

English as an additional language (EAL) programme

Information for school governors

The term 'English as an additional language' (EAL) recognises the fact that many children learning English in our schools already know more than one language and are adding English to that repertoire. In January 2005, 11.7% of pupils in primary schools and 9.1% of pupils in secondary schools had a first language other than English.

The focus of the Primary National Strategy EAL programme is on advanced bilingual learners: those children, often born in this country, who appear to be appropriately fluent for their age in everyday face-to-face conversational contexts but who need continued support in order to develop the cognitive and academic language required for academic success. These children are beyond the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language.

It takes on average five to seven years to become fully competent in a second language, although individuals will vary in the speed with which they acquire this competence. Fluency in spoken English is usually achieved within two years but the ability to read and understand more complex texts containing unfamiliar cultural references and write the academic language needed for success in examinations takes much longer.

Inspecting subjects 3–11: guidance for inspectors and schools, English as an additional language, Ofsted (2000)

The term 'bilingual' is used to refer to children who have access to more than one language at home and at school. It does not necessarily imply full fluency in both or all of their languages.

Aims of the EAL programme

- To promote equality of opportunity with particular reference to raising the standards of attainment and accelerating the progress of children learning English as an additional language. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 requires all schools to promote equality of opportunity
- To develop the confidence, skills and expertise of the school community in general and mainstream teachers in particular in meeting the needs of bilingual children

Key questions for governors to ask

• Leadership and management

- Standards of attainment and progress:
*How well are different ethnic groups performing?
Are there any gaps in the performance of children from particular ethnic or language groups?
If so, what is the school doing about it, and how will the EAL programme support the closing of the gaps?*
- Effective leadership:
Does the school ensure that staff with appropriate knowledge and expertise are appointed (EAL, sharing children's first languages)?

• Learning and teaching

How are the children's ongoing needs to develop English and access the curriculum met as a mainstream responsibility of the whole school community?

How is the specialist expertise of adults in teaching EAL learners utilised to coordinate support for children and staff and monitor the impact on learners?

How does the school support all children to use their whole language repertoire for learning?

How does the school curriculum reflect the school community and support learning?

How are parents and the wider community involved in promoting children's learning?

For further information: contact the Local Authority Primary National Strategy team or the Ethnic Minority Achievement team.

