

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Ian Jones

Government initiatives in relation to EAL have been a bit like the traditional view of waiting for London buses. Nothing comes for ages then several come along at once. We may not like the direction in which some of them are going, we may be doubtful about our ability to influence the routes taken and we may be concerned that in some cases they are going to run out of fuel or break down before getting us very far. However, they are on the road, they are moving and some of them might even take us some way towards where we want to go.

Over the past 12 months following the consultation on the government's strategy document 'Aiming High: Raising the Achievement of Minority Ethnic Pupils' a series of initiatives have been developed aimed at building a framework for the Strategy. In addition, the Ethnic Minority Achievement Project Team based at the DfES has shown a willingness, firstly to appoint practitioners to posts involved in developing different aspects of the Strategy and secondly to engage in dialogue with organisations such as NALDIC during the development phase of initiatives. For NALDIC, it has been an extremely busy period in terms of being involved in these discussions. At the same time it has been an opportunity for us to evaluate our position on the issues and how, as an organisation, we are to position ourselves in relation to changes of emphasis in the government's approach. The key for us is to try to ensure that EAL is integral to a strategy where the main emphasis is on achievement on management and on whole school approaches.

The Aiming High Strategy's approach to Continuing Professional Development in relation to EAL has been to grant tenders for two specialist courses at Masters Level, one in the North and one in the South. These courses are aimed at providing a specialist qualification for EAL teachers while two pilot courses aimed at providing a specialist EAL qualification for teaching assistants are also being funded. These courses are due to start in September. Training in EAL for mainstream teachers is being developed through the Primary National Strategy which has made two regional consultant appointments to run pilot projects in 12 local authorities. Other LEAs have had the opportunity to join this initiative as associates and as many as forty have expressed an interest in doing so. The Primary National Strategy has also initiated regular network meetings for EMA managers.

Currently, the Key Stage 3 Strategy is in the process of making an appointment of a director for a project aimed at raising the achievement of Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Somali and Turkish pupils. This is an achievement-focused project but, given that the majority of pupils from these communities are acquiring EAL, it is to be hoped that their language needs are not sidelined.

With the research on advanced EAL learners carried out by Ofsted being extended to Key Stage 2, a web site developed with QCA funding, 'Pathways to Learning' aimed at new arrivals due to come on line shortly and the circulation of guidance documents on supporting the education of refugee and Asylum seeker pupils and the needs of minority ethnic pupils in mainly white schools, there is currently no shortage of advice and guidance in the field of ethnic minority achievement and EAL. These are welcome initiatives although it remains to be seen whether the work on EAL assessment which is also underway is as welcome to EAL specialists if it is still based on the QCA 'Steps'.

The most significant documentation to arrive in schools recently has been the studies in good EMAG practice accompanied by the new EMAG Guidance document. The good practice guidance was produced as a result of work by Ofsted over the past nine months visiting a variety of primary and secondary schools where good practice in the use of EMAG was helping to raise achievement. The EMAG guidance document is supported by these case studies and is a bit of a curate's egg from an EAL point of view. While there are positive references to the RRA and to the roles of management in schools and LEA personnel, and the need for a co-ordinated whole-school approach to bilingual learners, it is not as strongly worded as NALDIC would have liked. A critique of the document will be on the NALDIC web site shortly. It is therefore important that we maximise the use of the positive sections of the guidance. The biggest single problem with the guidance however is the lack of funding to support it and the possibility of cuts to many LEAs if the formula is applied strictly next year. I discussed the implications of this in the last edition of 'NALDIC Quarterly' and since then we have made representations to the government along with many LEAs and individual head teachers. There is still no indication as to how they plan to proceed but we hope that their expressed wish to maintain stability of funding may produce a more positive outcome.

Engagement with these national initiatives has been an important part of NALDIC's work but not all of it. 'NALDIC Quarterly' has been successfully launched, for instance and our second summer

conference on ICT and EAL was a tremendous success. This makes the fact that we have finally established NALDIC premises with an office in Luton and are making progress towards charitable status all the more important. It will enable the work of the association to become more effective than ever and give us a firm organisational base for our development work, conferences, publications and the engagement with the ever increasing number of key national initiatives around EAL.

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