

# VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

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## Nicola Davies

Since the last issue of *Naldic Quarterly* went to print, the DCSF has announced the continuation of EMA funding for a further three years. The announcement in November 2007 ended more than two years of speculation, rumour and an all too typical period of uncertainty for EAL and EMA specialist staff.

The EMA funding, which has been in place as part of the Standards Fund since 1999, is due to increase to £184.8 million for 2008-09; £194.8 million in 2009-10; and to £203.8 million in 2010-11. There are some large changes from 2007 to 2008 but most authorities are then predicted to see a small rise in their allocations over the following three years. In contrast, allocations to the Corporation of London, Hackney, Coventry, Dudley, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Oldham, Trafford, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Redcar and Cleveland, North Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Derby City, Leicester City, Rutland, Windsor and Maidenhead, Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen, Hertfordshire and Warwickshire remain frozen. Birmingham, Newham and Manchester again top the table of 'winners'. For example, Birmingham is due to receive an extra £2.3 million from the total additional £19 million available between 2008 and 2010.

As part of the announcement, Jim Knight, Minister for Schools and Learning, also introduced the Exceptional Circumstances Grant '*for authorities experiencing rapid growth in pupil numbers, or a significant influx of children with English as an Additional Language*'. This grant is part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and is intended to recognise pressures on school budgets which arise as a result of new arrivals joining the school between the January count date (which determines the DSG allocation) and the start of the academic year. The grant will be triggered where the increase in pupil numbers is more than 2.5% in a local authority or where the proportion of EAL pupils increases by more than 2.5% in a local authority between the January count and the start of the academic year.

Whilst better than no grant, no increases in EMA funding and no recognition that new EAL learners do not helpfully enrol in schools on or before the 16<sup>th</sup> January each year, there is much to be criticized within the new announcement. Put simply, it is too little, too late. Whilst additional millions may sound impressive, between now and 2010-2011 funding overall is due to rise by somewhere between 3 and 5 percent each year, little more than the rate of inflation. Such niggardly increases, given rising salary and administration costs, are unlikely to result in significant increases in face to face work with

pupils nor in additional support and guidance to schools working with EAL learners.

As NALDIC has previously noted, the size of the allowable central hold back (15% or £15,000 whichever is the greater) causes real difficulties for some authorities and particularly for those with smaller allocations, often those where schools are less experienced in working with EAL learners. In December 2006 we wrote to the then DfES that the holdback is '*barely adequate in many authorities to support schools, particularly those with smaller numbers of EAL pupils*'. The failure to increase this level of permissible hold back will mean that local authority services to schools in many areas will suffer as under-funded central services struggle to provide support and guidance to all schools which need it. One teacher responding to a recent GTC survey noted that the ethnic landscape of England is changing, but teachers' skills to respond cannot change as quickly:

*Many schools in all white areas are receiving new arrivals from all over the world. They do not have the specialist skills and knowledge of EMAG staff to ensure these children are placed in appropriate groups/sets, they do not have the understanding of how children learn a second language or how to teach EAL. The skills and knowledge of EMAG central staff is needed to train mainstream staff and work with LA school improvement teams so that all pupils can access the curriculum and achieve to their full potential.*

As Jill Rutter explains elsewhere in this edition, the Exceptional Circumstances Grant (ECG) is only triggered where there is a very significant increase in the number of EAL learners joining an authority. To trigger the grant the EAL percentage of the entire authority population needs to rise by more than 2.5%, not as might popularly be supposed, a 2.5% increase in the number of EAL learners. As Jill notes in her article: '*What this means in practice is that West Sussex, a local authority educating 91,000 children would have to enrol more than 2,275 new children to trigger the grant*'. One can only agree with Jill's point that very few migratory movements to the UK have been that large or that sudden. On top of this, additional funding is then applied only to the number of pupils in excess of the 2.5% threshold. One example will suffice. According to the DCSF's handy ECG calculator, the grant would be triggered if Barking and Dagenham's 7084 EAL pupil population swelled to 8000 pupils (a rise of nearly 15%) between January and September 2008. However the additional funding is then calculated only on the 102 pupils above 2.5% threshold.

In her article, Jill writes that although the government argues that '*EMAG is only one source of support for bilingual pupils*', the amount of the EAL and ethnicity weighting in general funding is '*very small indeed*'.

Whilst recognising that EAL support is also the responsibility of classroom teachers, she identifies that

*the uneven distribution of migrant children across local authorities means that in some schools, classroom teachers have many demands placed on them during lessons. It is high time DCSF acknowledged that teaching is a difficult job and there are limits to the amount of 'differentiation' a teacher can undertake.*

Oddly, given the small increase in EMA funding, the work undertaken by staff through the fund is interpreted as a 'success story' by the DCSF. They note that:

*The further closing of the attainment gap over the last 3 years would indicate that EMAG, when used effectively, can drive up standards and close attainment gaps. LAs and schools should interrogate and analyse their data as a matter of course and employ good monitoring of pupil performance strategies in order to determine which groups of pupils are most in need of targeted support.*

This begs two questions. Firstly, if EMAG is so effective, why has this targeted funding not been increased more significantly? Secondly is the close analysis of attainment and performance information really necessary to identify groups who are in need of support? Or is it rather a handy administrative mechanism to divide scarce resources between those somewhat arbitrarily identified as 'most in need' and (presumably) the slightly less needy?

Up and down the country, those working in schools seem to have no difficulty in identifying that many EAL learners are very much in need of support which they are not getting. Funding for EAL specific support has been branded as inadequate by, among others, the National Association of Headteachers, the Institute of Public Policy Research, the National Union of Teachers, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers and by school staff in articles in the local and national press. Parents too are clearly aware of inadequacies and shortcomings. For example, parents responding to the influential Primary Review identified that, particularly in rural areas, funding and support may be spread too thinly to be useful. The Review concluded that:

*It is clear that a pattern of schooling premised upon the relative stability of its intake is being called increasingly into question, and that resourcing in respect of matters like language provision may not be keeping pace with need. This, without a doubt, is now a national challenge, and a typical day's press coverage shows that its ramifications reach well beyond primary schooling.*

It is not only the relative stability of the school population which is questionable, but also the assumption that linguistic and cultural diversity within the school population will inevitably lessen if we can just 'muddle through' the latest round of 'exceptional circumstances'.

Close examination of the details of the funding announcement suggests that support for bilingual learners to acquire English is perhaps no longer viewed by government as a central remit of the EMA grant. In contrast to previous years, the grant specification is not prefaced by the statement that the grant's remit is 'to meet particular needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL)'. Instead it simply notes that:

- (i) *it allows LA strategic managers and schools to bring about whole school change in narrowing achievement gaps for Black and minority ethnic pupils which in turn ensures equality of outcomes; and*
- (ii) *it covers some of the costs of the additional support to meet the specific needs of bilingual learners and underachieving pupils*

Whilst positioning support for bilingual learners clearly within the remit of existing mainstream funds, the second statement also acknowledges that actually the fit between current educational provision and a diverse pupil population is not all that close. The primary purpose of the grant is seen as tackling under-achievement. Whilst this view is quite legitimate and additional funding has successfully supported some schools to narrow attainment gaps, it is surely equally legitimate to ask where the support structures are to meet the particular needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language within the educational environment. These needs are not made explicit to teachers and learners through a curriculum which defines what the subject of EAL should encompass. They are not evident in assessment mechanisms which both identify the aspects of the English language that bilingual learners will need to acquire and provide information on how well they are doing this. They are not evident in the training provided for mainstream teachers. Newly qualified teachers consistently rate their preparation for working with EAL learners as one of the least satisfactory aspects of their training. And since the change of regime from Section 11 to Ethnic Minority Achievement, these particular needs have become increasingly less evident in the distribution and rhetoric around additional funding.

At NALDIC, we have been expressing concern for some time, not only about the gradual erosion of funding since the DfEE/DfES/DCSF took responsibility for the grant but also the problems inherent in the chosen formula. For example in 2004 we highlighted to the DfES that:

*the adopted formula based on the numbers of EAL learners and learners from nationally 'underachieving' groups factored by an indicator of social and economic deprivation (FSM) does not recognise the distinctive language and learning needs of bilingual and ethnic minority pupils within the education system and fails to direct additional resources to their needs.*

Jill Rutter concludes her article by powerfully arguing that:

*We are failing a generation of children.....The ending of the latest round of EMAG funding in March 2008 presented DCSF with the opportunity to rethink how it funds EAL support and to debate how much money is really needed. Instead, Government has put its head in the sand. This lack of leadership will only lead to more head teachers and local authorities resorting to using the media to highlight a lack of EAL support. Media stories on the impact of migration on public services are gaining prominence and can only continue to fan hostility to new migrants. We must recognise that increased international migration to the UK means that that a substantial increase in funding for EAL is needed.*

In the Primary Review's recently published research survey on demography, culture, diversity and inclusion, Mel Ainscow, Jean Conteh, Alan Dyson and Frances Gallenaugh examine current educational discourse in relation to diversity and to bilingual pupils in particular. The authors criticize the endless re-working of centrally-driven initiatives and argue instead for

*a reorientation of policy, from the generation of categories and categorical responses to providing a supportive framework for schools and teachers as they attempt to make sense of diversity within their own contexts.*

Such a supportive framework must surely include not only sustained investment, but also a structure for developing professional understandings alongside specific EAL and first language curriculum and assessment provision. If schools and teachers are to begin to make sense of the reality of linguistic diversity in today's Britain, this is surely the minimum requirement.

Details of the EMA grant conditions and allocations from 2007-2011 can be found on the NALDIC website at [www.naldic.org.uk](http://www.naldic.org.uk)