Children learning English as an additional language (EAL)

‘Many children in early years settings will have a home language other than English. Practitioners should value this linguistic diversity and provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in their play and learning. These children will be at many stages of learning English as an additional language.

- Some children are bilingual from birth, because their families have talked to them in more than one language.
- Some children will be acquiring English as an additional language. As with their first language, this needs to be learnt in a context, through practical meaningful experiences and interaction with others. These children may spend a long time listening before they speak English, and will often be able to understand much of what they hear, particularly where communication through gesture, sign, facial expression and using visual support is encouraged.

Learning opportunities should be planned to help children to develop their English, and support should be provided to help them to take part in other activities by, for example

- Building on children’s experiences of language at home and in the wider community by providing a range of opportunities to use their home language(s), so that their developing use of English and other languages support one another;
- Providing a range of opportunities for children to engage in speaking and listening activities in English with peers and adults;
- Ensuring that all children have opportunities to recognise and show respect for each child’s home language:
- Providing a bilingual support, in particular to extend vocabulary and support children’s developing understanding:
- Providing a variety of writing in the children’s home languages as well as English, including books, notices and labels;
- Providing opportunities for children to hear their home languages as well as English, for example through use of audio and video materials.’

Early Years Foundation Stage Consultation Framework P18

Short Articles include
- Early stages of learning English
- Establishing good home/setting links
- How a child might feel when entering a new setting
- Thoughts on settling a child speaking EAL
- Cultural differences
- Practical activities to support children speaking EAL
- Survival language
- Early language topics
- NALDIC research summary of the ‘Early stages of learning English’
- Websites and links to other sites
Helping a Child who has English as an additional language

If a child who speaks English as an additional language joins your setting, you will want to make the child and family feel as welcome as possible. The information in this pack has been written by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS) and the Early Years Consultant Team and should give you some useful advice and information on how to help the child settle in your group successfully.

Obviously over time it is hoped that the child will be able to use English as readily as their first language, especially when starting mainstream education. This can be accomplished by ensuring that the child has the opportunity to play and mix and communicate with other children, whereupon they will learn at their own pace, and gradually increase their confidence.

The acquisition of an additional language does not normally follow a set pattern, but some rough guidance is given below.

The Early stages of Learning English

1. In many cases a silent period, possibly combined with use of gestures and some home language
2. Echoing of words or short phrases – e.g. you offer a biscuit, and say ‘would you like to take a biscuit?’ the child may echo the question – and reply ‘biscuit’ or ‘take a biscuit’
3. ‘Formulaic Language’ – language with meaning – ‘mummy come soon’, ‘my turn’
4. Joining in with refrains in stories and songs, learnt by copying other children
5. Use of intonation and using basic question words
6. Development of independent phrases, such as wants, dislikes etc
7. Extended phrases, using verbs, adjectives and nouns
8. Leading eventually to longer sentences and oral competence, although some minor ‘irregularities’ may still occur
Establishing Good Home and Pre School Links

If possible have a home meeting with the parents prior to the child commencing Pre-School, find out

- The child’s correct name and pronunciation
- The child’s first language
- Try and find out the words in the home language for ‘survival language’
- Family background – brothers/sisters etc
- Religion and diet
- Child’s likes and dislikes
- Complete registration form – if parents also have English as an additional language, ask if the EY consultant Team for support in finding a translator to help

Make sure that parents know

- The opening times and days their child will be attending
- Fees and charges – and if their child is eligible for the nursery grant
- What types of drinks and snacks will be provided
- What type of activities that the group undertakes
- Emphasise the importance of maintaining the home language. Encourage parental participation – don’t be shy to make contact with parents who don’t speak English.
How a Child may feel…

You will very likely feel apprehensive at taking on a new child in your group, especially if you feel you may not be able to communicate readily with them – here is a reminder of how the child may be feeling!

How can I help?

- Try pairing the child with another that you know to be friendly and caring
- Check pronunciation of the name, make sure everyone can say it
- Don’t expect or insist on speech too early, listening time is vital for the child to tune into the new language
- Use non verbal cues and materials
- Be careful of misinterpreting facial expressions, gestures, body contact and personal space, which varies from culture to culture
- Sit the child with others you know to be supportive and understand the task they are doing – learning is often by imitation
- Show the child pre-school routines with simple accompanying language – greeting, name of helpers, toilet, drinks etc
Thoughts on Settling a New Child

Naming. Check pronunciation of child’s name. Make sure everyone tries to say it correctly.

Grouping. Seat child with supportive pupils of similar ability, who understand the work.

Speaking. Don’t insist on speech too early. Listening time is important for the child to ‘tune in’ to new language.

Surviving. Show classroom routines. Introduce basic language, eg. Greetings, names of staff, toilet, coat, drink. Snack yes/no, please/thank you.

Buddying. Pair with a responsible, caring articulate child who will act as a guide, friend and role model.

Communicating. Use non-verbal clues and materials. Be careful about gestures, body contact and personal space due to cultural differences.
Cultural Differences

Some children will avoid any physical contact for cultural reasons. For example, Muslim women and girls do not shake hands. In Nepal, the head is considered sacred and even small children should not be touched on the head.

Some children may not want to eat with other pupils because they are only used to eating with members of their own family.

Some children may seem aggressive in the playground or may show other behavioural patterns. This is sometimes because their English is limited and their only form of communication with their peers is non-verbal.

Some children may appear tired or uninterested due to environmental adjustments, stress or limited English skills.

Some Children will not answer unless they know the answer – an incorrect answer or a guess may mean ‘losing face’.

Some children may nod their head to acknowledge you but this does not necessarily mean that they understand you.

Some children will avoid eye contact with teachers – in some cultures this may be a mark of respect and does not indicate that they are not listening.

Some children may feel recorded written work is the most important part of their work and may pay little attention to oral based activities.

Some children may be uneasy at the more liberal approach to foundation stage activities in this country. When they are used to a more formal teaching/learning style, they need to learn how to work co-operatively and the boundaries of behaviour expected in the setting.
**Practical Activities**

**Listening Corner**

Try and provide a listening corner, which will help the child reinforce their language acquisition by listening to tapes and stories, either individually or in a small group. You could also play short videos if you have the equipment.

Play games such as a sound lotto to reinforce listening skills or you could make the simple listening game below;

**Matching Pairs/table games**

This game is played in the way as traditional visual matching pairs, but instead of using pictures you use sounds.

Take an even number of empty film canisters and fill them two at a time with a variety of small objects that will make different sounds such as small bells, peas, gravel or rice.

The mix the canisters on the table in a pattern and play in the usual way.

This game will also help children who have speech and language delay develop listening skills.

Other types of table games that will help are sequencing games, matching games and jigsaws.

**Physical play**

To help with acquisition of verbs and activity words, try using physical play, in games such as Simon Says (run, walk, sit, fast, slow) or games like North, South, East and West, where children are directed to run to different corners of the room, these could be given any name, which could be illustrated with pictures (cow, pig, sheep, dog etc).

**Books for bilingual pupils**

Books for the beginner bilingual pupil should
- Provide structural repetitive language
- Stimulate speech and discussion
- Act as first readers
- Be culturally appropriate
- Form part of normal routines/activity sites.
- Involve parents if possible

**ICT**

- Teach child how to use a computer.
- 1. Use programs which develop language skills.
- 2. Use web sites with vocabulary/sound files.
**Useful activities**

- Sequencing pictures such as
- Labelling

**Collaborative learning**

- Involve pupil in shared activities
  1. Problem solving.
  2. Surveys
  3. Investigate activities
  4. Sharing information
  5. Predicting results

**Songs and Stories**

- Use repetitive refrains and story lines, rhymes and songs
- Use pictures/photos and big books as a resource
- Provide concrete visual support where possible, e.g. puppets, soft toys, small world toys, magnet board story props and role play items
- Encourage retelling of stories, using gesture, body language and tone of voice
- Use books and music from other cultures – including that of pupil(s) in class
- Use dual language books to support/value child’s home language

**Use games which**

- Involve taking turns
- Introduce new vocabulary
- Introduce new concepts
- Encourage social language
- Provide motivation to listen and speak

Above all, make sure that bilinguals are involved at all times in setting activities…….
**Survival Language**

Think about the things that you would need to know and say if you suddenly found yourself in a different environment. Also consider the things you ask the children to do – do you make it clear what is expected of them? Make sure that all children, not just those with English as an additional language, have non-verbal as well as verbal cues as to what you expect them to do.

**Children’s Language**

Try and learn some of the child’s own language to help with the following;

- Thank You
- Mummy
- Daddy
- Yes
- No
- Hello
- I need the toilet
- I’ve hurt myself

You will probably be able to think of some more.
Adult Language

How can we help to non-verbally illustrate what we mean by……..?

Early Language Topics

These are the sort of topics/words which practitioners may well use in developing the language of a bilingual child. The topics are not necessarily in sequential order and should be incorporated into normal foundation stage routines and activities.

Survival Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hello</th>
<th>Goodbye</th>
<th>Where?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Who?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please may I have?</td>
<td></td>
<td>What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td></td>
<td>Which?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May I go to the toilet?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Do you like…….?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t understand</td>
<td></td>
<td>Are you…….?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where is the…….?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Am I….?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Myself Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My name</th>
<th>I am/am not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My family</td>
<td>I like/don’t like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where I live</td>
<td>I want/don’t want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My key worker is</td>
<td>You are/aren’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Nursery/Pre-school is</td>
<td>You can/can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends</td>
<td>….is/isn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like/don’t like…….</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Action Verbs

Run, Walk, Sit, Stand, Eat, Drink
Look, Jump, Throw, Catch, Listen
(Can introduce use of I/you)

Everyday nouns

In Setting

Door, Window, Chair, Table,
Toilet, Outside, Inside, Book, Snack (time),
Story (time)

Outside Setting

Road, House, Car, Crossing, Lights
The Early Stages of Learning English: Research

This outline of the development of young children’s learning of English as an additional language has been prepared by NALDIC to inform judgements made by educators in assessment contexts. It draws on research findings. The process should be seen as cumulative and there will be variations in the rate of development according to environmental, personal and social factors.

Many bilingual children who are at an early stage in their learning of English go through a ‘silent period’ when they first enter an unfamiliar early years setting. This can last for up to six months or longer. This is not a ‘passive’ stage. During this time, children will be watching, actively listening, and exploring their environment to understand new experiences and to develop new meanings. They will be trying to relate previous knowledge to new contexts. It is important that children should not feel pressurised to speak until they feel confident enough to do so. However, it is essential that adults continue to talk to the children, to pick up their non-verbal responses. To support the child’s understanding of meaning, and to involve them in activities, these strategies will help children to internalise the language they hear and to develop a sense of the patterns, meanings and range of language functions in their new, unfamiliar environment.

During this time, children may begin to use non-verbal gestures as a response to a question or to indicate a need. Understanding is in advance of spoken language.

Many children may begin to ‘echo’ single words and some short phrases used by adults and peers. All attempts at speech should be encouraged and praised.

There will be a development of ‘formulaic’ language (‘chunks’ of social speech) e.g. “Mummy come soon”, “My turn”. Children may begin to join in with story refrains and repetitions and songs.

‘Chunking’ will continue, but children will increasingly begin to use one-word utterances (frequently nouns) which will perform a range of language functions (e.g. questioning, responding, and naming).

Children will then begin to generate their own ‘telegraphic’ sentences, using two or three word utterances. Function words are likely to be omitted, the main concern being the communication of meaning. Non-verbal gestures will often accompany speech. Holistic phrases (a development of ‘chunking’) will continue during this stage.

Children will begin to use extended phrases or simple sentences, which contain surface developmental errors in the use of plurals, tenses, personal pronouns, function words and articles. Again the emphasis is on the communication of meaning.

Increasingly children will develop more control in their use of functional language. However, surface errors in the use of tenses, word endings and plurals, will continue for some time until children understand the use of different grammatical
structures in the target language, which may be very different from the home language.