

Recently-arrived Chinese pupils face isolation and bullying in the primary classroom

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Chinese children aged 8-10 who have recently entered British primary schools feel isolated, are bullied and suffer academically due to lack of support in learning English, according to a new research study from Goldsmiths College.

The children are isolated because they cannot communicate with teachers and fellow classmates verbally. They are seen as an easy target for bullying by peers because they cannot defend themselves in English. Meanwhile, most teachers hold low expectations regarding the capabilities of children from non-English speaking backgrounds.

These problems have a negative impact on the Chinese children's confidence and self-image. Feelings of frustration cause the children to withdraw more and more from class activities. Consequently their academic achievements suffer considerably.

English language support for these children is very limited. Schools state that they cannot afford to employ enough language support teachers to help children with English, due to changes in the funding system. This has intensified the situation of disadvantage for newly-arrived pupils.

Meanwhile, Chinese parents assume that English-medium education will lead to social and economic advancement. The desperate need of children for extra help with English goes unrecognised by both teachers and parents.

Yangguang Chen, who conducted the research study, comments 'Inclusion in the mainstream is claimed to be the best way of ensuring "equality of opportunity". However, children will only have equal access to the curriculum if language support is properly funded. Bilingualism is potentially an advantage to these children, but only if they are given enough help with their new language, English.'

This doctoral research study at Goldsmiths College, University of London, is funded by the ORS awards. Participants in the study included three children (aged between 8-10) of newly arrived families and a group of 13-14 year old Chinese students who have lived in Britain for over 5 years. Data was collected through classroom observation, interviews and children's diaries.