

NALDIC Position Paper on Newly Arrived Beginners of English as an Additional Language

2007

Pupils learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in schools come from diverse linguistic, cultural and educational backgrounds. NALDIC believes that language education provision for newly arrived beginners of EAL, of all ages in urban or rural areas, needs to reflect this diversity. Newly arrived EAL learners are entitled therefore to receive dedicated programmes of support that pay particular attention to their distinctive language learning needs as they move into the English education system and curriculum. These programmes will need to take account of learners' prior learning experiences in home language and support their English language learning development in the context of the national and broader curriculum.

Principle 1

Curriculum programmes for newly arrived beginners need to reflect the diversity within the EAL pupil population and be designed to meet the distinctive language and learning needs of different types of learner.

Newly arrived beginners of EAL are not a homogenous group. They come from diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and will join the school system having had different language and learning experiences in their first languages. Some will have had very little or disrupted formal schooling, others will have had age-appropriate schooling in first language and may even have had some exposure to English. Newly arrived beginners will be encountering the English school system for the first time, and will therefore need some form of induction and orientation to school, the curriculum and its organisation. However, once beyond this initial phase the needs of different types of EAL learner will vary and support will therefore need to be tailored accordingly.

Principle 2

Curriculum programmes for newly arrived beginners need to make explicit the distinctiveness of EAL teaching and learning content and methodology, and how this links to the rest of the curriculum.

Newly arrived beginners of EAL from diverse linguistic, cultural and learning backgrounds need tailored programmes when they first enter our school system. All programmes need to be underpinned by a pedagogy that addresses the particular language development and literacy needs of pupils new to English and the school system, whilst also beginning to prepare pupils for the language of curriculum content and different teaching and learning styles.

In the first few weeks of school, most newly arrived EAL learners will benefit from a short programme to support their induction, and orientation to the school, curriculum and its organization. During this programme, EAL teachers' will be able to conduct initial assessments of language and learning needs to plan for on-going support in key mainstream subject areas.

Principle 3

Curriculum programmes for newly arrived beginners of EAL need to reflect the local school, cultural and learning context.

The local school context will influence the way in which newly arrived beginners of EAL are supported on entry to school. Whilst the underlying pedagogy for newly arrived beginners of EAL will need to be consistent, the organisation, content and delivery of curriculum programmes, will need to be flexible to meet the needs of pupils at different stages of their education - whether in an urban or rural setting, with high or low numbers of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds - designed to suit the particular local school, cultural and learning context for pupils of the same age.

Principle 4

EAL specialist teacher knowledge and expertise is vital. Working with early stage learners of EAL foregrounds the need for specialist teacher knowledge and expertise in additional/second language teaching and learning if there is to be a clear understanding of the EAL curriculum content.

There is an urgent need for a specialist EAL teacher qualification and an on-going and comprehensive programme of training and support for teachers. EAL learners at early stages of English are entitled to the additional, targeted provision necessary to enable them to learn English across the curriculum and make progress in academic and/or vocational subjects. Continued and increased targeted, specialist provision, alongside greater mainstream expertise, are both essential if the education service is to improve its response to EAL learners, and especially those who are newly arrived in our system.

Principle 5

A fair and meaningful process of assessment, which pays attention to learners' first language, literacy and learning experiences as well as their needs in orientating to the English education system, should also be used to ensure that pupils' needs are correctly identified.

EAL learners are entitled to an assessment process which is fair and equitable and which informs their learning across the curriculum rather than solely in National Curriculum 'subject' English. Identifying the distinctive EAL needs of newly arrived beginners from diverse language, learning, cultural and ethnic backgrounds is key to making appropriate provision for them in their first few weeks and months of school in the UK.

Principle 6

Curriculum programmes for newly arrived beginners of EAL should provide opportunities for pupils to use and develop their first language skills.

Research shows that pupils who learn and develop their first languages, whilst also developing their knowledge and understanding of English, are likely to achieve more highly because of their developing bilingualism. Where possible, opportunities to learn and develop first language skills should be provided for all newly arrived beginners of EAL, and especially older pupils who enter our school system with age appropriate schooling in first language. This will not only improve their learning of English and the rate at which pupils settle into their new learning environment. It will also improve cognitive development and achievement in other curriculum areas.

Principle 7

Curriculum programmes for newly arrived beginners of EAL should be informed by on-going dialogue with learners and parents/carers.

Research indicates that the role of parents/carers in learning is critical and that strong home-school relationships can make a school more effective. For newly arrived EAL learners, establishing and maintaining strong links with their parents/carers is a key element in the development of successful curriculum programmes. The parents/carers of newly arrived EAL learners will not only be able to provide valuable background information about their children, and their aspirations for them, but will also benefit from learning more about our school system and ways in which they can work with teachers to support learning at home and in the classroom.