

Lost in translation

So, what sort of EAL school is yours? If it is one of those with a long history of EAL children and a resident EAL specialist teacher on site, then you can count yourself lucky. If, however, as is the case with many primary schools, your staff does not worry too much about the EAL issue

With LAs axing peripatetic Language Support Teacher posts and the Government no longer allocating ring-fenced money for EAL children, Halina Boniszewska looks at how schools can support new arrivals with little or no English...

until a new arrival suddenly appears on the school roll, then it may be time for a rethink as you no longer have access to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EM AG) which, until April of this year, enabled you to buy specialist support for your EAL pupils. Now is the time to plan ahead and put systems into place so that you and your staff are not caught out should a new EAL child arrive in your school.

Make an audit of resources

So, how should you do this to ensure best practice? You could, of course, ask the member of staff who is responsible for EAL in your school to make an audit of your EAL needs and resources, to familiarise herself with your school's EAL policy and re-write as necessary. But what if your EAL lead is new to the school? Where should you turn?

Contact your Local Authority

If you have a new arrival who speaks little or no English, your Local Authority is still your first point of call. Even if your LA is one of those that has axed its team

of peripatetic EAL teachers, it may have retained an EAL advisor who will be able to advise you on best practice in EAL. While it is true that such an advisor will now be on 'buy back' (in other words, you will have to pay for her services from out of your school budget) she may possibly deal with new arrivals at no cost. For instance, some local authorities have managed to persuade schools in their area to give some of their direct grant to the local authority for the purpose of dealing with new arrivals. The LA advisor may be able to carry out an initial EAL assessment and even arrange for a native language assessment at no cost to your school.

EAL websites and resources

But if your Local Authority is on buy back only and you have few resources in terms of staff or materials, what should you do? Panic not. Help is at hand in the form of some excellent websites that support EAL teachers and pupils. One of the best is the Hounslow Language Service website (hvec.org.uk),

which supplies a number of good quality downloadable online resources for teaching and assessing EAL, e.g. EAL Assessment Pack KS2; Communication Games for KS2 EAL Beginners; Beginners' Scheme of Work KS2. The scheme of work is based on resources that are readily available in most schools, e.g. Clicker 4; EAL Beginners' Activity Sheets; LDA Picture Cue Cards; Wellington Square Reading Scheme.

The Hounslow website also supplies a bank of downloadable school letters that have been translated into more than 30 languages. The letters cover



Tip

Linguists talk of an 'immersion method', the idea being that the best way of learning a new language is to pick it up as we go along in the new country with no direct teaching. It is worth bearing in mind that this is how the children of English ex-patriots learn to speak French in France.



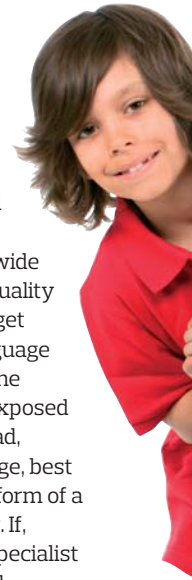
subjects such as school trips, head lice infestation and school attendance information. They form an extremely valuable resource, which Hounslow Language Service obtained through the Dingle Granby Toxteth Education Action Zone in Liverpool. (N.B. The site states that letters 'may be printed out for individual schools, but must not be distributed electronically without prior permission of Dingle Granby Toxteth EAZ'.) Lancashire Local Authority's website also has useful EAL resources (www.lancsngfl.ac.uk). This site carries a list of suppliers who stock and produce resources for those who work with young people from ethnic minorities or who speak English as an additional language. It also carries a useful pupil profile grid for monitoring the progress of new arrivals in learning English as an additional language. The Department of Education (education.gov.uk) also carries a few useful resources, e.g. A Language in Common: Assessing English as an Additional Language and Supporting Children Learning EAL. The latter is essentially an extract from the last Government's National Strategy's Excellence

Programme Guidance for New Arrivals, which gives advice to teachers in settings with little or no access to expert support.

Use your existing resources

But if your head is starting to ache at the prospect of trawling the internet for yet more resources, don't worry. Even if you think you do not, you will almost certainly already have a fair number of resources in your school that will help you support your EAL pupils. For a start, you will probably still have the National Strategy's materials (folders and training DVDs) Excellence Programme for New Arrivals, which continues to be the EAL blueprint for good practice. You will also have the phonics programme, Letters and Sounds, through which you could fast-track KS2 children in discreet short sessions before or after school. You will also have members of staff (teachers and teaching assistants) who are excellent model speakers of the English language – a vital ingredient for your EAL children's (and all children's) language success. You will also very likely have the Oxford Reading Tree reading

scheme (with its memorable characters in everyday settings that give a context to new arrivals) and you will almost certainly have a wide variety of high-quality fiction. Never forget every child's language benefits hugely the more he/she is exposed to beautifully-read, repetitive language, best presented in the form of a memorable story. If, through lack of specialist EAL teachers and resources, the best you can do is arrange for your EAL pupils to be read to in class (or before or after school) by a model speaker of the English language who has perfect diction, faultless pronunciation and nicely-modulated, expressive tone, you will already have given them a great deal.



Tip

A valuable EAL website that also offers training for teachers in EAL is NALDIC (NALDIC.org.uk). NALDIC is the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum. It is the subject association for EAL, which is based at the University of Reading. It carries a huge bank of publications and is both a lobby group for EAL and the first port of call for all those who want to know about the latest research and developments in the area of EAL.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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