

Response to the ‘Making Good Progress’ Consultation

NALDIC welcomes the opportunity to respond to this important consultation. As the UK professional body for all those interested in raising the achievement of bilingual pupils with English as an Additional Language, we see this as an opportunity to support the development of proven, sound professional assessment practices that will ensure bilingual pupils’ access the full curriculum and appropriate EAL provision

1 "The question raised in this document is what more we can be doing through the system of educational assessment, challenge and support to focus more on progress" Do you think we could and should be doing more?

NALDIC believes that a fair and meaningful process of assessment for learners of English as an additional language (EAL) is one which pays attention to their distinctive needs and supports their language learning development. It should be capable of being used to highlight EAL learners' skills, progress, and achievements, and to inform pedagogical and administrative planning. A very high priority should therefore be placed on formative assessment. This need has yet to be fully addressed in the English education system

NALDIC believes that any assessment scheme should reflect the distinctive learning trajectories of pupils with EAL. It should clearly distinguish the EAL learner's starting point from that of a child whose mother tongue is English, and help to improve educational practice for pupils who have to learn the English language as well as the content of the curriculum. It should take account of the different entry points of learners, with respect to age and curriculum demands, and show EAL progression in the context of the full curriculum. It should specify the domains of language knowledge and skills being assessed explicitly.

If these criteria are taken into account, it should be clear that National Curriculum English (subject) scales are not by themselves sufficient for the charting of EAL development. There is a need for additional evidence-based and fully validated EAL scales for primary and secondary phases of education which are complementary to the current National Curriculum English scales.

Teachers need a theoretically informed and empirically validated framework of assessment within which to work. In addition to providing sufficiently comprehensive information about EAL progression for teachers to be able to make informed judgements, such a framework would help to transform the under-represented language development needs of EAL learners in the education system by providing a central core of information for training purposes and by enhancing the visibility of EAL learners in education settings. These points have been little recognized in discussions about EAL assessment and it is particularly important that policy makers should take them into account.

The approach advocated by NALDIC is not yet a reality in the current national assessment framework. However, there is extensive experience in Britain, and an established body of work in the field of EAL assessment elsewhere in the world, which could be drawn upon in order to develop an assessment practice for EAL learners.

2 "The document asks whether - without compromising the framework of tests, targets and performance tables which have helped drive up standards so sharply over the past decade - we can adapt the system to support a focus on progress as well as absolute standards." Do you agree?

There is no question that standardised testing, and the test scores that it yields, has been regarded as a key component of the push to raise attainment standards in the past decade in Britain. At the same time,

there has been a growing recognition among educators and researchers that assessment is much more than standardised testing. As stated above, the current system of tests, targets and performance tables do not give us a true idea of the progress of EAL learners. The system of assessment is based on a mother tongue English norm and National Curriculum English tests and progress measures do not provide us with appropriate information for teachers to focus on progress. For example, without a standardised measure of pupils' fluency in English as an additional language, we cannot tell from current performance data whether a learner is 'doing well' or not. A Level 4 in English at the end of primary education may well indicate very good progress for a learner who started the Key Stage as an early stage learner of English. It would be less good for a learner who was already bilingual at the beginning of the Key Stage. Any new indicators developed to look at progress must include the following:

To account for the diverse range of learners of EAL. A common national framework would take account of learners' different points of entry, provide criteria and supporting information about the varying developmental trajectories, recognise positive starting points for EAL and provide positive descriptions of growth. The framework would recognise the fact that EAL pupils bring to their learning a range of experiences, skills, knowledge and understanding in their first language which will impact on their acquisition of English.

EAL assessment should be informed by a coherent and explicit theoretical basis drawn from educational assessment in general and more particularly from language assessment and testing. It should also draw on empirical research in the area of second, or additional, language assessment. It should be informed by research and by frameworks in relevant fields such as pragmatics, functional linguistics, and second language acquisition. The development of an EAL assessment framework will need to be an ongoing process of review and revision in the light of insights from research and evidence-based practice. The basis of EAL assessment should be informed by practice and research, and it should take into account the language demands of the whole curriculum. There will therefore be a need to develop a set of clearly stated descriptors of English language use - not only for the core curriculum subject of English - supported by indicative examples drawn from classroom experience. Such descriptors will enable teachers to link language learning with content, and facilitate forward planning for EAL-conscious teaching.

3 "Despite everyone's best efforts, there are still many children who fall behind their potential." Do you agree?

One of the key causal issues relating to children learning EAL falling behind their potential has been outlined above. Teachers need a theoretically informed and empirically validated framework of assessment within which to work. Without sufficiently comprehensive information about EAL progression for teachers to be able to make informed judgements, the language development needs of EAL learners are under-represented. Their needs become 'invisible' in education settings and in training and teacher education leading to underachievement and a loss of potential.

4 "What is needed is a systematic approach which builds on effective assessment for learning practice and helps pupils and teachers to identify next steps in learning." Do you agree that this would be desirable?

We fully agree with this and would wish to note that effective assessment for learning for EAL learners can only take place within the context of a system which recognises and pays full attention to EAL learners' English language related needs. From the point of view of EAL, putting the principles of AfL into teachers' routine practice raises some very important questions concerning teacher professional knowledge, teacher judgement and approaches to teaching. It is quite clear that language, or more precisely the use of language, plays a very important part in AfL – classroom teacher-pupil interaction is mediated by language. The success of AfL depends on effective teacher-pupil communication in the classroom. Teachers of all subject areas will have no difficulty in recognizing this. Teachers with EAL learners in their classes or subjects, however, have to deal with an additional issue – that the very language in which much of classroom communication is carried out, English, is also the language to be learned by the pupils. In other words, the teacher-pupil communication that is key to effective AfL across the different curriculum subjects does not necessarily provide directly useful information for the teacher. Some pupils may be very knowledgeable about a particular subject/topic but they cannot express what they know through English, or they simply cannot express what they don't know and what they need to know. The issues of appropriate use of pupils' first or stronger language are also important.

All teachers need to know what English language learning needs their pupils have and how to organise their teaching to promote further learning. For this aspect of AfL, teachers need a good working knowledge of how pupils learn an additional language in curriculum contexts. In England, the current official guidance on EAL tends to focus on helping pupils to participate in classroom activities and to encourage active engagement in curriculum work. Thus official advice on teaching EAL learners is largely concerned with 'access-enabling' strategies; there is relatively little National Curriculum infrastructure dedicated to EAL-oriented language teaching and assessment. This represents a significant difficulty to making AfL 'work' for EAL learners.

7 If you wish please comment on the subsections entitled "The 2020 Vision Report" and "Teacher strategies: the "personalised classroom".

The report notes that the following could be particularly beneficial for lower attaining pupils and so contribute to closing attainment gaps:

- a curriculum that takes account of prior learning and experiences and helps pupils to develop the full range of knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes
- attention to appropriate curriculum materials
- securing expected levels and good progress for all pupils in speaking, listening, reading and writing, particularly in the early stages of learning
- strategies that enable pupils to see clearly how they are progressing
- an explicit focus on higher order thinking skills and learning how to learn

We would urge the DfES to consider whether the current stance on English as an additional language gives sufficient prominence to the above issues in relation to EAL learners.

14 If you wish, please comment on anything arising from the subsection 'Individual tutoring'.

The consultation advocates the use of Progression Tutoring: testing the impact of providing targeted pupils (including boys in schools where the gender gap is largest) with exceptional help through up to 20 hours of individual tutoring to get back on trajectory. We would urge the DfES to consider whether it may be appropriate to include individual or small group language tuition for EAL learners as part of the pilot progression tutoring approach. In the current context of English education, pupils learning EAL receive no specific support or tuition in additional language development. NALDIC advocates an entitlement to English language support for all learners of EAL depending on their language stage on joining the system. We feel it would be useful to examine the impact of this approach within the pilot.

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