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Submission to Consultation on School Accountability Reform – School Profiles, Improvement and Intervention

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About The Bell Foundation

This briefing has been developed by The Bell Foundation, a charitable, evidence-led foundation that aims to improve educational, employment and justice outcomes for people who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL). The Foundation collaborates with leading universities and think tanks to develop an evidence base and works with a network of schools to develop and deliver practical solutions to help improve the attainment of pupils who are at risk of underachieving. In 2022, the Foundation supported over 26,000 teachers and educational professionals to support children who use English as an Additional Language through the training of teachers and webinars.

A series of policy briefings about our work to overcome language barriers with EAL and multilingual learners in schools, in post-16 and adult English education, and in the criminal justice system, is available on our website here: [Policy - The Bell Foundation \(bell-foundation.org.uk\)](https://bell-foundation.org.uk)

This response focuses on the impact of the School accountability reform proposals on learners who use English as an Additional Language (EAL) and their parents/carers, especially those who are themselves new to English or at early stages of English acquisition.

Do you agree a school profile should be the place users can see the most recent performance information, where it is available?

According to the 2021 Census data for England and Wales, over 1 million respondents reported that they could not speak English well or at all. Many of these people will be multilingual parents/carers of the 1.7 million plus EAL pupils in schools in England and a proportion within this group will be new to the English education system and unfamiliar with how Ofsted reports on performance data. These parents/carers will benefit from having all the information they need about their children's school and their education in a single place for ease of access and navigation. The proposed school profile may well be that place.

That said, this group of parents/carers will need more than just that. School reporting and expectations around parental involvement are likely to be hugely different across countries. Therefore, they will need to know that the school profile exists, where they can access it, what kind of information the profile will provide, and why and how it will be beneficial for them to regularly see recent performance information about the quality of provision and outcomes for their children. This information will need to be spelt out for them in accessible language.

The language used in the school profile and the way the information is presented in it should also be clear, succinct and accessible. For those who cannot understand written English, the DfE should go further and consider incorporating a translation tool to ensure that the level of linguistic complexity of the school profile does not pose unnecessary barriers.

Is there other information published by the Department that you would like to see in a school profile in future?

The Bell Foundation recommends that the school profile should include sufficient information about the context of the school related to the educational attainment of EAL pupils, for example:

- The number of pupils recorded as having English as an additional language - i.e. those who are exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English.
- The DfE should reinstate both the question in the school census that elicited data on the English proficiency of pupils with EAL and statutory reporting of language proficiency against the five-point scale used between 2016 and 2018. This is because EAL status is not a measure of English language proficiency, but research shows that EAL learners' proficiency in English has the strongest relationship with educational attainment, explaining four to six times as much variation as gender, free school meal status and ethnicity combined, which means that their likelihood of success is strongly influenced by their ability to use English competently (Strand, 2021; Hessel and Strand, 2023). Once these data are collected again, they should be made available in the school profile.
- In addition to baseline data on EAL pupils' initial proficiency in English on arrival, the school profile should also include progress in proficiency in English data. This will enable readers to ascertain whether those learners are making sufficient, and sufficiently rapid progress in their English language development, which is a pre-requisite for their educational attainment.
- As EAL status is not a good proxy for recent immigration, the profile should also include information about pupils' point of arrival in the English state-funded school sector. For example, it should specify pupils who arrive six months into year 11. This is because research findings highlight attainment gaps for learners aged 13-16 who are newly arrived in England, seeking to access education late (from year 9) and who have not been schooled in the English medium (Hutchinson, 2018).
- The specific first language of the child or young person, as there is heterogeneity in attainment in different first language groups, with some below the national expected standard, and other resilient language groups with attainment above the expected standard (Hutchinson, 2018).
- Given that there are still disparities in outcomes for some minority ethnic groups, especially Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils (DfE, 2023) and huge anomalies in exclusions (e.g., Black Caribbean, Mixed Black Caribbean and GRT pupils) this information should also be included in the profile.

Are there other pieces of information that you might expect or want to routinely see in a school profile? This could include, for example, information from schools themselves such as its ethos or the breadth of, and pupil engagement in, curriculum enrichment activities.

- Until statutory reporting of language proficiency is reinstated, any proficiency in English data gathered by the school should be included, particularly, recent data on

progress in English language development that can provide a more complete picture of proficiency.

- Information about how the school is supporting these learners to quickly settle and adjust to their new setting, overcome any traumatic consequences of their displacement (in the case of newly arrived refugees and asylum-seeking children and young people) and to accelerate their English language development alongside curriculum learning. This could include information about the deployment of bilingual teaching support staff and bilingual family liaison teams, any schemes that the school takes part in that welcome and promote the rapid inclusion of multilingual learners (such as the [Young Interpreter Scheme](#), [Schools of Sanctuary](#), etc.); enrichment and extracurricular activities that foster oracy and literacy development in English, as well as the pupils' social integration, and any short-term and targeted English language support interventions, and their duration.
- Other preferred or strongest languages used by the pupils in addition to their home languages would give a more accurate picture of the linguistic diversity of the school and how the use of these languages is normalised through the use of multilingual approaches to teach students concepts in different subject areas and to support them to learn new language(s).
- Where available and relevant, the school could provide information about the range of home and heritage languages qualifications available as part of their Languages GCSE offer.

These contextual data are very important in highlighting the challenges that schools may be facing and it will enable readers to interpret the school's performance data judiciously against its contextual backdrop (especially when exam outcomes are presented and they are good relative to the pupils starting points, even if those starting points are not nationally recognised, and the school is ambitious for their pupils within their context and has done its best to add value). Multilingual schools are now the norm in England and many of the Foundation's school partners have EAL cohorts well above the national average, with sometimes 60 to 70 languages spoken.

Do you have any further comments on our proposal for a new school profile service operated by the Department?

The Bell Foundation is happy to assist the Department beyond this response with evidence-informed suggestions for strengthening the accountability system to ensure that disadvantaged or vulnerable children who use EAL thrive at school and that the discriminatory and exclusionary practices that these children often experience at school no longer hamper their social, educational and linguistic development.

