philanthropy and The Bell Foundation recommend that:

1. Schools should be accountable for showing attainment impact

Schools should be held accountable for how their EAL funding contributes to improving pupil attainment in the same way as they must demonstrate how Pupil Premium spending impacts on disadvantaged pupils. Local authorities should also continue to prioritise it in their funding formula.

Although the report finds that where EAL pupils have attended English schools for the whole of a key stage they make greater progress than non-EAL pupils, and indeed that by age 16 they have caught up with their non-EAL peers, this reflects a long history of considerable additional funding being

directed to address language learning needs². This finding also masks considerable under-attainment for certain groups.

2. EAL funding should be targeted at those most at risk of under-attainment

The current definition of EAL reflects exposure to a language other than English at home or in the community and gives no indication of a students' proficiency in the English language. Schools should review how they identify the language and learning needs of children within the EAL category to ensure that funds are targeted at pupils who are at particular risk of underachievement. It must be recognised that for some pupils, this may also take longer than the current three years of allocated funding. The report demonstrates that certain groups of EAL pupils are especially at risk of under-achieving relative to their peers. All three funders believe there is a strong case for additional funding to be made available to schools with such EAL pupils to ensure they are able achieve to their full potential. As Professor Strand's report notes: "Fluency in English is ... the biggest factor influencing the degree of support an individual student will require, and schools need to be able to assess this need accurately using their own procedures and expertise."

3. More research is needed into the best strategies to improve outcomes for EAL pupils

The report also concludes that there is a lack of robust research evidence on effective approaches and interventions to raise the attainment of EAL pupils. There were no examples of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) or studies where the effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated by an independent review team. However, it has highlighted a handful of approaches/interventions with some, limited evidence of success.

We recommend that independently reviewed trials of EAL interventions are needed to establish the most cost-effective strategies for improving the attainment of those EAL pupils most at risk of under-attainment.

THE STUDIES

Professor Steve Strand conducted the analysis of the educational achievement of EAL pupils using data from the National Pupil Database and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE).

Professor Victoria Murphy conducted the systematic review initially covering 975 distinct reports on EAL interventions. A total of 302 reports were included for full-text analysis, with 29 of those having sufficiently robust evidence to being included in the final report.

² Until 2011/12, EMAG funding was ring-fenced to spend on meeting the needs of bilingual learners and underachieving ethnic minority pupils but these protections have now been removed.