

## Policy recommendations summary

### Context:

More than one in five pupils in England speak English as an Additional Language (EAL), with schools currently welcoming refugee populations from Ukraine, Hong Kong, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

Yet many teachers have told us that they do not know how to effectively support children who speak EAL. This, plus the existing policy vacuum and the declining resources and expertise in the system, is leaving many schools and pupils unprepared and unsupported.

This matters because, for these children, the ability to speak English well has the greatest impact on their attainment. Proficiency in English for children who speak EAL explains between four and six times as much variation in achievement as gender, free school meals and ethnicity combined.

*“Learning new English was pretty hard and I didn’t know what to do at first, the words were getting even harder but then when I had some help at school it got much easier.”*

EAL learner, BBC Newsround

Key policy changes are needed to ensure that schools are equipped for the realities of the classroom, and that all pupils, regardless of language, can thrive in education.

### 1. Address the EAL policy vacuum as a priority

**What is the issue?** There is a lack of policy designed to integrate EAL learners. This is partly due to an overreliance on misleading aggregate data and also because the majority of dedicated expertise and support for EAL children has disappeared from the system: the ring-fenced Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant funding which enabled this was removed in 2011 and the “EAL factor” in the national funding formula, which replaced it, has only increased at half the rate of funding for other pupils.

**What needs to change?** This policy vacuum must be plugged as a matter of urgency, and all future policy must be informed by robust analysis of EAL learners’ data, including time of arrival in the school system, first language, and proficiency in English.

**Why?** Aggregated data can be deeply misleading when informing policy as it masks a huge level of complexity. EAL pupils are a very diverse group, including both a child from a privileged, multilingual household who is fluent in English, as well as a newly arrived refugee, who has experienced disrupted or no schooling and is new to English. More granular data and analysis will enable better policy, tailored support, and strategies for teachers to ensure EAL pupils can fully access the curriculum.

### 2. Assess English proficiency

**What is the issue?** Proficiency in English is a powerful predictor of achievement for EAL pupils. The school census in England – the main source for primary and secondary education metrics – only briefly collected data on proficiency in English between 2016 and 2018.

**What needs to change?** The statutory assessment of English proficiency should be reintroduced in line with the data collected in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, with accompanying guidance from the Department for Education (DfE). Many other English-speaking countries collect this data, recognising the link with attainment.

**Why?** Proficiency in English for EAL pupils explains four to six times as much variation in achievement as gender, free school meals and ethnicity combined (Strand, S. and Hessel, A., 2018). The assessment of a learner’s proficiency in English is an important first step to delivering tailored classroom support and

targets. A more holistic approach to assessment should be built into existing mechanisms, alongside English proficiency scales, to ensure that every student achieves their academic potential.

### 3. Create a curriculum that reflects the diversity of today's classroom

**What is the issue?** Currently, the curriculum's guiding provision in schools and early years settings is highly prescriptive and narrow in focus. The rigidity of the current educational stages doesn't always help some EAL learners either. Also, EAL learners are mostly assessed through exams, which puts them at a great disadvantage as they end up being assessed twice, having to demonstrate not only that they know the subject, but that they understand it in English.

**What needs to change?** The curriculum needs to include diverse texts and materials that connect learning to children's cultural and linguistic backgrounds. EAL pupils also need flexible programmes of learning and assessment which match their existing skills and disparate needs, with a better range of appropriate qualifications (e.g. three-year GCSEs).

**Why?** Diversifying the current curriculum would enrich all pupils' educational experience and foster inclusivity in schools, including reception. More options when it comes to assessment and pathways will support both their academic and/or vocational learning and their English language development.

### 4. Train teachers for multilingual classrooms

**What is the issue?** Multilingual classrooms are the norm, with more than 40% of teachers working in schools with them, an increase of 14% between 2013 and 2018 (OECD). Yet, only 37% of early career teachers report that their teacher training prepared them well for teaching in multilingual classrooms (DfE, 2023), an issue compounded by the absence of EAL from the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Frameworks.

**What needs to change?** An effective teacher training programme – including how to support EAL learners at different stages in school – is needed to generate and maintain EAL expertise in schools.

**Why?** Without adequate training, teachers feel ill-equipped to meet the diverse needs in their classrooms, leaving many children who speak EAL without the support they need to learn, let alone achieve proficiency. This is particularly important as schools are welcoming an increasing numbers of refugee children.

### 5. Support children with high needs arriving later into the school system

**What is the issue?** Becoming proficient in English takes over six years. A child who arrives in reception will usually have caught up by the time they reach secondary school. But EAL pupils who arrive into the school system from key stage three onwards (i.e. late arrivals) have less time to catch up.

**What needs to change?** Provision is needed in schools and/or colleges that enables pupils who arrive later into the English school system to access a broad curriculum. For late arrivals who are developing competence, teachers also need to focus on enhancing their listening and speaking skills, building confidence, and preparing them for more complex language use (i.e. academic spoken language) which often lags behind conversational fluency.

**Why?** To enable late arrivals to continue on to higher education or professional level employment, empowering them to achieve their education or employment aspirations.

### 6. Reform Ofsted to include EAL in inspections

**What is the issue?** EAL, and the specific focus on inspecting provision for EAL learners, was removed from the Education Inspection Framework in 2019. References to EAL have also been removed from the school inspections handbook. This means that the support for EAL learners, and the extent to which this is delivered effectively in schools, is no longer an explicit focus for inspectors.

**What needs to change?** A specific focus on how schools integrate children who speak English as an Additional Language and ensure their access to the curriculum should be included in the new Ofsted report cards.

**Why?** By reintroducing a focus on this group of learners, inspections can highlight good practice, identify and prevent areas of concern, and support schools and colleges to ensure the rights, needs, and outcomes of these learners are not overlooked.

## 7. Provide a structured approach on oracy for EAL

**What is the issue?** The Government's mission to "break down the barriers to opportunity for every child" identifies that "there is good evidence that spoken language skills are strongly associated with children's literacy, numeracy and educational attainment". And children who speak EAL are a case in point. But to ensure that EAL learners can benefit from efforts to improve oracy, the needs of this group of learners must not be overlooked.

**What needs to change?** Teachers need to provide learners new to English with a structured approach that emphasises immersion, teaching essential vocabulary and simple phrases for participating in classroom interaction, as well as daily routines that involve speaking and listening.

**Why?** To ensure that all learners, regardless of language, can develop the oracy – or spoken language – skills needed for success in education and later in life.

## 8. Maintain EAL resources in the school funding formula

**What is the issue?** Although the national funding formula (NFF) acknowledges that children speaking EAL need additional school support, their "EAL factor" has not been increased at the same rate as funding for other pupils. It is also no longer ring-fenced (despite this being the case until 2011) and there is no accountability regarding its use. It is also only funded for three years, whereas evidence shows that it takes over six years to achieve full academic proficiency in English (Strand, S. and Lindorff, A., 2020).

**What needs to change?** It is vital that the "EAL factor" is maintained in the schools funding formula, to appropriately recognise the support needs for children who speak EAL.

**Why?** The association between proficiency in English and attainment is clear. For EAL pupils to receive the support they need and are entitled to and ensure they are able to fully access the curriculum, schools must be given adequate resources.

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