

Ms Shirley Maher
Public Communications Unit
DCSF
Castle View House
East Lane
Runcorn
Cheshire WA7 2GJ

NALDIC
Building L010
University of Reading
London Road
Reading,
RG1 5AQ

enquiries@naldic.org.uk

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Dear Ms Maher

Re: Status of EAL teachers

I am writing on behalf of National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC). NALDIC is the subject association for English as an additional language (EAL). It is dedicated to promoting the learning and achievement of bilingual pupils in schools and draws its membership from those who work in this field in schools, universities and other educational institutions.

NALDIC has recently been alerted to concerns about EAL teachers' position in schools. These relate to the perceived status and professionalism of qualified EAL teachers in relation to qualified teachers in other disciplines and the frequent practice of appointing unqualified staff to 'teach' EAL.

NALDIC has been lobbying for many years for greater recognition of the language and learning needs of EAL learners and the role of the EAL teacher. Whilst the needs of EAL learners are being increasingly acknowledged, there is less recognition of the role of the EAL teacher in terms of nationally recognised teacher training and qualifications.

NALDIC believes that the field of teaching EAL is a distinct academic and professional discipline with unique linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical dimensions that require specialised education and training. Those working in the field often have the rigorous education, credentials, and experience equivalent to that of their peers in other subjects. However, in many settings and schools, teachers of EAL are not respected as being part of a unique discipline, and often do not receive the same professional treatment or benefits as their peers in other subjects or disciplines. NALDIC's position is that schools, local authorities and government agencies should recognize the field of EAL as a unique academic and professional discipline that is distinct from, but on par with, other subjects.

NALDIC is opposed to policies that treat EAL teachers differently from their counterparts with comparable credentials in other disciplines. We believe this is important to foster equity and integrity in schools and in society at large, and is especially pertinent in the current climate of opinion, which is often hostile towards individuals from minority ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

As you will be aware, The Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) Regulations 2008 (SI 2008/2945) introduces a new requirement for all SENCOs to be qualified teachers by September 2011. Under the legislation, some of the SENCO functions will continue to be undertaken by other staff, including teaching assistants, and they will continue to make a significant and important contribution to improving the achievement and well-being of pupils. However it is recognized that SENCOs need to 'have the necessary standing to influence differentiated teaching to meets pupils' individual needs'

NALDIC is disappointed that there is apparently no intention to extend legislation similar to that on SEN professionalism to EAL and ethnic minority achievement (EMA) co-ordinators. We consider that until this happens, our members will continue to encounter unequal practices in their schools. For example, our members have recently alerted us to situations in some schools where qualified teachers of EAL work at the direction of teaching assistants or HLTAs. Similarly we have recently been contacted by members who are concerned that some local authorities are putting in place appointment procedures for local authority EAL/EMA consultants where qualified teacher status is not a requirement of the role.

We would be grateful for your comments on these issues and would be delighted to hear that the department is considering proposals to legislate on a requirement for all co-ordinators of EAL to be qualified teachers along with guidelines to schools and local authorities on appropriate employment practices relating to the appointment of EAL/EMA teachers, co-ordinators and consultants.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Davies
Chair
On behalf of NALDIC
www.naldic.org.uk

Cc
Geoff1.BROWN@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk
Keith.Bartley@gtce.org.uk