

EAL in Early Years Settings: Guidance and Strategies



About The Bell Foundation

The Bell Foundation is a charity which aims to overcome disadvantage through language education by working with partners on innovation, research, training, and practical interventions. Through generating and applying evidence, the Foundation aims to improve practice, policy and systems for children, young people, adults, and communities who use English as an Additional Language in the UK.

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1 Introduction

1.1 What is the aim of this guidance?

This guidance sits alongside The Bell Foundation’s Primary EAL Assessment Framework and accompanying Classroom Guidance and Support Strategies for EAL Learners. It was written to address the unique environments, developmental characteristics, and needs of early years children for whom English is an Additional Language (EAL), particularly those in Reception.

Research from the [University of Oxford](#) on the educational achievement of learners who use EAL consistently demonstrates how assessing proficiency in English can provide essential information about learners’ likelihood to attain in school and their potential need for support ([Strand & Demie, 2005](#); [Strand, Malmberg, & Hall, 2015](#); [Strand & Hessel, 2018](#); [Strand and Lindorff, 2020](#)).

This document aims to:

- Provide guidance on key principles of effective EAL pedagogy for early years (EY) provision;
- Provide guidance for leaders around multilingualism in EY children, training needs for EY staff, and building relationships with the families and communities of young multilingual children;
- Introduce The Bell Foundation’s EAL Assessment Framework, provide suggestions for its use within EY environments, and offer practical EY classroom strategies for creating a welcoming, language-friendly environment.

1.2 Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for anyone tasked with creating inclusive environments and conducive conditions to support the learning of children using EAL in early years provision. As such, it will largely be relevant for leaders and for Reception teachers and teaching assistants (TAs). Nursery teachers and those working with Years 1–2 may also find the guidance useful.



Senior or middle leaders and teachers with responsibility for overseeing early years foundation stage (EYFS) provision will find this guidance useful for:

- Establishing a strategy for working with EY multilingual children and families;
- Supporting staff who work with EY multilingual learners.



Teachers, Higher-Level TAs, or TAs responsible for planning and/or teaching EYFS groups will find this guidance useful for:

- Supporting young learners using EAL to develop the levels of English proficiency needed to access the curriculum successfully;
- Supporting young multilingual learners to thrive and participate in all aspects of school life.

1.3 How to use this guidance

This guidance is intended to be a very practical guide. It aims to put you, the reader, in an informed decision-making position by offering a knowledge base in EAL pedagogy, a tool for assessing English-language proficiency in young children using EAL, and a suite of classroom support strategies designed with flexibility so that you can adopt, adapt, or reject them according to your context.

Following this introductory section (Section 1), the guidance is presented in three sections that practitioners can dip in and out of according to their role and needs.

[Section 2](#), “Five principles to guide EAL pedagogy in early years settings”, serves as a guide for developing and embedding effective provision at a whole-school level for EY learners using EAL.

[Section 3](#), “Guidance for leaders”, offers leaders insights into multilingualism in young children and advice for establishing a collective approach to working with young multilingual learners.

[Section 4](#), “Classroom guidance for practitioners”, introduces The Bell Foundation’s EAL Assessment Framework and offers suggestions for how to use it with early years multilingual children. This is followed by practical suggestions and ideas for supporting young learners using EAL in the classroom and wider school.

The suggested support strategies are organised into five areas that correspond with The Bell Foundation’s Five Principles to Guide EAL Pedagogy (www.bell-foundation.org.uk/effective-teaching-of-eal-learners). If these principles are new to you, you will also find it useful to read [Section 2](#) of this guidance.

In addition, references to the EYFS statutory framework (Early years foundation stage (EYFS) statutory framework -GOV.UK (<https://bit.ly/4gnfNV8>)) are indicated under each principle where it aligns within the guidance in Section 4.

When reading on-screen, you can navigate to the beginning of each section from anywhere in the document, using the numbered buttons at the top of the page.

2 Five principles to guide EAL pedagogy in early years settings

Young multilingual learners in early years foundation stage (EYFS) settings are still in the process of acquiring their home language, while also learning an additional language. At school, EAL learners have a dual task: to learn a new language (English) while also learning *through* language. The five principles below take into account what is unique to this group of young multilingual learners, while guiding schools to develop and embed effective EAL provision.

1

Multilingualism as an asset

Encouraging early years learners to use and develop their full linguistic repertoire is highly beneficial.

Young learners' multilingualism – their ability to listen, speak, and develop reading & viewing and/or writing skills in one or more languages beyond English – is a valuable resource. Bilingual or multilingual children begin their educational journey in EYFS from a range of linguistic developmental starting points. These young learners are still developing their home language/s alongside learning English, and maintaining this (as well as any other languages they know) will result in greater cognitive flexibility and learning outcomes. Early years practitioners and support staff should, where possible, deploy pedagogies that include the use of different languages. Young learners should be encouraged to continue to hear and use the languages they are already developing from parents, family members, the extended community, and appropriate school staff who share a common language.



2

High expectations with appropriate language support

Having high expectations of early years learners using EAL, while offering them the language support that they need, is beneficial to their learning.

Young learners using EAL, like all learners, benefit from high expectations that inspire, motivate, and challenge them. EYFS practitioners and support staff should stretch, engage, and inspire children of all backgrounds, abilities, and levels of proficiency in English, and provide stimulating activities that encourage active engagement and concentration.

Unlike first-language English learners, those using EAL have a double task ahead of them – simultaneously learning the English language and learning *through* English. This means that EYFS practitioners and support staff should set high expectations, while offering the right level of language support and scaffolding for learners to access and understand their learning environment and to demonstrate their developing knowledge/skills.



3

Integrated focus on content and language

Focusing on language while teaching subject content is crucial to the progress and attainment of early years learners using EAL.

The cognitive learning experiences of learners using EAL are separate from their English-language abilities. Although young multilingual learners may be fully capable of cognitively understanding developmental activities and experiences in their home language/s, they may be unable to access or fully express understanding in English. Access to sympathetic and trained home-language adult role models can enable young multilingual learners to express their understanding.

Learning experiences, including play experiences, should be designed in such a way that all learners' needs can be met and developed within the EYFS setting. Any additional support required should be provided in the EYFS classroom. English-language development should be integrated and embedded into the learning experiences within language-rich EYFS settings.



4

Effective and holistic assessment

EAL assessment builds a broad picture of the early years learners, which enables teachers to plan appropriate and targeted support.

Ongoing effective formative assessment provides EYFS practitioners with the information needed to adapt planning for the needs and learning experiences of children who use EAL (see [Section 4.1](#) for more information about assessment of proficiency in English). Initial observations and discussions should gather linguistic and developmental information, such as details of learners' language and literacy practices (if there has been opportunity for any previous "pre-school" experiences) and current developmental skills. Initial understanding of EYFS learners' English-language development should be informed by observations in listening, speaking, and emergent reading & viewing and writing skills.

Gathering information in a learner's home (or preferred) language provides useful information where skills cannot yet be demonstrated in English. Observing learning and developmental skills in this way can also help early years practitioners to build an initial, holistic, and accurate picture of the child's present experiences and skills. Formal standardised assessments are not always suitable for assessing learners using EAL and should be adapted to reduce the linguistic demands of complex instructions.

Continuous formative assessment is an integral part of the developmental learning process at EYFS. It should include both assessment of English-language development – using an age-appropriate, EAL-relevant assessment framework – and teacher assessment for the different areas of learning.



5

Social inclusion

Including early years learners using EAL and their family in all aspects of school life improves their wellbeing and motivation for learning and is beneficial for the school.

In order to have opportunities for success in early years environments, young learners using EAL need to feel safe and secure from day one. They should not be excluded from any aspect of school life. Early years settings should foster an inclusive culture in which young learners using EAL are encouraged to participate in all learning activities and to develop mixed-language friendship groups.

Social inclusion is successful when early years providers create respectful relationships with learners' families (www.bell-foundation.org.uk/working-with-parents) and the wider communities, and strive to understand families' backgrounds, cultures, and prior experiences. Some parents and/or carers of young children who use EAL, especially those who are themselves new to English and to the English school system, face additional challenges to parental participation. Therefore, providers should have accessible communications and expectations for all staff across the setting, to build reciprocal relationships that actively promote family involvement and mutual understanding.



3 Guidance for leaders

An increasing number of children are growing up in environments in which more than one language is spoken. Currently, just over one-third of children entering nursery school in England are recorded as having a first language known or believed to be other than English (UK Government, 2023–2024).

For some children, the EYFS setting may be their first contact with the English language, while other children may have been exposed to or developed English – alongside one or more additional languages – at home. This linguistic diversity makes the role of early years leaders even more crucial – to promote inclusion, and to act as role models and champions for young multilingual children’s education.

3.1 Multilingual language development in the early years

Relationships, identities, experiences, and opportunities to hear and use multiple languages all play key roles in the early language development of multilingual children. The home language is central to a child’s ability to continue developing relationships with important family members who may not speak English. Yet far too often, the linguistic and cultural identities of these children are overlooked in early years settings because of an emphasis on learning English.

For decades, research has identified the benefits of supporting and developing a child’s home language, and any other languages they may know, as much as supporting and developing their English. Researchers have demonstrated that there are advantages to being multilingual; for example, cognitive flexibility; the ability to better understand other people’s perspectives, thoughts, and intentions; connecting with family culture and history; making friends from different backgrounds; opening up employment opportunities; and even reducing the risks of dementia (Barac & Bialystok, 2012; National Library of Medicine, 2013).

Multilingualism also plays a key role in establishing a child’s social identity, sense of belonging, and emotional wellbeing. Creating early years spaces where children feel their languages and cultural practices are valued and promoted can help multilingual children thrive as they explore new environments and learn new things (Drury, 2007). This also promotes the development of children’s sense of a self-worth that is not solely based on their mastery of the English language (Foley, 2024).

As such, it is important for early years practitioners to find out as much as possible about a child’s use of languages, as well as their literacy and cultural practices, in order to truly understand what the child brings to the classroom. A child’s full linguistic repertoire,

meaning all the languages and literacy practices a child knows, is a valuable resource for socialising, for building up new learning, and for learning English as an additional language.

It is important to remind – and if necessary persuade – teachers that they do not need to know or understand all the languages spoken within their classroom in order to allow – or, ideally, actively encourage – children to draw upon their full language resources. Teachers’ fear of losing control if they do not understand what is being communicated is real, and it is often the main cause of their insistence on monolingual (English-only) practices. Likewise, it can cause a reluctance to open spaces for multilingual children to use all their language resources in ways that support their learning. Suggestions for how to do this can be found in [Section 4.2](#).

3.2 Teacher learning needs

As the UK becomes ever more diverse, most early years practitioners will work with children who speak more than one language. However, according to research, many early years teachers have not had exposure to, or training in, how to support children’s multilingualism (Hayes et al., 2020).

The EYFS statutory framework (sections 1.14 and 1.15) supports the provision of opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning alongside opportunities to develop their English. To support teachers in this area, we suggest that leaders use the five key principles explored in [Section 2](#) to guide decisions around teacher training needs. No one principle is considered more important than the rest. Rather, leaders are encouraged to consider their local context and the current practices in their setting to choose which principles, ideas, and/or suggestions to focus on first, and then in more depth. Suggested training needs might include:

- Exploring one’s own beliefs, values, and biases around language;
- Strategies for using a child’s full linguistic repertoire in the classroom (see [Section 4.2](#));
- Strategies for supporting English-language development, including through teaching the curriculum (see [Section 4.2](#));
- Assessing or observing for English-language proficiency as part of identifying appropriate additional language support (see [Section 4.1](#));
- Building relationships with multilingual families and communities.

3.3 Building relationships with families and communities

Parents or caregivers of multilingual children can be as diverse as multilingual children themselves. Some parents may be new to the English language and the UK education systems, while others may be fluent in English and familiar with the UK’s schools and early years settings. Some families may have different cultural expectations around parental engagement in school. One consistency, however, is that the families of multilingual

children are experts in their children's language learning and development. They can offer valuable information to help educators support their child's home language/s and English-language development. Leaders will want to examine their family engagement practices, ensuring they provide opportunities for meaningful, ongoing, two-way communication. Parental engagement strategies should seek to build trust with individual multilingual families and to get to know their unique language and cultural practices.

Engaging with families of multilingual children looks and sounds different from traditional family engagement approaches and practices. Multilingual families may have different concerns; for example, a) they may question what language to speak at home and need assurance that it is best to continue using their home language, or b) they may fear their child is not able to fully show what they know in assessments administered in English and believe this could lead to their child being misclassified as having a speech or developmental delay.

School staff should also bear in mind that multilingual families may need support from interpreters or translation services –yet at the same time they may be able to provide the school with unique linguistic and cultural resources that will benefit all children.

The following list offers some tips for working with multilingual families, especially those who may be new to the UK:

- Establish trust and respect by getting to know the unique language, literacy practices, and cultural traditions of each family.
- Offer opportunities for families to discuss their child's education and educational options in a language that is familiar to them.
- Regularly request input from families regarding their language aspirations, expectations, anxieties, and/or concerns.
- Engage in ongoing discussions with families regarding their children's language development and learning, both at home and at school.
- Provide families with information to address any questions or concerns they may have regarding multilingualism. Share information on the advantages of being multilingual. In addition to announcements or information that is shared online, recognise that word of mouth may be a preferred way for families to gather information.
- Create inclusive and welcoming environments where families can connect with other families who share similar goals (such as promoting multilingualism) and similar worries, along with families who have gone through similar experiences before (e.g. with an older child) and can offer support.
- Collaborate with families to create a shared vision for your setting's efforts to promote cultural and linguistic diversity.

In the end, a major aspect of early years education is creating a sense of belonging. This means taking concrete steps to embrace multilingual children's dynamic language practices and engaging with families as experts, true partners, and advocates for their

children. It means developing one's own understanding of multilingualism and challenging policies or practices that position multilingual children's language practices as somehow deficient. Instead, it reimagines what early years education looks and sounds like within a welcoming and thriving multilingual environment.



4 Classroom guidance for practitioners

This section offers suggestions on the importance of assessing English-language proficiency (4.1) and strategies to support assessment and English-language development (4.2), in the early years setting.

The guidance is designed for use by early years practitioners so that learners using EAL can be helped to develop the levels of English proficiency they need to access the curriculum successfully.

4.1 Assessment of proficiency in English language

Why assess proficiency in English-language development?

- Research has consistently shown that there is a clear link between proficiency in English and educational attainment for learners using EAL. It also shows that assessing a learner's proficiency in English provides valuable information about their likelihood to attain in school and their potential need for support.
- This group of young learners present as very diverse. Their English-language journey may have already begun well before they started school or may begin as they enter school. One size does not fit all! A learner's English-language proficiency is a significant dimension of diversity, as outlined in [Section 3](#). Therefore, observing and having a good understanding of a young learner's English-language proficiency is important, from the outset, to understand their progress and learning outcomes.
- Using an evidence-informed assessment framework, such as **The Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment Framework for Schools** (www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-assessment-framework), alongside the "Communication and Language" Early Learning Goals, can help early years practitioners to:
 - Understand what English-language development and skills a learner using EAL may have already acquired;
 - Understand what ongoing English-language development and skills need to be targeted and supported;
 - Understand the English-language development of learners using EAL to ensure that special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and EAL are not conflated or misjudged, and take into account the natural and age-appropriate development of a learner's home-language skills. The rate at which a child learns an additional language should not be mistaken for a language delay or impairment. Understanding a learner's proficiency in English can help to inform decision-making around appropriate interventions. The Nuffield Early Language

Intervention is designed to be used with monolingual English learners, and as such does not take into account a learner's proficiency in English. For more information on SEND, see EAL and SEND: Guidance for Integrated Provision in Schools (www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-send-guidance).

- Provide formative assessment information for teachers around English-language development as learners transition from EYFS to Key Stage 1. This can be used to inform appropriate targets and support.

How is The Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment Framework organised?

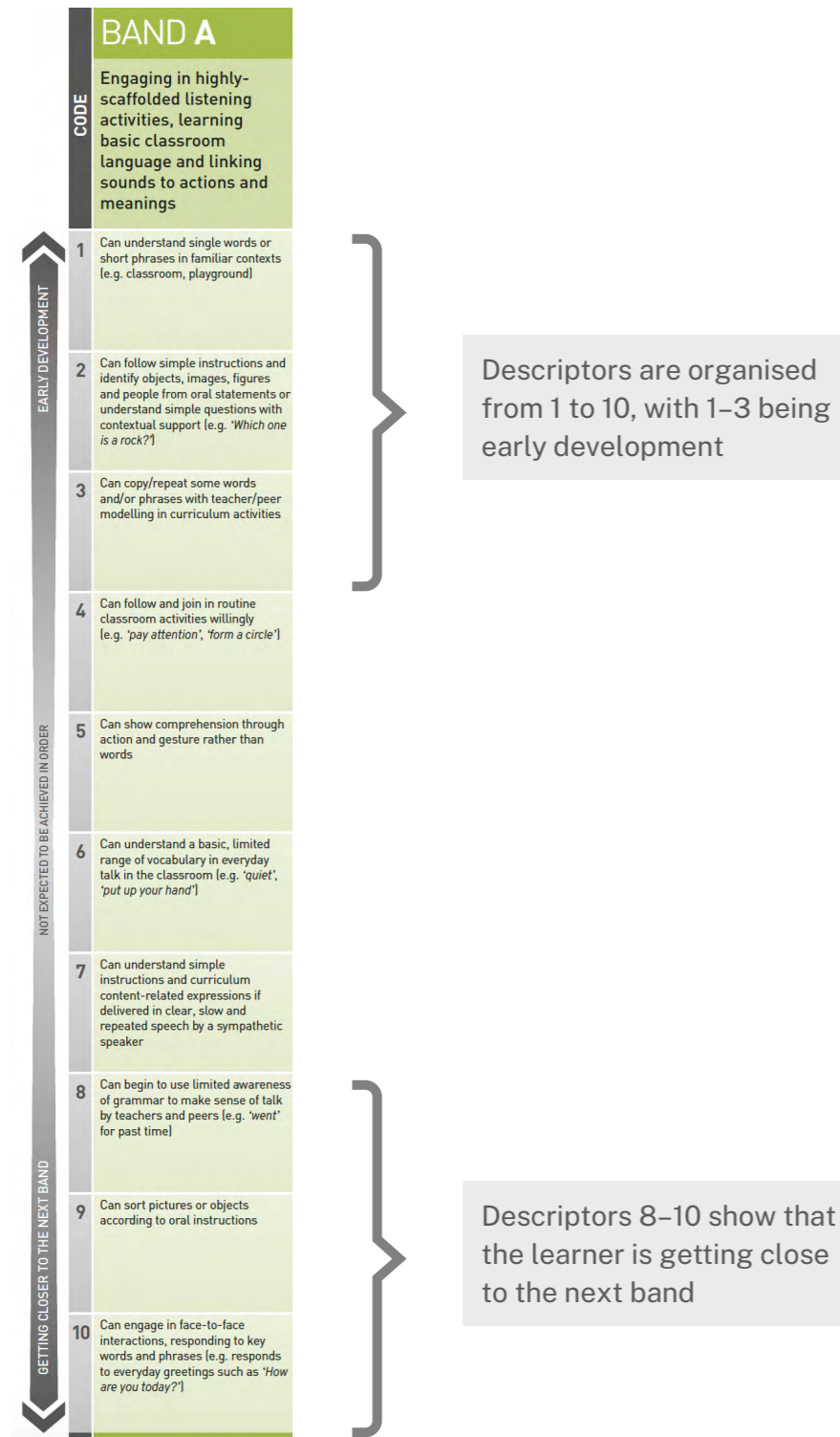
The Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment Framework for Schools (primary version) is designed to support teachers in assessing learners' English-language proficiency within the context of the curriculum. The outcomes of the assessment can be formative and summative.

1. The assessment framework is organised according to the **four language domains**:
 - Listening;
 - Speaking;
 - Reading & viewing;
 - Writing.
2. Each domain is then organised into the **five proficiency bands**:
 - Band A: New to English;
 - Band B: Early acquisition;
 - Band C: Developing competence;
 - Band D: Competent;
 - Band E: Fluent.

The following screenshot shows the broad definitions for each of the bands within the listening domain.

PRIMARY LISTENING					
CODE	BAND A	BAND B	BAND C	BAND D	BAND E
	Engaging in highly-scaffolded listening activities, learning basic classroom language and linking sounds to actions and meanings	Demonstrating an emerging ability to understand and respond verbally in interactions with others based on their understanding of the context	Developing more independence in the use of the basic listening skills needed to engage with learning	Applying listening skills over an increasing range of contexts and functions	Showing an ability to understand and respond to spoken communication in classroom and school contexts with little or no hindrance

3. Each proficiency band has **ten assessment descriptors** identifying what a child can do in English at that level. The descriptors are sequenced to reflect likely progression within each band, where descriptors 1–3 represent early development in the band, and descriptors 8–10 are getting close to the next band. Learners may not achieve all of the descriptors within a band, and may achieve them in a different order.



How to use The Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment Framework in the early years foundation stage setting

The Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment Framework (primary version) can be used alongside early years assessment processes and the "Communication and Language" Early Learning Goal descriptors to establish a "best-fit" judgement of English-language proficiency for learners using EAL in EYFS settings.

As language development in the early years is typically driven by listening and speaking, EYFS practitioners may wish to begin with those sections of the EAL Assessment Framework. However, given the diversity captured within the term "EAL", some young learners also begin to develop English-language proficiency in reading & viewing and/or writing. See [Appendix I](#) and [Appendix II](#) for relevant assessment descriptors for reading & viewing and writing, respectively.

Similarly, a practitioner's understanding of each individual learner will inform which proficiency bands are the most appropriate. A learner who has recently arrived in the UK and is just beginning to learn English is likely to be working at the earlier bands. A learner who is growing up learning and using two (or more) languages simultaneously may be meeting some of the descriptors in higher bands.

4.2 Early years support strategies

The strategies in this guidance provide some practical ways of implementing the five key principles within the early years foundation stage (EYFS) setting. Many contribute to good practice for all children, while some are specific to learners using EAL.

The following strategies are organised according to the [five principles](#) rather than the proficiency bands (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/effective-teaching-of-eal). This is to recognise that all children at EYFS are still developing language.

However, understanding English-language proficiency can help early years practitioners recognise and anticipate the steps involved in acquiring English as an additional language. This recognition will contribute to a deeper understanding of each learner. Furthermore, practitioners will be well equipped to come to an informed and appropriate decision about the use of strategies listed under all five principles. For example, choosing an appropriate strategy from Principle 2, High expectations, will depend on a learner's proficiency in English.

Practitioners may wish to take a look at the Classroom Guidance and Strategies to Support EAL Learners (primary version) to supplement the suggestions provided in this guidance (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-classroom-guidance-strategies).

1

Multilingualism as an asset



Encouraging early years learners to use and develop their full linguistic repertoire is highly beneficial.

Relevant EYFS guiding principles:

1. A unique child;
2. Positive relationships;
3. Enabling environments.

Strategies for use in the EYFS setting and school

Learn some basic greetings and common family words that a learner using EAL may often use in their home or preferred language (e.g. *mum/brother, hello/how are you*) (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/translanguaging). This may help the learner make themselves understood and shows awareness and appreciation of the other language/s in their life. Parents and/or carers can help with this, and it may reassure a learner that even teachers sometimes find it hard to learn something new.

Learn and sing songs and rhymes in a learner's home or preferred language, as much as possible. This could be done by inviting parents and/or carers into school to help teach these to a class and to the teacher. Doing this recognises the value and status of a learner's home language/s, and gives them an opportunity to share what they linguistically know.


Pair learners using EAL with same-language peers to support collaboration in understanding.


Include multilingual labelling and signage around the classroom, such as days of the week/months of the year. This provides visual recognition of this vocabulary and is an additional reference to diversity within the classroom.

Provide dual-language story books for parents and/or carers and other bilingual adults to share with the EAL learner at home. This allows learners using EAL to access a range of stories for young children and to share them with their parents and/or carers.

Include learners using EAL in questioning (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/questioning-strategies) by pitching questions at their level of English proficiency. New-to-English learners may be able to answer simple differentiated yes/no questions or "choice" questions (e.g. "Did the hungry caterpillar eat oranges? Did the hungry caterpillar eat four oranges? Did the hungry caterpillar eat watermelon or mango?"; [looking at a photo] "Is this your mummy or your aunty?").

Use online translation services, such as [Google Translate](https://www.google.com/translate).

The *speak-to-translate* button  can be an effective tool to help practitioners use a young multilingual learner's prior knowledge and understanding of specific vocabulary and experiences, including for children who are not yet literate in their preferred language. For example:

- By using the *speak-to-translate* button, the learner can speak in their home or preferred language, and then listen back to the translation in English;
- The teacher can write the English word into the "Enter text" field and the child can listen to the translation provided through the *listen to translation*  option.

Multilingual machine translation services, however, should be used judiciously, as not all languages are included. It is also important to check the accuracy of any translations, particularly where a word might have multiple meanings, such as "left".

Strategies for use beyond the EYFS setting and school

Remind or reassure parents and/or carers that it is important to continue speaking and reading to their child in their home language/s, as research conclusively shows proficiency in the home language/s supports proficiency in an additional language. (For more information on the role of home-language maintenance, see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/helping-children.)

Remind parents and/or carers who are themselves learning English that they can support their child's language development by looking at books and discussing the pictures in their home language/s. This might be done through a workshop with interpreters, or by recording a video.

Send key words/phrases home in advance of their being taught at school, for family members to translate and discuss ahead of a lesson.

Provide dual-language visual word mats to support this and encourage parents and/or carers who are not fluent in English to translate key words and phrases with their children using an appropriate translation tool or app.

Keep parents and/or carers informed of topics being covered in class, and encourage them to discuss and research these in their home language/s.

2

High expectations with appropriate support



Having high expectations of early years learners using EAL while offering them the language support that they need is beneficial to their learning.

Relevant EYFS guiding principles:

1. A unique child;
2. Positive relationships;
3. Enabling environments;
4. Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

Strategies around having high expectations

Provide learners using EAL with opportunities to communicate and respond to questions, even if they are not talking (a non-verbal period is normal, especially at the outset).

Target learners using EAL for frequent, daily talking moments (i.e. brief communication opportunities that are not necessarily part of the teaching and learning structures of the day; for example, arriving in the morning; hanging up a coat; transition from inside to outside). Plan the vocabulary and structures that can be developed during these informal talking opportunities (e.g. on arrival in the morning, in addition to reinforcing polite greetings, pick a topic to practise, such as the weather: “What’s the weather like? It’s a lovely day!” and offer choices: “Is it cold or hot?”; “Is it snowy or sunny?”). Ensure that the language used is clear, consistent, and with an appropriate balance of support/challenge for the learner.

Ensure that the EYFS key adult assigned to a learner using EAL is briefed to facilitate the use of talking spots and talking moments.

Talk through language targets with learners using EAL (if possible use a same-language adult to support this).

Point to examples of work to help a learner using EAL gain an understanding of how to improve (e.g. marking and modelling letter formation).

Inform parents and/or carers of their child’s English-language targets. Make sure that they understand these clearly, using translation/interpreters if necessary.

Strategies for providing appropriate support

Sit the learners using EAL near the lead adult in carpet sessions, in a position where they can see the adult’s face straight on. This will ensure that they can hear properly and also pick up clues from facial expressions, gestures, and body language.

Make meaning clear by using facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language (gestures, quick mimes).

Always point to the object, picture, or key word that you are referring to.

Speak clearly and slowly, avoiding any unnecessary or idiomatic language (e.g. “Put [not “pop”] this in your reading bag”). This is particularly important when the child is new to English.

Use the same phrasing for frequent instructions and routines to reinforce understanding and help learners to internalise high-frequency language. Call-and-response songs work well for this.

Use visual support (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/visuals) throughout the day (e.g. visual timetables; instructions to accompany teacher talk; story telling; word mats; flashcards [see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/flashcards]; labelling). Visual support can make the difference between a learner using EAL participating through full or partial understanding, or not understanding at all.

For group work, provide as quiet and empty a space as possible in order to minimise both audio and visual distraction. Listening to a new language can be very tiring, and background sounds (e.g. music) in the classroom can make it harder to discern words and sounds.

Observe and notice what a learner using EAL is saying in context, alongside play and activities. Record dialogue observations, highlighting any significant word, phrase, and sentence development.

Position learners using EAL who are new to English towards the end in turn-taking games so that they become familiar with the vocabulary and language structures required for the game.

Use drama and role play (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/drama-and-role-play). Children are often more talkative as someone else (e.g. a doctor, a teacher), and this provides opportunities to hear and use language in different contexts.

3

Integrated focus on content and language



Focusing on language while teaching subject content is crucial to the progress and attainment of early years learners using EAL.

Relevant EYFS guiding principles:

1. A unique child;
2. Enabling environments;
3. Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

Strategies using stories and songs

Use plenty of songs with actions to reinforce language structures, teach vocabulary, and enable learners using EAL to join in an activity with their peers. Repetition of words attached to tunes and actions are a good memory aid. Learners will benefit from songs for teaching specific vocabulary. Classics such as “Head, shoulders, knees, and toes” can be adapted to teach additional vocabulary (e.g. extending body-parts vocabulary to include elbows, chin, and feet, etc., or including animal names or classroom equipment, e.g. “chair, table, book, and pencil”) (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/building-vocabulary).

Use repetitive stories (e.g. *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*; *Dear Zoo*; *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*) and encourage children to join in with the repetitions. This will help learners using EAL to internalise frequent vocabulary and language patterns.

Use ready-made or created story props and visuals in addition to pointing at the pictures in stories. Learners using EAL will benefit from characters and items being introduced before a story is told, and from related discussion, questioning, and play after the story. For example, a toy tiger, teacup, and plastic food will enhance the telling of *The Tiger who Came to Tea*¹ (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/visuals).

Associate story characters with their own gesture/sound, as this aids participation and understanding (e.g. pig – grunt; wolf – baring teeth).

Use YouTube versions of well-known books in a whole-class setting for all children to see the story, pausing to allow explanation and repetition.

Prepare learners using EAL for reading and writing activities with collaborative talking activities (e.g. looking at pictures and predicting what will happen in a text; developing ideas and practising letter sounds, words, or sentences orally before writing them down) (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/collaborative-activities).

Use wordless picture books as a stimulus for learners using EAL to generate language by creating stories.

¹ Make use of what is already in the classroom, or of accompanying merchandise for many well-known stories. Plenty of visual resources to accompany well-known children’s stories are also readily available. EAL-specific resources, such as those for [Handa’s Surprise](#) and [Dear Zoo](#), are available from The Bell Foundation’s learning resources).

Strategies for pre-teaching language

Model “please” and “thank you” for learners using EAL, as frequently used phrases to express politeness in English.

Plan for, teach, and model vocabulary and language structures needed for different topics/tasks² (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/modelling).

Teach learners using EAL key words and phrases for topics in advance in small group work and/or send words and visuals home in advance.

Prepare learners using EAL for the language that will be encountered on school trips (e.g. for a trip to a farm, teach nouns such as “cow”, “pig”; verbs such as “stroke”, “draw”, “feed”; and frequently used structures such as, “Do you want to ...?”, “Let’s ...”, and “I like + -ing” structures, such as “I like stroking the goat”).

Developing understanding through content

Strategies using visual prompts

Display a bank of photos of EYFS children performing typical classroom actions.³ Label the photos (e.g. painting, cutting, eating). These can be used to support understanding, for example on interactive flipcharts when explaining a task (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/visuals).

Use puppets to help model language and then check for understanding. For instance:

- The adult can double check that the puppet has understood the task.
- The EAL learner can “teach” the puppet what they have learned.
- The adult can use the puppet to model and practise talking in different personas (e.g. Freddy the puppet says, “I like bananas”. The adult asks, “What does Freddy like?” The child answers, “He likes bananas”).

Strategies for developing vocabulary

Use new vocabulary frequently after initially teaching it and ensure that learners using EAL do the same – children need to hear and speak words several times in order to retain them (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/building-vocabulary).

When teaching new key topic words and phrases, establish whether a learner using EAL knows these in their home language (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/building-vocabulary).

Teach words that often go together (known as collocations) to new-to-English learners. For example, verb + noun collocations (e.g. eat an apple, do my/your homework) are building blocks towards sentence building, leading to the automaticity that is needed to develop fluency in both spoken and written English.

² For an example, see the language/literacy objectives in the teaching notes for [Handa’s Surprise](#).

³ As a learning activity, you could include EAL learners in the process of taking the photos.

Have a mini white board on hand for quick on-the-spot visuals (e.g. drawings; numbers and number representations; choices) to reinforce key words.

Encourage learners using EAL to make good use of resources, such as class word buckets that contain words and pictures related to what children are learning at EYFS, e.g. phonics (“Can you find the word dog in the word bucket? It begins with d”).

Extend language. Comments, such as “I like your tower; that is a tall tower!” can often be more effective for extending language than questions, such as “What are you making?”, as they can generate chat and expose children to useful vocabulary (e.g. in the exchange above, a learner using EAL may not know that the word for what they are making is “tower”).

Supporting writing

Provide frequent opportunities to model and orally rehearse sentence construction to prepare for writing.

Use recording devices to help learners using EAL retain words and sentences they plan to write down. Use simply structured substitution tables (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/substitution-tables) or speaking frames (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/speaking-and-writing-frames) for verbal substitution activities. These give learners a scaffold to support practising different sentence types (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/scaffolding).

Supporting parents and/or carers

Send home visual vocabulary flashcards (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/flashcards) starting with school and classroom language, and provide ideas for parents on how to play games with them.⁴ For example:

- Turn the cards over/child picks a card and names what is on the card;
- Reveal a card slowly and the child names what is on the card as it is revealed;
- Hide the cards around the room and the child names what is on the card when the card is found;
- Mime an action connected to the card and the child guesses what word is on the flashcard;
- Model sentences and then the child forms a sentence using the flashcard word/s (e.g. the flashcard has an image of a book: “I like reading my book”).
- Pick cards out of parents’ pocket/bag and the child names what is on the card;
- Name the words in English and in the home language;
- Spot any similarities between the English word and other language/s the child speaks;
- Other flashcard vocabulary games such as matching pairs and snap.

⁴ Flashcards available from the British Council’s Learn English Kids (<https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/print-make/flashcards>).

4

Effective and holistic assessment



EAL assessment builds a broad picture of the early years learner, which enables teachers to plan appropriate and targeted support.

Relevant EYFS guiding principles:

1. A unique child;
2. Enabling environments;
3. Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

Suggestions for carrying out an initial assessment

Prior to an assessment, ensure that an initial meeting has been held to collect relevant background information, including:

- Whether or not the learner using EAL is UK-born or newly arrived in the UK;
- What the learner’s home language is, whether they are at a developmentally age-appropriate level in their home language, what their proficiency is in that language, and whether any other languages are spoken;
- Whether or not the learner has attended a pre-school setting;
- Any circumstances that may affect the learner’s wellbeing and capacity to learn; for example, the parent and/or carers may have arrived in the UK from a conflict zone and may be experiencing difficult social circumstances, such as living in inappropriate accommodation (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/learner-profile).

Allow a learner using EAL to settle into their new setting before carrying out an initial assessment. As an initial assessment is best conducted during a normal session, make sure that you observe a learner while engaged in a chosen activity.

During the initial assessment, play classroom vocabulary games (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/building-vocabulary) with new-to-English learners to check understanding; for example, find.../where are...? (e.g. “Find a red pencil”; “Where are the water cups?”) or pulling objects out of a bag (e.g. “What’s this?” “It’s ...”).

Suggestions for conducting formative assessments

Conduct ongoing formative assessment using an evidence-informed assessment framework, such as The Bell Foundation’s EAL Assessment Framework for Schools (www.bell-foundation.org.uk/eal-assessment-framework) alongside the “Communication and Language” Early Learning Goal descriptors.

Adapt baseline and other formative early years assessments where possible/appropriate to allow the learner to demonstrate their understanding without relying too heavily on English-language proficiency. This could include:

- Facilitating the use of home language/s where possible;
- Allowing a learner to give a spoken response;
- Using translation software;
- Focusing on communicative success rather than grammatical accuracy when assessing for learning at this level.

Suggestions for continuous assessment for learning

Build a picture of prior learning for each new topic – being mindful to distinguish between where the concepts are new and where only the English language is new – and use this to help inform any support available in school, at home, or through external organisations.

Allow the learner using EAL to rehearse before speaking assessments (e.g. to practise saying what they see in a picture).

Repeat and rephrase instructions for a task to support understanding.

Recast rather than correct. Recasting models the correct way of saying something without discouraging communication (e.g. pupil: “I goed cinema”; adult: “Oh, you went to the cinema. I went to the cinema, too”) (see www.bellfoundation.org.uk/comprehensible-english).

Offer choices to prompt a spoken response at the same time as checking for understanding (e.g. “Do you want the blue pencil or the red pencil?”; “Do you want the orange or the banana?”; “Is your coat inside or outside?”).

Allow learners using EAL thinking time to process what is being said and to formulate a response.

Use picture sequencing for checking understanding, such as ordering and reordering pictures (either with/without accompanying text), recounting routines, retelling a story practising verbs and tenses, and generating talk in pairs and groups (see www.bellfoundation.org.uk/visuals).

Praise any attempt at communication, including nonverbal communication (e.g. if a child is clearly listening or responding to an instruction),⁵ home language, and mixed code (i.e. mixing languages).

⁵ Non-verbal communication can be praised through a look-and-a-nod, a smile, a thumbs up, or a high five.

5

Social inclusion



Including early years learners using EAL and their family in all aspects of school life improves their wellbeing and motivation for learning and is beneficial for the school.

Relevant EYFS guiding principles:

1. A unique child;
2. Positive relationships;
3. Enabling environments;
4. Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates.

Strategies for use in the EYFS and school setting

Pronounce names correctly and ensure all adults and pupils in the classroom do the same.

Use names to alert a learner using EAL to what is being said and to check and prompt concentration.

Provide resources and toys that reflect the variety of heritages in the setting (e.g. toy fruit/food, dressing-up clothes). Children will relate to and enjoy playing with familiar items and learners using EAL can learn from each other about items that are unfamiliar to them.

Provide opportunities for someone who speaks the home language/s of a learner using EAL (e.g. another class teacher, a teaching assistant, an older child or family member) to visit and mentor the child in class. This will help to give the child a voice, make them feel secure in their new environment, and facilitate clarification of instructions and tasks.

Provide learners using EAL with frequent, daily opportunities to work and play alongside peers who are supportive English-language role models. This needs to be balanced with same-language pairing to enable young learners to use and continue to develop their first language and to demonstrate any prior knowledge and experience.

Encourage learners using EAL in the direction of activities or talking spots where communication is more likely to take place (e.g. some children chat more outside, some in enclosed spaces, such as play tents).⁶ Assign adults with responsibility for particular areas so that they can encourage language buddies to visit the talking spot to help EAL learners.

⁶ The teacher and other adults can collaborate on mapping the inside and outside space for “talking spots” (taken from the EAL Assessment Framework for Schools).

Strategies for use beyond the EYFS setting and school

Provide parents and/or carers who are new to the country/area with local information, in plain and simple English, about opportunities to help their child learn English (e.g. local library activities; stay-and-play clubs).

Ascertain in advance whether or not parents and/or carers will need an interpreter at parents' evenings and other meetings. If required, EYFS practitioners or school staff should book an interpreter (where possible) or arrange for the meeting to be attended by a same-language-speaking member of staff, or a proficient-in-English family member or family friend.

Pitch communication with parents and older siblings appropriately in accordance with their own level of English-language proficiency.

Promote clear communication with parents and/or carers of learners using EAL by making regular EYFS communications accessible. Use clear language (short, unidiomatic sentences) and visuals. Use AI software tools, such as online readability checkers, to ensure that parents and/or carers can access any EYFS communications.

Hold weekly drop-in sessions for families of learners using EAL to help them make sense of EYFS communications, or to reinforce advance learning. This will help to ensure that parents and/or carers know the meaning of commonly used educational acronyms and terms, particularly when there may not be a comparable meaning in the child's home language/s.

Provide parents and/or carers with translated guidance around helping their child how to read.

Inform parents of their child's English-language targets. Make sure that they understand these clearly, using translation/interpreters if necessary.

Provide parents and/or carers with leaflets about the English education system in their home language (see www.bell-foundation.org.uk/english-education-system/).

Help parents and/or carers feel welcome and included by encouraging their involvement in extracurricular school activities, such as family learning sessions, school events, and school trips.

Provide parents and/or carers with suggestions of websites and apps for their child to use at home to support schoolwork and practise English.⁷



⁷ For example the British Council's Learn English Kids (<https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/>) website, plus a phonics website/app that supports the phonics scheme the school uses.

Appendix I: Suggested reading & viewing descriptors from bands A and B

Band A:

Band A	
Showing little or no knowledge of written English; taking first steps to engage with written and digital texts in English	
1	Can make use of their cultural and own first language experiences to try to make sense of words in digital and print forms (i.e. doesn't understand but may distinguish between words and numbers or symbols or text types – a story from a book or an advertisement from a website)
2	Can follow written text conventions (e.g. left to right movement in English, continuity of text from top to bottom of page)
3	Can understand that written text and visuals have content, meaning and organisation (e.g. front and back covers of a book)
4	Can distinguish and understand different forms of meaning representation (e.g. letters, words, visual images, symbols and graphics)
5	Can recognise names, including own name, and labels of objects and spaces in the classroom and other familiar parts of the school (e.g. school office)
6	Can match pictures and other visuals with taught/rehearsed words
7	Can make sense of familiar words in books, on signs and posters in school and in frequently visited digital environments
8	Can recognise and use grapheme - phoneme correspondence to decipher the meaning of some words in a taught/rehearsed text
9	Can follow and make use of familiar words to extract basic meaning from a familiar text

Band B:

Band B	
Making sense of written text at word and phrase/sentence level, using visual information to help decipher meaning	
1	Can recognise words and the sequences of words that form familiar phrases or expressions (e.g. "Once upon a time")
2	Can use awareness of grapheme phoneme correspondence to try to decode unfamiliar words/phrases (e.g. can try to sound out a written word)
3	Can attempt to use familiar and some unfamiliar words in phrases/sentences, and try to make sense of them
4	Can use own growing language knowledge to process text at the phrase/sentence level, showing awareness of idiomatic expressions (e.g. "In the beginning", "A long time ago")
5	Can comprehend taught/rehearsed short written passages at whole-text level, using visuals as support where appropriate

Appendix II: Suggested writing descriptors from bands A and B

Band A:

Band A	
Showing attempts at writing in English	
1	Can mark/indicate familiar pictures, numbers, and other visual images
2	Can communicate intentions and own meaning through drawing and mark making
3	Can show awareness of the differences between print and picture in attempting to write
4	Can show awareness of some basic conventions of writing (e.g. leaving spaces between symbols or letters, writing from left to right. This is significant if it is not the convention in the pupil's first language)
5	Can form and reproduce some English letters
6	Can copy or write own name
7	Can use first language to scaffold their effort to form English words (e.g. words from other languages used in English, such as French "table")
8	Can start to write English to fill in blanks, copy known words or label diagrams/images (e.g. labelling a map)
9	Can contribute to a shared story in the class and produce letters and strings of letters associated with pictures
10	Can copy/reproduce letters shown by teachers to make their own meaning when telling a story

Band B:

Band B	
Demonstrating basic skills of spelling and sentence construction	
1	Can show awareness of common and simple spelling patterns (e.g. "hat", "ant", "sit") reflecting a consonant-vowel-consonant sequence
2	Can form and reproduce most English letters and attempt to produce words
4	Can complete sentence starters if examples are provided (e.g. "I like [apples]", "The monkey ate [four bananas]")
8	Can combine drawing and writing to create meaningful sentences on familiar topics (e.g. a picture of a house with "This is my home")
10	Can write some simple basic phrases or sentences in relation to personal experience (e.g. family, home, playground activities)

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