

# Supporting Pupils with Home, Heritage and Community Languages:

## Information for schools and trusts

This paper is suitable for school leaders and all staff in primary education. It seeks to provide guidance for mainstream primary schools in how to develop an inclusive curriculum which supports progress in learning English while also recognising the importance of children's home languages and cultures.

For the purposes of this paper, a home language as defined by Unesco "is a language learned in childhood in the home environment". Throughout this paper, the term 'home language' incorporates home, heritage and/or community languages.

According to the latest school census information available from the Department for Education (17 June 2021), one in every five children (20.3%) in primary education in England brings with them lived experience of at least one other language and culture. In a global and interconnected society, the ability to communicate in more than one language and to be culturally aware represents a significant asset.

Primary schools today reflect society's increasing linguistic and cultural diversity, yet our classrooms may be places where many languages exist but are not heard. With priority given to developing proficiency in English, we risk seeing children's home language as a hindrance, useful only in the process of transitioning to English. The end result can be that children enter school bilingual but leave monolingual. This is a missed opportunity, not only for bilingual children but for all children.

At a national level, recognition of the value of pupils developing their home language is gradually gaining momentum. Policy makers and national institutions acknowledge the strategic role and contribution of home language to the country's economic growth and global trade, security, defence, and international relations. The significance of language skills and cultural capital to social mobility and the educational achievements of pupils with English as an additional language is covered further in the British Academy's *Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills report* of July 2020.

Further, "The teaching of foreign languages in schools should be more reflective of "modern Britain", with greater numbers of pupils learning languages such as Arabic and Polish" announced Robin Walker, Minister for Education in October 2021.

For such diversity to become reality, support for home languages should begin in the primary classroom or even before in the pre-school environment.

### **How do we support children whose first language is other than English?**

In order to provide pupils with the secure and nurturing environment necessary for effective learning in the primary classroom, it is important that home languages are recognised and supported from the outset. Research (Cummins 2021) tells us children's first language is central to their intellectual and emotional development and essential to their identity. For many children, the home language is a primary cognitive tool; instead of blocking the home language, we should be finding ways of helping pupils use it. We can start by developing a curriculum policy that recognises and encourages the use of other languages in addition to English as part of normal school life.

Curriculum guidance to recognise, support and develop a multilingual approach

- 1 Develop a curriculum policy that reflects an intercultural and inclusive approach to language and literacy education, acknowledging all the languages spoken and taught within the school community.
- 2 Think about how to link the teaching of English as mother tongue, English as an additional language, home language and the teaching of modern 'foreign' languages.
- 3 Introduce language awareness work to show, for example, how languages and cultures are interrelated.
- 4 Seek opportunities for links across the curriculum, for example, in relation to global citizenship and the international dimension.
- 5 Include books in the home language, as well as simple dictionaries and other reference material in the school's library.
- 6 Make home languages visible across the school in hallways, corridors and classrooms. For example, have the countries represented by a board displaying all the flags from children's heritage country.
- 7 Promote pupils' multilingual skills, through performance in school assembly, parents' evenings and cultural events.
- 8 Routinely celebrate pupils' multilingual achievements by displaying work in different languages within the classroom and around the public areas of the school.
- 9 Encourage pupils to acknowledge their own progress in multiple languages by collecting a language portfolio to show to parents and teachers, and to take with them to their next school. For example, this leaflet produced by CiLT (the National Centre for Languages).
- 10 Wherever possible, encourage teachers to create multilingual, intercultural spaces, where teachers and pupils can learn about each other's languages and cultures through storytelling, show and tell, and the relating of everyday experiences.

### Creating a language friendly school

As our communities become increasingly diverse, schools strive to be linguistically and culturally inclusive, providing welcoming, safe, language friendly environments that encourage positive engagement from parents and pupils alike.

Here are some steps that can strengthen school policy and practice with regard to home language and cultural inclusivity:

- 1 Develop an inclusive vision statement which recognises the value of all languages spoken in the school and all cultures represented in the school community.
- 2 Ensure that your inclusion policy makes mention of support for pupils developing their home language and intercultural understanding, as well as providing support for English as an additional language.
- 3 Ensure home languages are included in your school's language policy.
- 4 Encourage a structured approach to knowledge about language that draws on the interrelationship of literacy in the first language, any other language that the children speak and the learning of a new language (see Holmes, B. and Myles, F. (2019) **White Paper: Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward**, P15 paragraph 3).
- 5 At initial interview with parents and pupils, ask about other languages spoken at home.

- 6 Avoid mixed messages for parents. Make it clear that the school encourages the development of home languages and literacy.
- 7 Inform parents about the cognitive, social and academic benefits of bi- and multilingualism.
- 8 In assemblies and school celebrations, emphasise how all languages are of value and how having different languages and different cultures in the school community benefits everyone.
- 9 At open evenings, include reference to support for home languages, and if possible, have on display examples of cultural artefacts, nursery rhymes and pupils' writing in their home language.
- 10 Find out if any of your teaching and support staff speak other languages or have any links with local supplementary school settings. Carry out the same process for any volunteers and governors you may have regularly coming into school.
- 11 When recruiting and appointing new teaching staff and teaching assistants, find out if they have any familiarity with home languages or have any experience of drawing upon different languages in their teaching and support for pupils.
- 12 When advertising for new staff, include skills and experience of different languages and cultures as 'Desirable Skills'.

### **Specific guidance for strengthening family-school-community partnerships**

- 1 Seek opportunities for communication with parents around home languages and culture development to strengthen intercultural dialogue.
- 2 Seek opportunities to find ways in which resources in community settings (including local libraries, museums and galleries, places of worship) may be used as resources for learning in mainstream schools.
- 3 Try to identify storytellers, poets and artists from the cultural communities within your school and invite them into school to share their work with pupils.
- 4 Encourage parents to come into school to read stories to groups of pupils in their home language.
- 5 Identify and engage with community-led supplementary schools or other out-of-school settings your pupils may attend.

### **Making connections with supplementary education**

Supplementary schools are established and managed by community members, generally on a voluntary basis. As community-based organisations, they act as crucial information and advocacy points for adults as well as children. There are 3,000 to 5,000 supplementary schools in England teaching a wide range of languages (more information on this is available in *Supplementary Schools - Descriptive analysis of supplementary school pupils' characteristics and attainment in seven local authorities in England*).

The aim of supplementary schools is to provide a structured and safe environment for children to learn more about their language, culture, faith, and/or heritage, while at the same time supporting their educational attainment and enabling children to realise their potential. Importantly, they enable children to develop literacy in their first language. Many children attend supplementary schools in out-of-school hours, often on a Saturday.

The successful outcome of supplementary education is that pupils develop connections between their own home culture and that of their peers and acquire cultural agility so that they move between languages and cultures comfortably and confidently. Supplementary schools actively seek to encourage and assist social integration and are sometimes called on to support children's wellbeing and learning in mainstream contexts. It is about building confidence and a sense of pride in a bilingual, bicultural identity.

## Practical activities to support local supplementary schools and your students

- 1 If pupils have a non-English home language, find out which supplementary schools operate in your area (ask pupils for details) and encourage pupils to continue with improving their own language skills (see points 2 and 3).
- 2 Contact your local council to seek background information and records on local supplementary schools.
- 3 Alternatively, use the **NRCSE online database** to help inform you about local supplementary schools and their offer.
- 4 If your pupils are being taught a home language at a supplementary school or other out-of-school setting, ask for the details so you can contact the school and offer support/arrange to meet.
- 5 Arrange to visit the supplementary school so you can see the school in action. Meet their teacher and listen to their successes and challenges.
- 6 Allow supplementary school teachers to join CPD sessions at your school to provide opportunities for their training and development.
- 7 Collaborate on the delivery of training of teachers on the basic facts of bilingualism, language learning, and language development in younger and older children (see **Bilingualism Matters - Bilingualism Matters** ).
- 8 Draw on expertise from supplementary schools and the EAL department to gain a full understanding of the needs and abilities of each student. Share curriculum resources.
- 9 Approach supplementary schools to exchange use of your facilities for their support for your pupils.
- 10 Support supplementary schools with safeguarding.

## Benefits to you and your pupils

There are many benefits to pupils, teachers and communities when schools become language friendly. Language friendly schools:

- Strengthen pupils' literacy skills in both languages (Cummins 2021).
- Develop the child's cultural identity and language, or sense of belonging, self-esteem and confidence.
- Promote the achievements of minority ethnic children or children who are members of another group in mainstream schools.
- Improve children's and young people's education attainments in mainstream schools.
- Improve communication between children, parents and teachers.

Partnering with supplementary schools where your pupils are involved can support the teaching and learning of community, home languages, help you to engage with pupils' parents, especially from 'hard-to-reach' migrant families, as well as boosting cultural enrichment and extracurricular activities.

Partnering with supplementary schools can support the school's intercultural work and contribute to a school ethos that celebrates the linguistic footprint of its community.

Research by the DfE in 2019 shows that children with additional languages joining schools from reception were slightly more likely to reach the expected standard in reading, writing and maths than pupils whose first language was English. Multilingual children can be successful learners and high achievers.

## Further information

A range of related resources are available on the Association for Language Learning (ALL) Home and Heritage and Community Languages including an annotated list 'Resources to support linguistically and culturally inclusive practices in primary and secondary schools'. This detailed list brings together work by teachers and researchers in the UK and internationally aimed at providing practical support for schools.

Home / Heritage / Community Languages - Association for Language Learning ([all-languages.org.uk](http://all-languages.org.uk))

Woll, B. and Li, W. (2019) Cognitive Benefits of Language Learning: Broadening our perspectives. Final Report to the British Academy.

[www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cognitive-benefits-language-learning-perspectives-report/](http://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/cognitive-benefits-language-learning-perspectives-report/)

Chumak-Horbatsch, R. (2019) Using Linguistically Appropriate Practice: A Guide for Teaching in Multilingual Classrooms. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Cummins, J. (2021) Rethinking the Education of Multilingual Learners. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

<https://www.multilingual-matters.com/page/detail/Rethinking-the-Education-of-Multilingual-Learners/?k=9781800413573>

Little, D. and Kirwan, D. (2019) Engaging with Linguistic Diversity – A Study of Educational Inclusion in an Irish Primary School. London: Bloomsbury.

Language Friendly School <https://languagefriendlyschool.org>

Lost Wor(l)ds [www.multilingualism-in-schools.net/about-us/](http://www.multilingualism-in-schools.net/about-us/)

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