

This guidance is intended to support senior leaders, teachers and EAL coordinators who are shadowing a multilingual learner as part of the Whole-School Self-Evaluation of their EAL provision.

What is it?

Shadowing a multilingual learner (MLL) is a non-evaluative, observational process in which an educator follows an individual MLL through part or all of their school day to gain a deeper understanding of their academic, social, and emotional experiences. This “day in the life” approach offers real-time, qualitative insight into how multilingual learners interact with peers, teachers, and curriculum and serves as a powerful catalyst for reflection and meaningful systemic change.

Why is it important?

Pupil pursuits provide valuable, real-time data that standardized assessments cannot capture—revealing how EAL provision and school climate shape student opportunities. It allows educators to identify gaps, foster empathy, and better understand MLLs’ broader academic and social needs and strengths. The process equips educators with the perspective and information needed to improve instruction, increase inclusion, and drive meaningful, equity-focused change.

How does it connect to the whole school self-evaluation?

Pupil pursuit observations can be adapted to meet a variety of purposes. The three proformas provided here (A, B, and C) each focus on a distinct area and show how it links to specific dimensions from the Whole-School Self-Evaluation (WSSE):

- A. Opportunities for academic language development** – Examines opportunities for academic language use across all four modes: listening, speaking, reading/viewing, and writing. (*WSSE Dimensions D, F, G*)
- B. Opportunities for oral language development** – Focuses specifically on speaking and listening opportunities and interactions that promote development of oral language. (*WSSE Dimensions D, F, G*)
- C. Overall school day experience** – Provides a fuller, more empathetic picture of a multilingual learner’s day, including insights into their well-being and academic and social interactions with people in multiple settings, including lunch or break time, etc. Includes two proformas, C1: lesson observations and C2: outside classroom settings. (*WSSE Dimensions A, D, F, G, H*)

How does it work?

In an ideal pupil pursuit, as part of a whole-school evaluation, a team of teachers would observe selected multilingual learners for a full or substantial part of a day. A group of teachers may spend a full day observing different pupils or take turns observing portions of a single pupil’s day. Observations are guided by a structured proforma, ensuring consistency and comparability in the data—particularly when multiple teachers are involved simultaneously. This systematic approach produces reliable insights that can be explored in depth during a post-shadowing debrief. The ultimate goal is to move beyond isolated, subjective impressions, using the evidence to drive meaningful, schoolwide improvements that better support multilingual learners.

Before:

- Determine who will lead the pupil pursuit process, clarify its purpose and focus, and select the appropriate proforma to use (A, B or C).
- Choose the observers and the multilingual learners (MLLs) to be shadowed.
- Provide a brief training on how to observe and complete your selected proforma. Use the provided 'Sample proformas' to assist with the training.
- Review the profile of each selected MLL in advance to understand their linguistic, academic, and personal background. This will inform the observation context and the analysis of findings later.
- Ensure observers have an observation-only role—teaching and shadowing cannot happen simultaneously.
- Decide on your observation format and coordinate schedules and logistics:
 - Arrange lesson cover for observers to shadow in person or virtually in another classroom or school setting;
 - Provide cover so observers can shadow one of their own MLLs;
 - Allow observers to record their own lessons, then conduct a pupil pursuit on an MLL identified after the recording has been made.
- Preserve the authenticity of the learning environment; for example, avoid telling the classroom teacher which specific student will be shadowed to prevent bias in interactions.

During:

- Complete the appropriate pupil pursuit proforma, while observing a selected student. You will need multiple copies of the proforma based on the length of time you are scheduled to observe.
- Stay objective—record low-inference observations based solely on facts.
- Avoid interpretation, opinion, or judgement in your notes.
- Focus on documenting what happens, not inferring why it happens.
- Make clear, concise notes and comments as needed to capture the student's experience and context.

After:

- Have observers individually summarise and reflect on the data that they collected. See the 'findings' and 'recommendations' sections in the provided Sample proformas for examples of this.
- Hold a debrief meeting for observers to share and discuss their data, highlighting emerging themes or patterns. For example, learners new to English are not participating in oral interactions in class or during lunch.
- Identify specific areas in need of improvement or change based on the evidence. For example, provide CPD on strategies used to support oral language development for learners who are new to English.
- Set clear, achievable goals to guide the implementation of these changes and share findings with senior leaders to incorporate them into the WSE form.