

Bilingual pupils and special educational needs

Children must not be regarded as having a learning difficulty solely because the language or form of language of their home is different from the language in which they will be taught.

Special Education Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001)

Some bilingual pupils, particularly those new to English, may take some time before they feel confident enough to participate actively in classroom activities and use the English they have learnt. A 'silent' period is natural and should not be construed as the pupil having learning difficulties.

Lack of English should not be equated with lack of knowledge, skill or understanding. Bilingual learners are no more likely to have special educational needs (SEN) than any other pupils.

Triggers for cause for concern:

- Progress in acquiring English is below expected norm
- Unusually slow work rate compared with peers
- Little response to teacher or peer intervention
- Poor listening and attention skills
- Poor ability in first language
- Parent expressing concern over pupil's school progress

TIPS

- Be careful about making snapshot assessments. Look carefully at all aspects of a pupil's performance in different subjects
- Consider the length of time the pupil has been in the UK, as well as their experiences of schooling and curriculum content in their country of origin
- Find out about pupil's oracy and literacy skills in the home languages
- Consider differences between the home language and English such as script direction, alphabetic and numerical representation etc
- Consider if the pupil is experiencing racism, or emotional stress due to other events, such as being a refugee
- Make use of local sources of advice and information in the community, as well as bilingual staff



Need more guidance?

**Assessing the Needs of Bilingual Pupils:
Living in Two Languages (Resource
Materials for Teachers)**

Deryn Hall
David Fulton Publishers

**Enabling Progress in Multilingual
Classrooms...Towards Inclusive
Education**

LCAS Enfield 1999
Guidance for teachers that looks closely
at identifying if an EAL learner has SEN.

**Guidance on the Assessment of EAL
Pupils who may have Special
Educational Needs**

Milton Keynes EMAS
www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/emass

**Portsmouth Ethnic Minority
Achievement Service**

www.blss.portsmouth.sch.uk/sen/bilsen.html



Reflection

What might be the professional development needs of staff in relation to the issue of EAL learners and SEN?