

Educational Outcomes of Children with English as an Additional Language

Introduction and background

This report was funded by the Bell Foundation and Unbounded Philanthropy and published by the Education Policy Institute (EPI). It focuses on the attainment of children with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and the current policy and funding regime available to support this group of children. It looks at national policies for the assessment of English proficiency and needs, the allocation of funding to support children with EAL through the national funding formula for schools (NFF), and monitoring and accountability for the attainment of children with EAL at national level. EAL children are defined as those who speak another language at home other than English. This includes children who are British citizens who speak another language at home, as well as refugees and migrants.

The main points of the report are summarised below. The full report includes a series of case studies giving details of provision in Australia, Canada, the USA and New Zealand.

Key findings

Assessment of proficiency

- Children with EAL have widely varying levels of English proficiency; some have no English and some are fluent multilingual English-speakers; some have been educated in English throughout their childhood and some have had no prior education, or schooling that has been interrupted. They come from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds.
- The heterogeneity of the EAL group is the main reason why assessment of English proficiency is essential for the planning and monitoring of children's educational progress.
- Broadly speaking there are three options for assessing English proficiency and support needs in school. In the US, standardised tests are normally used to screen new arrivals for EAL and monitor their progress while receiving language support. In other English-speaking education systems (New Zealand, New South Wales & Alberta) assessment is conducted by teachers using frameworks which describe stages or levels of language development, differentiated by year group or phase. Although the assessments are high stakes in terms of attracting additional funding, they are not externally moderated. These non-testing systems typically rely on harder, less fluid criteria such as the timing of arrival, first/second generation migrant status, or refugee status to determine the level or duration of access to additional support. A third option is a combination of tests and observational assessment leading to an overall judgement by professionals working with the child.
- In 2016, the Department for Education began collecting a new teacher-assessed measure of English proficiency for pupils with EAL through the school census. Schools are asked to position each child on a five-point scale according to a judgement of 'best fit' with briefly described categories: *New to English*, *Early Acquisition*, *Developing Competence*, *Competent*, or *Fluent*. The government may explore in future whether the new proficiency data can be linked to the new NFF.

- Possible future linkage of EAL proficiency levels and funding could, however, be problematic. Schools might, for example, deliberately underreport proficiency levels in order to gain funding. On the other hand, the data which the assessment would yield would give more accurate data and research on the assessments, and in time enhance them.

Funding of EAL support

- The level of English language support needs experienced by children with EAL is often obscured by strong underlying attainment. Potential for even better achievement may be missed as a result of this. The Bell Foundation has published a research-informed assessment framework designed to support schools to make a consistent interpretation of the new stages of proficiency. It is comparable with international equivalents.
- Before 2012, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant provided local authorities (LAs) with ring-fenced funding to support pupils from black and minority ethnic backgrounds; many of these pupils were EAL. Since 2011, this grant was subsumed into general school funding. This, in turn, has led to LAs reducing or ceasing central support for EAL services.
- The new NFF is pupil-led, allocating funding according to a range of factors, including EAL. EAL funding is allocated for a pupil's first 3 years in an English school. However, in the context of a future funding squeeze, there is a worry that some of the EAL funding may be diverted away from this group, as has been the case with the pupil premium.
- Analysis shows that the implicit consequence of the NFF, if applied directly to school funding, would be to reduce the funds following the average primary pupil with EAL, but to increase the funds following the average secondary school pupil.

- Provision for late arrivals in the current system is weak. The analysis in this report demonstrates that a pupil who arrives in England late in their school career faces the highest risk of low attainment, both at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. However, if they arrive after the Key Stage 2 tests, they will miss out on funding for low prior attainment.

Monitoring, attainment and accountability

- The EAL group is highly heterogeneous. Some EAL pupils were born in Britain, others arrive at different points in their schooling. Of the new arrivals, some will have prior knowledge of English and some may have arrived from other English-speaking countries.
- With the exception of pupils arriving in reception, time of arrival can provide a proxy of English proficiency, albeit an imperfect one. The arrival time proxy could be used straight away to improve school funding and accountability for attainment, whereas the teacher assessment proficiency data need to be subject to quality checks and are unlikely to ever be suitable for funding allocations.
- Better data and analysis of the EAL population is needed to ensure that policies are adequate, targeted and relevant.
- Current official statistics treat EAL pupils as a single homogenous group. As a group, they have the same Attainment 8 score as the national average, make greater than average progress during school and are more likely to achieve the EBacc (28% vs 24%).
- However, the heterogeneous nature of the group creates a 'misleading averages' problem. There is a further problem in measuring the progress of EAL pupils. Academic assessment taken before academic proficiency is reached will underestimate academic attainment to an unmeasured degree. A further problem is that of missing data. Children who arrive just after national assessment points will wait for up to 4 years in primary school and up to 5 years in secondary school without any national assessment.
- There is an urgent need for benchmarks for EAL attainment so that seemingly high average attainment figures do not mask the urgent needs of some sub-groups. Robust benchmarks are also needed in order to have a measure of for funding accountability.
- The analysis in this report shows that a number of factors need to be taken into account in order to establish an effective benchmark. Data shows that the attainment of EAL pupils varies considerably according to the language group to which they belong. For example, pupils with Chinese as their first language have above-average Attainment 8 scores at age 16 if they have arrived as late as year 10; those with French have above average attainment if they arrived by year 8, and those with Urdu if they have arrived by year 7. At the other end of the scale, pupils with Pashto or Lithuanian as their first language have below average attainment at age 16 if they have arrived after year 1, and those with Portuguese as their first language have below-average attainment even if they have attended English schools since the age of five.
- The report's authors argue, however, that first language should not be included in a new benchmark. This is because: first language may be linked to other issues such as refugee status or, at the other end of the scale, being from a more advantaged background. Secondly, there is no obvious language which can be set as a reference point. Thirdly, information about first language does not provide comprehensive information about linguistic history. Some children may have been exposed to a number of languages throughout their speech and language development.

- On balance, a good option may be for the government to publish regular basic attainment statistics for different first languages as well as late arrivals, but to establish benchmarks for the potential attainment of children with EAL using a simple model based solely on time of arrival.

Rounded EAL policy

- Other English-speaking jurisdictions often have more extensive EAL policies than England. In particular there is a vacuum with respect to the creation and dissemination of new specialist expertise on EAL. There is currently no mechanism by which new specialists are likely to emerge under current funding pressures.
- Other English-speaking jurisdictions have policies with much greater emphasis on: specialist roles, staff development and graduate level specialist qualifications; guidance and/or minimum entitlements defining what support should be provided; policy aimed at adequate provision in areas where EAL populations are sparse; clear policies on parental and community engagement and provision choices; and valuing other languages through official certification of proficient bilingualism which is available to both EAL and non-EAL learners.

Summary of recommendations

- First language should be taken into account in the new benchmark, along with the following other factors: ethnicity, gender, month of birth, special education needs and disabilities (SEND) by type of need, deprivation at individual or neighbourhood level.
- In the medium term, the new proficiency data should be quality-assessed as part of wider research. In the longer term, the review of data quality should be used to decide whether any changes to the assessments are required, including whether alternative methods such as standardised proficiency tests should be considered.
- In addition to the basic EAL premium in the national funding formula, a late arrival premium is needed to boost support for children with EAL arriving in English schools late in the primary or secondary phase.
- Additional eligible years of less intensive EAL funding (extending its duration) are needed to support children progressing from basic social interaction proficiency to academic English proficiency.
- Better official statistics that acknowledge the wide spread of attainment outcomes for children with EAL are needed to inform policy discussions. Attainment break-downs by first language, statistical benchmarking by time of arrival in English schools, and analysis of the new English proficiency assessments are the best current options.
- Government should develop new policies to generate and maintain EAL expertise in schools. Systems in other English-speaking jurisdictions provide useful options to consider including the establishment of specialist roles, programmes for staff development and graduate level specialist qualifications to enable full engagement with the secondary curriculum.

The full document can be downloaded from:

https://epi.org.uk/report/eal_outcomes/