

## EAL/ SEND Concerns

### A Guide for Teachers of Recently Arrived EAL Pupils

#### Introduction

Identifying where a pupil with EAL who has recently arrived in the UK and also has SEND is a complex issue. Teachers have to ensure that the child or young person has enough time to settle in, learn English and adjust, whilst also assessing and providing appropriate, personalised support as needed. Within these processes, there are also significant issues around race, class and gender around how children and young people are perceived as learners. Although EAL pupils are often underrepresented in SEND lists, Black, working class pupils, particularly boys, can be overrepresented in some SEND categories and pupils with disrupted formal education can be misidentified as SEND or as underachieving. Care therefore needs to be taken with how we get to know our pupils and their families, thoroughly considering how they learn best, their schooling background and what support they may need.

Often 'best practice' advice has been that schools wait two years after a pupil arrives in the UK before formally identifying SEND, on the understanding that this can help to challenge assumptions which otherwise might lead to misrecognition and wrong labels. The Bell Foundation recommends that further investigation should be started if a pupil is not making the same rate of progress as their peers after 6-12 months, 'in a supportive learning environment with EAL support'. However, the pupil's specific context needs to be considered.

There are situations where SEND has been identified in home countries, and families migrate to the UK to access SEND support which is not available in the same way in their country and therefore ask for support straightaway. For other families, they hope that previous lack of progress in learning may be overcome by moving, and they fear the stigma of SEND. Introducing this idea before forming good, trusting relationships may alienate them, resulting in a refusal to accept support or the family moving the child to another school.

For younger pupils who may have recently arrived or been born in the UK, they may have not had much social interaction before starting school, or family approaches to play may have been different. For others, SEND can start to become a concern as the family and school track their development, particularly regarding physical and sensory development. A newly arrived pupil can be silent for as long as six months, and those with disrupted formal education may take longer to settle in and acquire literacy, particularly if they do not have print literacy in their home language.

Lastly, waiting too long, particularly where a child or young person is approaching transition, can delay important assessments of their needs.

In order to start to approach these complexities, this guide presents a range of suggestions through which teachers can engage families, support the pupil and move towards formal identification where necessary in a timely way.

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## 1. Teaching strategies

- Make sure the child or young person feels welcomed and that they belong in school - see 'Working with newly arrived EAL pupils'.
- Ensure consistent, excellent EAL, multilingual practice within quality first teaching - see 'Whole class strategies for EAL pupils'. Research shows that with EAL pupils who may have SEND, we need to use all the strategies that we know regarding EAL pupils.
- Maintain a view of the child or young person as a complex learner - do not lose sight of their race, ethnicity, gender, class, migration experiences etc. consider cultural competency or unconscious bias training for staff to assist with this.
- Resist taking the pupil out for too much intervention and do not place them in SEND groups unless these are very clearly appropriate as EAL pupils acquire English best in whole class settings.
- However also provide 'safe spaces' for learning particularly where they have disrupted prior education and at the start of their schooling in the UK. These may be short term 'beginners' lessons, 'boosters', pre teaching or short term, rapid skills based catch up interventions. Also interventions to assist in settling in are important, whether this is engaging the pupil in an after school club or ensuring they have an appropriate 'buddy'. Any intervention should be personalised for the child or young person's needs and should as much as possible be linked to mainstream lessons.
- Use TAs effectively in class, ensuring that they are trained in EAL as well as SEND. Use TAs who speak the same language where possible/appropriate.
- Use high expectations, praise, find out what the pupil is good at and build on it.
- Learn what the pupil finds difficult and use your 'toolkit' - just because you do not have a formalised identification yet, this does not mean you can't try strategies you know work with other pupils and see if they help.
- Consider what presenting behaviour may be telling you, remembering that many migrant children and young people have experienced trauma pre migration and are also facing significant challenges in the present.
- Use a social model of disability approach without using medicalised terminology. Avoid labels and notions of inability/ laziness. Think instead about how you can change the context and support to make the situation more effective- what strategies have you not tried yet?
- Keep careful records of what does and doesn't work in different learning contexts (formal and informal) and with different people as well as progress over time to inform your practice and help you to decide whether and when SEND assessments are needed. Ask all staff who work with the pupil for feedback, including lunchtime supervisors, TAs, etc.
- Ensure that there is clear, regular communication with all staff about the pupil's possible needs and planned intervention, and close cooperation between SEND and EAL leads. Keep an eye on your SEND list for any over or under identification of particular needs.

## 2. Arranging Family Meetings

- Initial family meetings to gain background information are part of welcoming strategies, and your EAL lead has links to useful proformas for this meeting. It is helpful to have interpreters at this meeting to ensure you get the correct information. However, often when families first arrive or start school it is not appropriate to delve into too much detail, and families may not yet trust you to share their concerns or open up about past experiences, so if SEND is a concern, then arranging a second meeting after a settling in period can be crucial.
- In this second meeting explain that you want to make sure you as a school are supporting their child in the best way. Do not use medicalised language- stick to terms like “help” and “support” as SEND is highly stigmatised in many communities and entwined with notions of inability and/or mental health - any suggestions that their child is unable will close down communication. Phrases like “currently” and “not yet” can help when talking about how you may be able to provide some extra support for them to make progress. It is useful to focus on a need, not a diagnosis.

## 3. Communicating in the first language

- Do not use family members or their friends or the child, other families or children in the school as language brokers when discussing a child’s learning as this can seriously impact understanding and put people in difficult positions. Important information may be misunderstood or not passed on, or key issues about progress may be framed in terms of inability which will alienate the family.
- Do use interpreters or multilingual staff as much as possible, even when the family seem to have a good level of English, to ensure full understanding both ways (see separate briefing sheet on this);
- 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)
- Contact your EAL lead or [kathryn.kashyap@achievingforchildren.org.uk](mailto:kathryn.kashyap@achievingforchildren.org.uk) to access the AfC multilingual staff register.

## 4. Areas to ask the family about

- Find out as much as you can about the child’s proficiency in first/ home languages and bear in mind different scripts, lack of print literacy, very different grammatical structures etc.
- Ask how much school/education have they had, where and in what language, not forgetting early years.
- What language is their best language for speaking and understanding? When do they use their first language, the home language and English and with whom, for example with extended family or in community settings?
- What learning does the child or young person do in the home or in the community, either formally or informally and how do they enjoy and do well at this? (Often families can feel more confident to comment about these settings and this can open up concerns).
- More sensitive areas that may not be possible to ask about at this stage, but have them in mind in case the family opens up: any illnesses early on in life; whether hearing and sight have been checked recently; family illness; difficult experiences; caring roles; trauma; physical and mental health in the family.

## 5. Managing family responses

- Draw on family strengths and concerns positively, particularly around the challenges of migration and the benefits of multilingualism. A child who learns in both languages will ultimately make the best progress, so encourage this as much as possible. Often when there are concerns, the natural reaction is to just focus on one language but this will hold the child back.
- Don't ignore families who are worried about progress, but don't make quick judgements about EAL/SEND. Encourage families to be positive and focus on enjoyable/ expert activities and learning as well as needing to 'catch up'.
- Make sure you have clear lines of communication open and the family can easily contact a key member of staff.

## 6. Use multilingual school and borough staff and community groups

- Speak to multilingual staff on the borough register or at your school, ask staff at your school and at Achieving for Children for advice as they may have worked with families from a similar background.
- Find out cultural approaches to SEND within the family's home country to inform the way that you build relationships with the family and avoid pitfalls. This can be done through asking staff members who come from the same background. You could contact local community groups or ask other staff in EMA or SEND networks who may have worked with a particular community before. You could contact a staff member on our multilingual register or researching online. Unless you know otherwise, work on the assumption that there may be stigma and views that SEND means inability and/or is seen through a medicalised lens. In some communities, there may also be beliefs around SEND as a curse.
- Refer the child or young person to after school and community groups as appropriate and check on how much tuition they are attending. Discuss with the family how best to manage the child's time, out of school activities and their homework so that the child has a balance of activities.
- Involve community groups and independent advocates in discussions about learning where appropriate with the family's permission. An advocate from the same background can often explain the system in the UK in ways that the family will accept and understand - this is more than just an interpretation exercise. Community groups such as Refugee Action Kingston (<https://www.refugeeactionkingston.org.uk/>) are keen to help. You can ask them for advice about how to refer a family to their organisation. These organisations are also very skilled in approaching families to offer their services, managing possible resistance carefully and sensitively.

## 7. If you are still concerned

- Meet the family again with an interpreter/multilingual staff member to check any details that may have been missed out in previous communication or not appropriate to ask at the time.
- Still keep the focus on how the school can best support learning, and avoid terminology such as 'assessment', 'psychologist' - stick to phrases around teachers supporting and helping.
- These discussions will be sensitive and need to be conducted with care - an advocate would be useful if acceptable to the family. For example, check medical issues (eyesight, hearing etc.) and child development, full details of the pre, during and post migration situation for them; what issues family members see at home.
- Refer on where appropriate with issues that do not need formalised SEND assessments such as eyesight or hearing tests.
- A first language assessment can be really helpful here. This needs to be done sensitively, being aware of how much formal learning a child has done in their home language. Hounslow Language Service are very experienced in these and will give you a full written report as part of their service. Although this service is costly, it can be hugely beneficial in informing your practice and have significant positive implications not just for deciding about present support, but for how the pupil will make progress long term.

## 8. If you move to more formalised SEND discussions

- Continue with EAL support and encouragement of learning in the first language.
- Use the notion of 'educational help' to explain the ways in which you can provide more support - this cuts across SEND and EAL labels in a useful way.
- With some families where there is a lot of stigma around SEND, this will not change quickly. Agreeing to educational help and even EHC plans may be based on a belief that with this support their child will 'get better'. There may need to be more work with the family over time around understanding the social model and barriers to learning.

## 9. Links for further advice and resources

Achieving for Children

- Sarah Herbert - Lead School Improvement Adviser for SEND [sarah.herbert@achievingforchildren.org.uk](mailto:sarah.herbert@achievingforchildren.org.uk)
- Kathryn Kashyap - School Improvement Adviser for EMA and PPG [kathryn.kashyap@achievingforchildren.org.uk](mailto:kathryn.kashyap@achievingforchildren.org.uk)

Achieving for Children Local Offer

[https://kr.afcinfo.org.uk/local\\_offer?mode=text](https://kr.afcinfo.org.uk/local_offer?mode=text)

Advice from the Bell Foundation, a leading EAL organisation

<https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk/school-leaders/learners-special-educational-needs>

Lambeth mother tongue assessment pack for primary children

<https://amandaigay.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/mta-final-publication.pdf>

Distinguishing the difference: SEND or EAL (Birmingham)

[https://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/write/MediaUploads/Resources/EAL\\_Resource.pdf](https://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/write/MediaUploads/Resources/EAL_Resource.pdf)

ELTwell- resources and guidance about dyslexia in particular

<http://eltwell.com/>

NALDIC self-study pack

<https://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Teaching%20and%20Learning/Documents/eal-sen-trainingfile.pdf>

NALDIC guide (£2.50 or free to members)

<http://www.naldic.org.uk/eal-publications-resources/Shop/shop-products/nq84o.html>