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The benefits of integrating students who use EAL into mainstream lessons



About The Bell Foundation

The Bell Foundation is a charity which aims to overcome exclusion through language education by working with partners on innovation, research, training and practical interventions. Through generating and applying evidence, we aim to change practice, policy and systems for children, adults and communities in the UK disadvantaged through language.

The Foundation works in two key areas:

- **The EAL Programme aims to improve the educational outcomes of children with English as an Additional Language in the UK to benefit the individual child and society as a whole. The Foundation works in partnership with a range of organisations across the education system to provide training and resources in order to build capacity, develop and evaluate models of good practice, and provide thought leadership.**
- **The Criminal Justice Programme seeks to break down the language barrier to accessing justice and rehabilitation for individuals in contact with the criminal justice system for whom English is an Additional Language. In 2017 the Foundation developed a long-term strategy for its work in the sector, with a focus on both victims and offenders of crime. The Foundation works through interventions in research, policy, practice and service support.**

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Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is intended to support staff in primary and secondary schools, particularly leadership teams, including staff who lead on EAL, in making informed decisions around the provision for learners who use English as an Additional Language. For the purposes of this guidance, the learners referred to are largely those who are new to English or those in the early acquisition stage. Withdrawal refers to any instances when learners are taught separately to their peers. For learners who are new to English, this is likely to include a focus on intensive language development alongside curriculum content.

What does this guidance cover?

The guidance is designed to support practitioners in primary and secondary schools, including teachers, teaching assistants and EAL professionals, to work with the parents of EAL pupils with the aim of improving learning outcomes. The guidance may also have relevance for other stakeholders, such as school leaders, parents, trainee teachers, and initial teacher educators.

This guidance provides:

- Some context on the development of EAL teaching in England
- An overview of what constitutes integration in mainstream lessons, and why this is essential for learners who use EAL
- Some discussion around the implementation of withdrawal

Learners who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) face a Herculean task. As well as developing their English, they are also studying science, maths, history, art and so on, and the curriculum is not waiting while they catch up with their language learning. The Bell Foundation advocates a fully integrated approach to the education of learners who use English as an Additional Language. It is worth considering some of the historical context of EAL provision before examining more closely what is meant by “integration”, what the policy is in England, and what Ofsted’s current position is.

Since the mid-1980s, policy in England has shifted to integrating learners who use EAL into the mainstream education system. This was a reaction against the use of language centres for extended periods of time, where language learning was prioritised at the expense of the broader curriculum. These segregated practices not only denied learners access to other educational opportunities, they also reinforced a sense of difference, or more precisely, deficiency. The Commission for Racial Equality enquiry condemned the segregated arrangements that Calderdale Borough Council had in place for learners who use EAL, noting that children had “no access to a normal school environment” (CRE, 1986, p.9). The subsequent changes in policy were “designed to remove a barrier to equality of access to education” (Leung, 2005, p.1) and were intended to increase integration.

In research commissioned and published by The Bell Foundation, **Schneider et al** (April 2014), define social integration within school settings as “full participation within school life, and builds on a sense of belonging and cohesion within school, around common values and positive and inclusive relationships with peers. In short, social integration can be viewed as forming social relationships within the school and being attached to the school.” A truly integrated approach recognises and values the many unique experiences that pupils who use EAL bring, whether they are cultural, linguistic or educational, and it provides the support necessary to allow them to learn side by side with their classmates. **Explicit training** in EAL pedagogy is crucial to ensuring the success of integration.

The “Brief summary of Government policy in relation to EAL learners,” (2012) notes that the Government’s priority “is to promote rapid language acquisition and include them in mainstream education as quickly as possible.”

Ofsted’s most recent framework makes no explicit reference to the integration of EAL pupils, or to EAL. The Bell Foundation made clear its concern for this omission in its response to the draft framework. It recommended that Ofsted should amend the intent section to include the “integrated and embedded teaching of English language in mainstream classes where learners need this.” The emphasis here then is on ensuring that the curriculum is designed in such a way that all learners’ needs can be met in the classroom, and that the teachers are sufficiently confident in meeting the linguistic demands of the curriculum. Standard 3 in the Teachers’ Standards’, which expects a teacher to “demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher’s specialist subject” goes some way to address this need for language teaching, but fails to recognise the unique needs of a learner using EAL.

Integration will allow learners to develop their English language proficiency without detracting from their experience of the full curriculum, and all that school life has to offer. For the youngest learners, this is likely to be complete immersion in a mainstream classroom, where peers provide the impetus and much of the modelling required for language learning. Often at this stage, the additional support required (e.g. classroom language; basic phonics) can be provided in the learner’s classroom. For learners arriving at a later stage in their education, where the demands of examinations require intensive learning of academic language, some form of additional support, for example a personalised tutorial during a weekly form period, will probably be necessary. This might include more formal uses of language, for example, the language of instruction or subject-specific vocabulary and concepts which would have been taught lower down in the school. Nevertheless, this still needs to be balanced carefully with other aspects of school life which might be having a positive impact on both integration and language acquisition. Form time, for example, could be a valuable opportunity to develop relationships with peers, and to learn about other important areas; PSHE for example.

Research recognises that new arrivals may face “linguistic and social isolation” and recommends that schools adopt “finely tuned pedagogic practices (which) will provide access to the curriculum for EAL students and enable them to integrate fully into the life of the classroom.” These pedagogic practices include many simple adaptations that can be made to classroom teaching, from adjusting seating plans, consciously modelling and recasting language and utilising the wealth of strategies and resources such as **substitution tables** and word banks. The EEF has included evidence on **collaborative learning** in their teaching and learning toolkit and note that “approaches which promote talk and interaction between learners tend to result in the best gains.” This is every bit as true for learners who use EAL as it is for those with English as their first language, and where students are buddied with effective language models, this can be particularly effective.

Being fully integrated in the “life of the classroom” has many advantages for learners.

Advantages of integration in mainstream lessons

Social:

- Most students wish to be seen as a part of the collective whole; they generally want to be included in lessons
- Students feel less isolated when teachers welcome them into their classrooms, and encourage them to engage
- Developing strategies to establish learners who use EAL as integrated members of the group helps to develop confidence; **Dr Yongcan Liu advocates** “buddying to provide peer support for learning and social integration.”
- Using collaborative learning strategies encourages communication, which can help develop friendships and encourage mutual understanding
- Real integration will take place when other students recognise not only the frustrations facing a new arrival, but also the positives they offer; their unique cultural and linguistic heritage, for example
- Once a learner feels more integrated, they are more likely to access and enjoy all that school has to offer

Educational:

- Following a broad and balanced curriculum in a supportive, age appropriate classroom ensures equality of access to educational provision and improves life choices and opportunities. This links closely to Ofsted’s expectation that school leaders will demonstrate ambition in their intent “to give all learners ... the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life”. In practice, however, the provision of supportive and equal access to the curriculum for pupils for whom English is a new language goes beyond simply placing the student in mainstream classes and expecting that natural immersion to lengthy stretches of language will be sufficient. As Leung and Creese (2010) warn, “Inclusive pedagogies, unless properly resourced with appropriate teacher expertise and knowledge may fail the very learners they set out to support”. Therefore, successful integration is largely dependent on the classroom teacher being adequately equipped to confidently meet the language needs of the pupils who use EAL.
- The classroom teacher is the expert who can provide quality subject knowledge
- **Research** suggests that learners who use EAL in mixed language friendship groups, perform better, even in writing, than those with friends who mostly speak their first language

A learner should not be deprived of opportunities to engage in all that school life has to offer, and that includes the whole range of subjects, academic and more practical. For example, decisions about qualifications should be made with pupils’ best interests in mind, rather than the pressure of league table performance. This is perhaps particularly true with the open element at GCSE, the third group of qualifications which includes the EBacc subjects not taken in the EBacc group, and other approved academic, arts or vocational qualifications, since a more recent arrival’s scores will still count in the Attainment 8 results, though not in the Progress 8. Limiting a learner’s choices to subjects perceived to be easier to pass, for instance BTEC qualifications in Child Care or Creative Media, is not necessarily in the learner’s best interests, particularly, for example, when some more recent arrivals may have limited experience of media.

The ambitious curriculum on offer should reflect a learner’s academic potential rather than their current linguistic limitations. The Bell Foundation welcomes Ofsted’s ‘quality of education’

judgement, in particular its intention to restore an ambitious curriculum to its proper place as an important component, and the Foundation notes that “access to the full curriculum is vital” for pupils for whom English is an Additional Language. However, the Foundation emphasises that deep understanding of the curricular subjects cannot happen without appropriate language use.

Linguistic:

- While the linguistic demands of the curriculum may be significant, they are best taught within the context of the subject, where a learner can then see their relevance; in science, for example, the teacher can and should teach the language of hypothesis, as well as the subject content
- Teachers and students play a key role as language models: “social interaction between students and between students and teachers is seen as pivotal to additional language development” (Leung, April 2005). For example:
 - Being exposed to a wide range of voices (accents, speeds, tones, specific sets of specialist vocabulary items) will encourage the development of active listening skills. This is more evident where withdrawal is provided by just one person, particularly if they might be over accommodating in their speech; the learner then has no urgent need to actively work on their listening skills. The sense of need is often a great motivating factor
 - Collaborative activities will provide both opportunities for learners to hear more English, including language of a more academic nature, being modelled by peers and put their own language learning into practice
 - Learners with increased opportunities to interact with peers are likely to develop greater confidence in speaking
- By using language in real classroom contexts learners will have the chance to receive useful feedback on whether they are communicating successfully. For example, their peers’ and teachers’ reactions to their spoken or written contributions will show them whether they are being fully, partially or not understood, and may provide them with helpful alternative ways of expressing their ideas more succinctly, accurately or appropriately.

In spite of all of these benefits, it can be daunting for the classroom teacher to be faced with pupils who are new to English or are at the early stages of English language acquisition. It is easy to see how a busy classroom teacher faced with 30 pupils might believe that a learner at the earliest stages of language acquisition would benefit from working one-to-one or in a small group, with a TA, outside the classroom, where they can concentrate and communicate easily. However, with specialist training and the appropriate resources, classroom teachers are best placed to meet the needs of all learners, including those new to English. **CPD opportunities** to address these training needs will enable teachers to develop the confidence and necessary expertise, and will provide the forum to share their experiences, challenges and good practice with other colleagues.

One source of tried and tested strategies is **The Bell Foundation’s EAL Assessment Framework**. The framework, available for both primary and secondary practitioners, provides support strategies appropriate to each proficiency level which are suitable to use in the mainstream classroom. Many of these strategies require no extra work from the classroom teacher and yet the impact can be significant. For instance, thinking about a seating plan, and ensuring that, where possible, the learners are with a buddy who shares the same first language. By encouraging some discussion in the first language, the teacher will be helping the learners to develop their cognitive skills as well as their linguistic skills.

Out-of-class interventions: some considerations

All school contexts are different, just as EAL learners are not one homogenous group with the same needs. The school leadership team may opt to provide some lessons beyond or instead of the normal timetable. In effect, this should be much the same as support that could be given to any student, with or without English as an Additional Language, being given extra out of class support in any subject; additional support in maths, for example. Where a learner's needs cannot be met adequately in the context of the classroom, intensive out of class intervention may be necessary. As with all out of class interventions, any withdrawal of EAL learners from a mainstream class should be for a specific purpose, time-limited and linked to the work of the mainstream class with the subject or class teacher involved in all planning. The impact of the intervention must be measurable to ensure that its effectiveness is monitored.

Some schools implement a language induction programme before learners who are new to English join mainstream lessons fully. Gordon Ward's *Racing to English* is suitable for a short-term, intensive, introductory programme which might be delivered systematically perhaps for 1-2 hours per day for the first 3-4 weeks, or as more of an ad-hoc intervention to address specific identified language needs. Similarly, learners operating at the earlier proficiency levels will benefit from an opportunity to become acquainted with key vocabulary, tiers 2 and 3, before a specific lesson. While this might be a suitable homework activity for some learners, for others, it might be more appropriate to cover this with a member of staff. Again, depending on the context of the school, this could be delivered during form period, or some other time which minimises disruption to participation in mainstream lessons.

There may also be other times when small group interventions are appropriate. Strand and Hessel (2018) identify proficiency in English as "the most significant risk factor for EAL learners," and that language need should be the driving force behind target setting and subsequent intervention. Where assessments show a significant discrepancy between a more advanced learner's potential and their actual performance, which cannot be addressed in the classroom, out-of-class intervention may be considered as an option. For example, in CAT tests (Cognitive Abilities Test), a sustained discrepancy between verbal and non-verbal scores might indicate that purposeful intervention could address the language needs which are holding the student back from otherwise high attainment. Similarly, if a learner plateaus on a proficiency level, focused language intervention which is still linked to the curriculum could provide a short-term solution.

While intensive language lessons can offer this quick-fix solution, there is a danger that they can be counter-productive and increase the pressure on the learner, particularly if they must then catch up on any missed learning. Guidance from the EEF on the effective use of TAs, notes "Research on TAs delivering targeted interventions in one-to-one or small group settings shows a consistent impact on attainment of approximately three to four additional months' progress (effect size 0.2–0.3). Crucially, these positive effects are only observed when TAs work in structured settings with high-quality support and training. When TAs are deployed in more informal, unsupported instructional roles, they can impact negatively on pupils' learning outcomes." Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is likely to be particularly true at GCSE. If intervention sessions require being withdrawn from a normal lesson, there is a risk that the student will miss out on key learning which may be difficult to catch up on, particularly where the subject content is complex. This is exacerbated where the student is regularly withdrawn from the same lesson. However, with careful planning, the classroom teacher could minimise the amount of new content covered, and instead focus perhaps on exam practice, extended writing or other revision activities. Similarly, the practitioner delivering the intervention could teach the specific language features through the subject content; for example, a student needing further support with the language of suggestion (modal verbs; e.g. could, should and conditionals, if...then...will...), could be withdrawn from Geography lessons when the class is practising longer mark questions which require the same structures.

Where a school is considering specific interventions to support students which involve them missing some lessons, the leadership team should be mindful of the following points:

Which students? How will the students be identified? How many students will be in the group? Are they from different school classes? Do they speak different languages? Are they at similar proficiency levels? Do they have similar language needs?

What? What are the learning objectives of the series of sessions? What are the language areas that need to be taught? How are the objectives linked to the curriculum? Will there be opportunities for developing all the skills areas? Will the content be cognitively challenging? How will learning be assessed? How will it be clear that the objectives have been achieved?

When? Will the learners be withdrawn from a lesson, or from a form period for example? Which lesson will they be removed from? How often? How will they catch up with any work missed? How long will the programme run for?

Who? Who will plan and teach the lessons? Are they confident with and trained on EAL pedagogy? Are they confident with curriculum content in order to link the two? Are the withdrawal lessons planned with the regular classroom teacher? Can they speak the pupils' home language(s)?

With over 1 million pupils recorded as having English as an Additional Language in primary schools in England, and almost 500,000 in secondary schools, classrooms are truly multilingual. Learners who use EAL are not a small minority of pupils. Integration is beneficial for all learners, but in order to be fully effective, teaching staff need to be able to confidently meet the linguistic demands of their subject and use support strategies which encourage full engagement. Where intervention is deemed necessary, particularly any requiring withdrawal from a lesson, it should be short-term, focused in terms of its intentions, planned and delivered by appropriately trained staff, and its impact should be measurable.

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