



## Using interpreters

When working with learners who are multilingual, it is important for the child or young person, the parent/carer, and the school that there is good communication regarding a pupil's learning. Without this, confusion and misunderstandings of their needs and situation can significantly impact their progress, providing appropriate support and the family's engagement with their education.

### The law and best practice

Schools need to ensure that parents/ carers are provided information in accessible, straightforward ways so that they can participate in discussions about their child's learning and welfare. This is clearly stated in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE and DoH 2015). Under the Equality Act (2010), schools also have a responsibility to ensure equal opportunities for pupils under the protected characteristic of race, which includes nationality and ethnicity.

Even if the parent/carer has quite a good level of English, it can be difficult to understand complex systems so it is important that an interpreter is provided if they are not fluent in English. Ensure that you find out what the parent/ carer's first language is and do not to make assumptions.

Kingston Interpreting Service charge £45 per hour and their contact details can be found here:

[https://www.kingston.gov.uk/info/200232/contact\\_us/935/kingston\\_interpreting\\_service](https://www.kingston.gov.uk/info/200232/contact_us/935/kingston_interpreting_service)

Hounslow Language Services also provide interpreters:

[https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20070/business/1211/translation\\_and\\_interpreting\\_services](https://www.hounslow.gov.uk/info/20070/business/1211/translation_and_interpreting_services)

Our multilingual staff register is also available for schools who sign up to SP[ARK] Premium contact. This gives details of all school staff across Richmond and Kingston who are happy to help schools communicate with parents after school. However please note that as this is voluntary, and these staff are not trained interpreters, they must not be used for statutory meetings such as exclusions, attendance panels and EHC plan assessments and reviews. Please contact Kathryn Kashyap on [kathryn.kashyap@achievingforchildren.org.uk](mailto:kathryn.kashyap@achievingforchildren.org.uk) for more details.

### Using family members, friends and other parents or pupils

It is important that family members including siblings or friends are only used to interpret for simple fact sharing about school structures.

Any communication about the pupil's progress should be conducted with the parent/ carer and an independent interpreter. Otherwise, protective relationships within the family and between friends may mean that the full details are not interpreted, or specific educational matters are not understood and are therefore interpreted wrongly. This is also very important where you are meeting with spouses, so that one is not having to interpret for the other.

Due to confidentiality, another child or parent must never be used to interpret in these situations.

Most importantly a child must never be used as an interpreter for their parent/ carer: this puts them in a vulnerable and difficult position when the discussion is about their learning.

### How do I know if a parent needs an interpreter?

Always concept check- just because they nod does not mean that they have understood. Be aware too of cultural understandings around parent- teacher relationships for example, it being rude to challenge a teacher.



## **What to do if a parent/ carer refuses an interpreter**

Parents/ carers will often say they do not need an interpreter. There are several possible reasons for this:

- they may be anxious about someone else being involved and will need reassurance about confidentiality and the training that the interpreter has had;
- they may feel patronised- it is important to explain about your responsibilities within the law and reassure them that an interpreter is there in case of need, and that they can use English as well in the meeting. Also that this is standard practice with all multilingual families;
- they may be concerned about the cost, so make sure you emphasise that it is the school's responsibility to pay.

### **Good practice when working with an interpreter:**

- introduce the interpreter to the parent before you start;
- sit so that you can see both the parent and the interpreter;
- emphasise confidentiality will be kept by the interpreter;
- ensure that the parent feels comfortable with the interpreter and that they do not know each other;
- set the scene for the interpreter and make sure this is interpreted to the parent;
- speak, listen and maintain eye contact with the parent not the interpreter;
- use simple English and avoid metaphors, jargon, acronyms and idioms;
- be aware that using an interpreter will mean that the meeting takes longer;
- allow pauses for the interpreter to speak and remind the parent to do the same;
- avoid side conversations that might make the parent feel isolated;
- ask that the interpreter does not have side conversations with the parent that are not interpreted to you;
- try if possible to use the same interpreter if you have a series of meetings, especially if you feel the family get on well with them;

## **Translating materials**

It is not always useful to translate letters and materials. Some languages may only be spoken by parents, in which case translations will not help. For many schools, the number of languages spoken by the pupils means that translation is unrealistic. It is therefore important to look at how communication is designed: making it more visual and simple, with key information in large print, can often be useful for a range of families.

However, if a school has a significant group who speak one language, or an isolated group who they are working with, translation may be a useful tool.

Where there are complex forms, such as medical permissions, to sign, it is important not to rely on translations as the parent will need to understand the context and the reasons for the signature. In these cases, using interpreters is preferable if you are not sure of print literacy levels and knowledge of the system in the UK.