

Pupil portraits

Student teachers, like EAL pupils, are not a homogenous group and will vary in their understandings of the processes of second or additional language acquisition. Some student teachers will be bilingual themselves and have a wealth of personal experience to draw on. Others may be very familiar with multilingual school environment. Some may have had no contact with individuals learning EAL. Many tutors find that considering individual EAL learners helps student teachers to begin to understand the processes of second language acquisition in a school setting.

Pupils learning EAL share many common characteristics with pupils whose first language is English. Many of their learning needs are similar to those of other children and young people. However, these pupils also have distinct and different needs from other pupils by virtue of the fact that they are learning through an additional language at the same time that they are learning the additional language. In addition, they come from cultural backgrounds and communities which may have different understandings and expectations of education, language and learning.

[Amal](#) is in Year 3 and was a beginner in English when she joined the early years class of her school. Her portrait outlines how her teachers are helping her develop the formal language and literacy skills required in the National Curriculum. [Anna](#) was at the very early stages of learning English when she joined her school in Year 5. Her portrait shows how she begins to learn English and how her teachers have supported her language development at the same time as her cognitive development. [Ahmed](#) is a Year 6 pupil who started learning EAL when he joined his local Nursery class. Although all of Ahmed's formal education has been in English and his spoken English is fluent he is still acquiring academic language proficiency to meet all the language demands of the National Curriculum.

[Trevor](#) was at an early stage of acquiring English when he joined his 'mainly white' school in Year 7. [Ubah](#) and [Said](#) are Year 10 students who joined their schools in KS3 as beginners in English. Ubah had had no prior experience of schooling whereas Saidi had attended a number of schools in other countries. [Yvette](#) joined her school in Year 10. She had some experience learning English at school but she needed to be able to access her GCSE courses through English.

Two further portraits concern pupils who are learning EAL and who are facing learning difficulties. [Olamide](#) has a statement and attends a special school and [Fabio](#) is experiencing difficulties learning to read. [Supporting bilingual children in the early years](#) provides glimpses of four children learning EAL in the Early Years Foundation Stage settings.

All these pupil portraits were written by serving teachers and show how real pupils learn English in the mainstream classroom and how teachers support them to do so. The portraits include comments on aspects of [spoken language](#), [social and cultural context](#), [language demands](#) and [language and cognitive development](#) which are considered in greater detail in other sections.

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