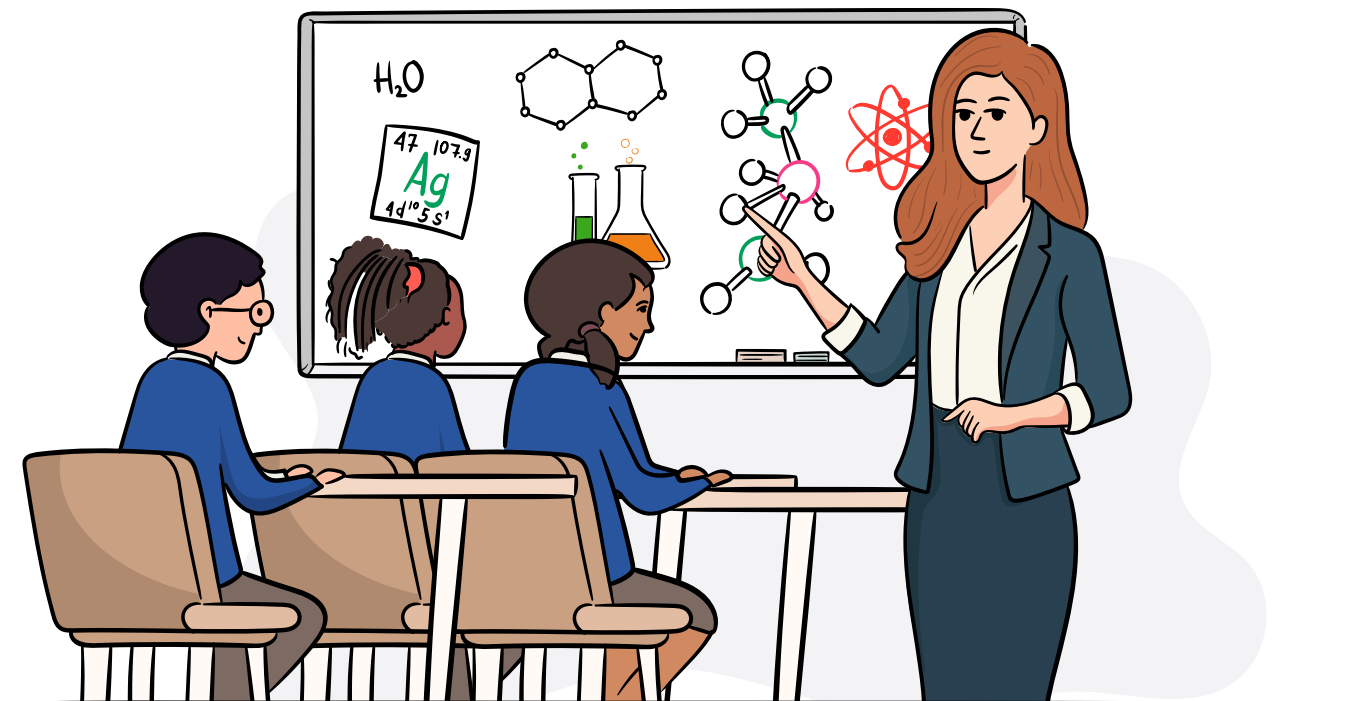


Creating Inclusive Mainstream Classrooms for EAL Learners

Updated January 2025



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, the Foundation aims to improve practice, policy and systems for children, young people, adults, and communities who use English as an Additional Language in the UK.

Copyright

All rights reserved. This publication is intended solely for use by schools, Multi Academy Trusts, Local Authorities and in other specialist education settings. Practitioners using the guidance may copy, save, and share the publication across their organisation. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any other form or for any other purpose without the written permission of the copyright owner. Applications for the copyright owner's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publisher.

Copyright © The Bell Educational Trust Limited (operating as The Bell Foundation)

The Bell Educational Trust Limited is a charitable company limited by guarantee number 1048465, established on 5 April 1972, and a charity registered with the Charity Commission number 311585

The Bell Foundation
Red Cross Lane
Cambridge
CB2 0QU

www.bell-foundation.org.uk

Contents

1	Who is this guidance for?	4
2	A discussion around the implementation of withdrawal	5
3	Advantages of inclusion in mainstream lessons	8
4	Out-of-class interventions: some considerations	11
R	References	14

1 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 English as an Additional Language (EAL), in making informed decisions around the provision for learners who use EAL. 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.

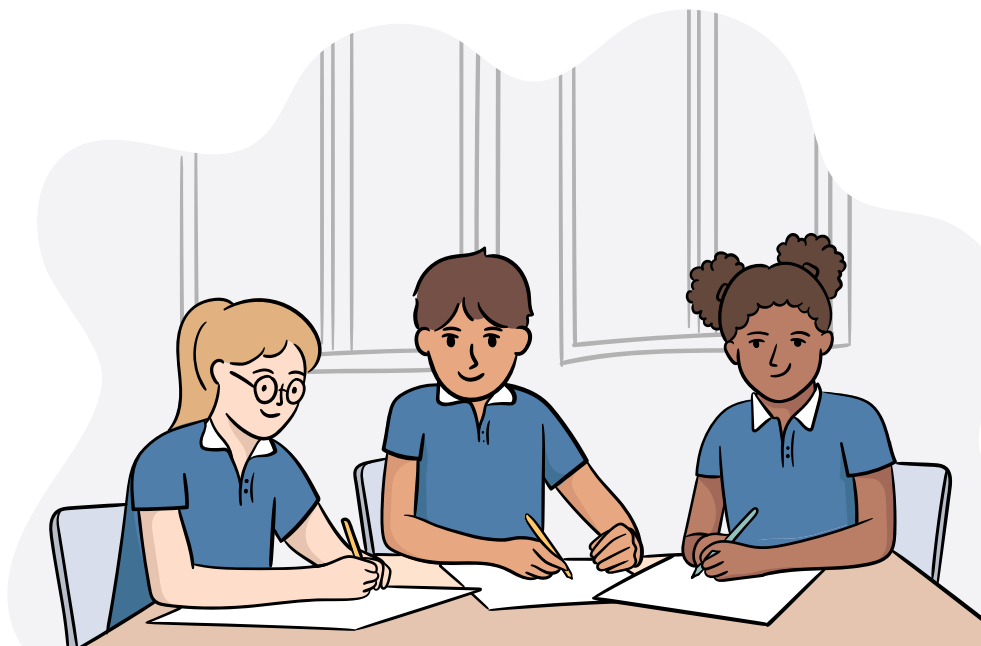
Withdrawal refers to any instances when learners are taught separately from their peers. For learners who are new to English, this is likely to include a focus on intensive language development alongside curriculum content.

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 build inclusive practices for multilingual learners to improve learning outcomes. The guidance may be relevant for other stakeholders, such as school leaders, parents, trainee teachers, and initial teacher educators.

This guidance provides:

- A brief summary of the development of EAL teaching in England.
- An overview of what constitutes inclusion in mainstream lessons, and the advantages for learners who use EAL.



2 A discussion around the implementation of withdrawal

EAL teaching in England

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 does not wait while they catch up with their language learning. The Bell Foundation advocates for a fully inclusive approach to the education of learners who use EAL. It is worth considering part of the historical context of EAL provision before examining more closely what is meant by “inclusion”, what the policy is in England, and what Ofsted’s current position is.

Since the mid-1980s, policy in England has shifted to including learners who use EAL in 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, but 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, Arnot et.al.,(2014), define social integration within school settings as “full participation within school life[that] 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 inclusion. See bell-foundation.org.uk/free-on-demand-training.

The “Brief summary of Government policy in relation to EAL learners” (NALDIC, 2012 – <https://bit.ly/45pwwpaP>) notes that the Government’s priority back then was to “promote rapid language acquisition and include them in mainstream education as quickly as possible”. This has continued to be the case with subsequent Governments.

The 2025 Ofsted state-funded schools’ toolkit (<https://bit.ly/3LV9z4i>) includes a section on EAL:

“For pupils at the early stages of learning English as an additional language, inspectors consider the extent to which:

- *leaders and teachers recognise that these pupils already speak at least one language, and do not lower their expectations of them*
- *teachers assess pupils’ English language proficiency accurately and regularly*
- *teachers recognise that providing opportunities for pupils to talk with staff and peers during lessons is particularly important; teachers help pupils articulate what they know and understand by scaffolding, modelling, extending and developing their ideas*
- *teachers focus on the vocabulary pupils need, including subject-specific vocabulary, to help them understand new concepts; they keep explanations clear and precise*
- *teachers develop and extend pupils’ language carefully and deliberately, with plenty of repetition teachers ensure that pupils learn to read using systematic synthetic phonics as soon as possible, so that they have access to a wide range of literature that will accelerate their understanding of English.”*

The emphasis here is on ensuring that the curriculum is designed in such a way that all learners’ needs can be met in the classroom, and that 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.

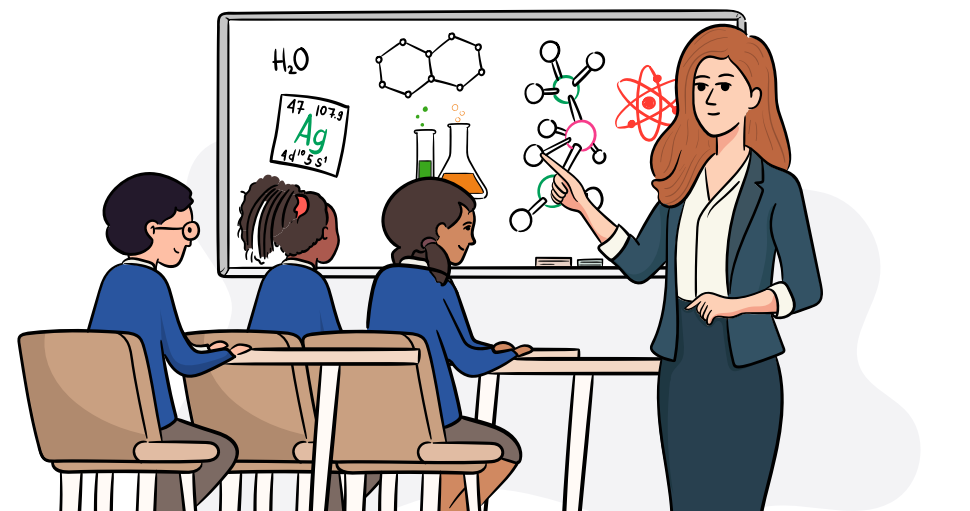
Inclusion will allow learners to develop their English language proficiency without detracting from their experience of the full curriculum, and all that school life has to offer. For the youngest learners, this is likely to be complete immersion in a mainstream classroom, where peers provide the impetus and much of the modelling required for language learning. Often at this stage, the additional support required (for example,

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—such as 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, including PSHE.

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.” (Ceres, 2016). 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 a wealth of EAL strategies and resources such as substitution tables and word banks.

See <https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/resources/great-ideas>.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has included evidence on collaborative learning in their teaching and learning toolkit (<https://bit.ly/4kcdDdn>) 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.



3

Advantages of inclusion in mainstream lessons

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



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 and support them to engage.

Using collaborative learning strategies encourages communication, which can help develop friendships and encourage mutual understanding.

Developing strategies to establish learners who use EAL as integrated members of the group helps to develop confidence; Dr Yongcan Liu advocates for “buddying to provide peer support for learning and social integration.” (Arnot et al, 2014)

Real inclusion will take place when other students recognise not only the frustrations facing a new arrival, but also the positives they offer, such as their unique cultural and linguistic heritage.

Once a learner feels more included, 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 exposure 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 inclusion 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 by Evans et al (2016) finds 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 full range of subjects, both academic and more practical. Decisions about qualifications should be made with pupils' best interests in mind, rather than primarily in response to accountability measures or performance tables.

This is particularly relevant when considering the "open" element at GCSE, which can include a wide range of academic, arts, and vocational qualifications. National performance measures and subject groupings remain part of the current accountability framework; however, following the national curriculum and assessment review (2025), the EBacc is to be removed as a headline measure and Progress 8 is likely to be reformed. Schools should therefore ensure they are working with the most up-to-date national guidance.

Limiting a learner's choices to subjects perceived to be easier to pass, for instance certain vocational qualifications, is not necessarily in the learner's best interests, particularly where more recent arrivals may have had limited prior exposure to specific subject areas.



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, 2005). For example:

- Being exposed to a wide range of voices (accents, speeds, tones, and specific sets of specialist vocabulary items) will encourage the development of active listening skills. Where withdrawal is provided by just one person, particularly if they are 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 to 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.

Despite all of these benefits, it can be daunting for the classroom teacher to be faced with pupils who are new to English or 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 which address these training needs will enable teachers to develop the confidence and necessary expertise and will provide a forum to share their experiences, challenges, and good practice with other colleagues.

See bell-foundation.org.uk/free-on-demand-training/ and bell-foundation.org.uk/free-on-demand-training.

One source of tried and tested strategies is The Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment Framework for Schools. See bell-foundation.org.uk/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.

4

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 out of class in any subject. 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 (<https://bit.ly/4sY94Hy>) is suitable for a short-term, as an 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 in 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 their participation in mainstream lessons.

There may also be other times when small group interventions are appropriate. Strand and Lindorff (2020) identify proficiency in English as the major factor influencing the educational achievement and the degree of support a pupils using EAL will require. It is that language need which should be the driving force behind setting targets and subsequent intervention. Out-of-class intervention may be considered as an option when assessments show a significant discrepancy between a more advanced learner's potential and their actual performance, which cannot be addressed in the classroom. 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 a 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 (2015) on the effective deployment of TAs (<https://bit.ly/4bKlbQYXX>), notes:

“The evidence shows that TAs can support pupils effectively through structured interventions. However, these need to be carefully considered, monitored, and linked to the classroom to ensure positive outcomes for pupils”.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is likely to be particularly true at GCSE level. 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 when 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 such as could, should and conditionals such as 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 to link the two? Are the withdrawal lessons planned with the regular classroom teacher? Can they speak the pupils' home language(s)?

Conclusion

The school census of 2025 recorded that more than 1, 800, 000 learners are identified as EAL. That is more than one in five learners in schools, making multilingual classrooms the norm. Inclusion is beneficial for all learners, but for it 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 with measurable impact.



R References

Anderson, C., Foley, Y., Sangster, P., Edwards, V. & Rassool, N. (2016). *Policy, Pedagogy and Pupil Perceptions: EAL in Scotland and England*. University of Edinburgh, CERES, The Bell Foundation. Available at: <https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/research-report/policy-pedagogy-pupil-perceptions/>.

Arnot, M., Schneider, C., Evans, M., Liu, Y., Welply, O. & Davies-Tutt, D. (2014). *School approaches to the education of EAL students: Language development, social integration and achievement*. University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University, The Bell Foundation. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4pQDZCy>.

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (2015) *Deployment of Teaching Assistants: Guidance Report*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4bKlbQYXX>.

Education Endowment Foundation (2021) *Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2: Guidance Report (Second Edition)*. London: Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4kcdDdn>.

Evans, M., Schneider, C., Arnot, M., Fisher, L., Forbes, K., Hu, M. & Liu, Y. (2016) *Language development and school achievement: Opportunities and challenges in the education of EAL students (Executive Summary)*. Cambridge & Chelmsford: University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University and The Bell Educational Trust (The Bell Foundation). Available at: <https://bit.ly/4pXQWux>.

Leung, C. & Creese, A. (2010). *English as an Additional Language: Approaches to Teaching Linguistic Minority Students*, Sage Publications, London.

Leung, C. (2005). *English as an additional language policy: Issues of inclusive access and language learning in the mainstream*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/4qxrU6q>

NALDIC (2012) *English as an Additional Language: A brief summary of Government policy in relation to EAL Learners*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/45pwpap>.

Ofsted (2024) *State-funded schools inspection toolkit: for use from November 2025: State-funded school inspection toolkit version 1.1*. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3LV9z4i>.

Strand, S. and Lindorff, A., (2020) *English as an Additional Language: Proficiency in English, Educational Achievement and Rate of Progression in English Language Learning*. The Bell Foundation. Available at: <https://www.bell-foundation.org.uk/our-work/with-schools/research/english-as-an-additional-language-proficiency-in-english-educational-achievement-and-rate-of-progression-in-english-language-learning>.

