# NALDIC's response to the 2024 Curriculum and Assessment Review

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion of Multilingual/EAL Children in the Curriculum

As an organisation NALDIC (National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum) strongly believe that concepts of inclusion and what that looks like and feels like needs to be addressed in any review of the curriculum. The diversity that characterises classrooms, staffrooms and teacher education institutions is not new. As a result, in the 21st century we need to be mindful of that fact that the homogeneity of the past is gone, and we can no longer work with assumptions of normativity in any context. This has implications for the curriculum. To be truly inclusive, we need to recognise that the curriculum is not a neutral document.

While there are important drivers behind a desire for equality, e.g. inclusion and closing the achievement gap, we need to recognise that the curriculum in its current form does not reflect the diversity of student populations. In order to ensure multilingual pupils have the opportunity to fully participate in learning encounters, the curriculum needs to broaden and to include intentional opportunities for all social practices, knowledges, languages, cultures and geographies, histories and identities to be embedded in its structures, choice of texts, learning outcomes and aims, as well as summative and formative assessment processes. This intentional approach to curriculum development would allow teachers and pupils to employ diverse ways of making meaning, bringing the practice of justice and an educational ethic to all that we do in education.

A one-size-fits-all model to curriculum, where teachers replicate past practice or accentuate status quo models is no longer sufficient to meet the challenges associated with diversity and inequity. A fresh approach is needed, one that foregrounds diversity as the norm, and takes into account the range of languages used in the daily lives of children and young people from a range of different backgrounds. Failure to broaden curriculum aims, texts and outcomes to include this diversity means that we are asking pupils from multilingual backgrounds to see themselves through a borrowed lens and prevents all pupils from developing an understanding of the global world in which we live.

It is therefore paramount that we develop a curriculum that takes responsibility for ensuring that learners from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds have equitable learning opportunities and encounters. To achieve this, teachers need a framework for guiding learning and teaching that take these differences into account. A curriculum that achieves this reframes what counts as education and the kind of strategies and interventions that are

needed to achieve justice and ensure accountability in learning and teaching. Curriculum design is a key pedagogic site for inclusion and below we offer explicit suggestions for how the curriculum and assessment review can ensure the equality, diversity and inclusion of multilingual children in England's 21st century education system is fully embedded.

## The Essential Role of Language Learning Pedagogies

It is currently recorded that there are over 1.5 million pupils in England having a first language known or believed to be other than English, and that the proportion of pupils who use English as an Additional Language (EAL) has more than doubled over the last two decades, with 21.3% of primary and 16.9% of secondary school pupils using a home language other than English. This means that 27% of teachers in England work in classrooms where at least 10% of the pupils use a first language that is different from the language of instruction (Richardson, 2022).

In recognition of this group of learners, Teaching Standard 5 *'Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils'* specifically mentions multilingual learners, stating that teachers must "*have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.*" (DfE, 2011:12) 'The National Curriculum Statutory Guidance (Dec. 2014) (DfE, 2014), Section 4 sets out principles for the inclusion of all pupils, including the requirements that all qualified teachers (a) set suitable challenges and (b) respond to pupils' diverse needs in order to overcome potential learning and assessment barriers for individuals and groups of pupils; (b) is expanded up and highlights the necessity for teachers to be aware of the multilingual learners in their classrooms:

- *4.5 Teachers must also take account of the needs of pupils whose first language is not English. Monitoring of progress should take account of the pupil's age, length of time in this country, previous educational experience and ability in other languages.*
- *4.6 The ability of pupils for whom English is an additional language to take part in the national curriculum may be in advance of their communication skills in English. Teachers should plan teaching opportunities to help pupils develop their English and should aim to provide the support pupils need to take part in all subjects.*

DfE (2014:9)

A well-established body of research recognises that multilingual pupils grouped by the term 'EAL' are not a homogenous group and that their learning needs are broad and varied. In

2020, the DfE published a definition that sought to identify the nuances and complexities within this groups of learners:

*"A pupil is recorded as having English as an additional language if she/he is exposed to a language at home that is known or believed to be other than English. It is not a measure of English language proficiency or a good proxy for recent immigration." (DfE, 2020:4)*

This definition broadens the scope of the term 'EAL' to include the wide range of multilingual children entering classrooms up and down England on a daily basis: advanced bilinguals, pupils new to English, asylum-seekers and refugees, isolated learners and sojourners (recognising that children can belong to more than one of these groups simultaneously) (Conteh, 2019). It also identifies that the learning profile of EAL children changes over time as their language proficiency increases.

This inclusive and broad definition highlights the necessity of qualified teachers having the opportunity to extend the depth and breadth of their pedagogical knowledge, skills and understanding of working effectively with this group of pupils. It is NALDIC's stance that in order to adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of EAL pupils (or in fact, any of the learner groups identified in Standard 5), a teacher must explicitly draw on all seven of the other Teaching Standards via their increasingly confident and sophisticated knowledge of language learning pedagogies. A risk of placing named groups of children within one Teaching Standard is that it oversimplifies the inextricable nature and relationship between all of the Teachers' Standards which work together provide excellent, equitable teaching for all learners, for example, All learners, including EAL learners should have high expectations set for them which inspire, motivate and challenge (Teaching Standard 1), all learners, including EAL learners, should have access to planned and well-structured lessons (Teaching Standard 4) and all learners, including EAL learners, should be supported to make good progress and outcomes over time (Teaching Standard 2).

Another key challenge that has presented since 2019 is that the Core Content Framework that all ITE providers were required to adhere to lacked any specific mention of EAL learners. In 2024, following the publication of the ITTECF framework, one mention of EAL learners has appeared within *High Expectations (Standard 1 – Set high expectations)* as the "Learn that…" statement: "*8. Pupils' experiences of school and their readiness to learn can be impacted by their home life and circumstances, particularly for EAL pupils, young carers, and those living in poverty." (DfE, 2024)*. It is somewhat indicative of the limited focus and expert-input into the inclusion of this statement that there are no corresponding "Learn how to…" statements to support either teacher educators, mentors or trainees themselves in understanding how to apply this statement. The changing Initial Teacher Education landscape in England over recent years means that trainee teachers qualifying from 2019 onwards have potentially not received training in any relevant language learning pedagogies, and from 2024 are being taught that supporting EAL pupils falls only within *High Expectations (Standard 1 – Set high expectations)*, being disjointed from the focus on literacy development specified in *Subject and Curriculum (Standard 3 – Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge)* and

entirely excluded from *Adaptive Teaching (Standard 5 – Adapt teaching)* which links to Teachers' Standard 5.

NALDIC's stance on the above is that all qualified teachers in England should be language teachers, i.e. that they should be able to meet Teaching Standard (3) of "Demonstrating good subject and curriculum knowledge, including academic literacy". Maintaining secure subject knowledge is essential for all teachers, and there should be an expectation that this includes the knowledge, understanding and skills to explicitly teach the academic literacy demands that each subject requires. For example, teachers should be able to articulate what confident literacy in a maths lesson requires of pupils; how is this similar/ different to the literacy skills required in science, PE or history? An understanding of these language demands would give teachers the autonomy and agency to identify varying levels of language need in the classroom, and adapt their teaching (Teaching Standard 5) accordingly. These adaption can range from specialist intervention programmes for pupils who require support to develop their basic English proficiency (a key issue being identified nationally for a wider range of children, post Covid, whether EAL or native English speakers) to whole-class academic literacy being developed by the subject teacher themselves when working with students with higher levels of English language proficiency. The focus on language learning pedagogies would be an example of adaptive practice for all learners and enables schools aspiring to meet the expectation of being fully inclusive because it can actively demonstrate that it "removes barriers to learning and participation, provides an education that is appropriate to pupils' needs, and promotes high standards and the fulfilment of potential for all pupils". (EEF, 2020)

## **Effective Assessment to Identify Progress & Enable Good Progress for Multilingual/EAL Children**

Valid assessment is widely recognised as a fundamental component in a well-developed curriculum, to wit, the enormous amount of time and resources devoted to implementing the officially approved assessment frameworks and practices since the inception of the National Curriculum.

The assessment of EAL, as a key curriculum issue for our ethnolinguistically diverse school population, has received no specialist attention from DfE, OFSTED or any other relevant official agency for the best part of 25 years.

At present, the English language proficiencies of EAL learners are assessed on the age/Key Stage-related criteria in all subject areas designed with the default assumption that all pupils are from English-speaking home and community environments (i.e. the so-called 'mainstream'). This approach does not acknowledge the wealth of research that identifies the 6-7 years for EAL learners to move from limited English proficiency to that of fluency, thereby masking their academic knowledge, understanding and skills.

The default assumption that all pupils can be assessed on the basis of a mainstream monolingual English proficiency model and the lack of an official EAL framework has led to misrecognition of minoritized pupils' actual language abilities and their English language learning needs. Furthermore, the lack of accurate assessment (using appropriately informed criteria) makes it extremely difficult for teachers to develop appropriate teaching responses for pupils at different stages of EAL development.

The current policy and practice can be likened to a scenario where all 'mainstream' pupils in England are put through a Modern Language X (MXL, e.g. Spanish)-medium curriculum across all subjects and their ML proficiencies and curriculum attainments are adjudged by the criteria set for first-language users of MLX.

The present assessment policy and practice regarding EAL are both educationally unsound and unjust. Urgent actions are needed to develop a curriculum-oriented EAL assessment framework for formative and summative purposes for schooling education at both primary and secondary levels. The development of such a framework will have the benefits of over 50 years of relevant international research and professional experiences from within the UK and other Anglophone education systems with broadly similar demographic characteristics. Such as curriculum development will also be seen as a positive step towards great equity in terms of educational provision for our ethnolinguistically diverse school population.

**Concluding Remarks:**

NALDIC is an advocate for multilingual children and their multilingual communities. As a subject association, we support and maintain a vibrant, evidence informed, socially aware community of practice in EAL across the UK through our three pillars of Practice, Activism and Research. We take great pride in assisting the community of EAL practitioners in developing and maintaining professional skills and knowledge of the teaching of EAL and related fields by providing opportunities for them to share and reflect on their practice. We also promote the quality of EAL provision in education by engaging with policy and professional developments at local, national and international levels where appropriate and draw on the most up-to-date national and international research to supporting impartial

evidence-informed decision-making in policy and practice. As an organisation, we would relish the opportunity to partake in follow-up conversations with the Curriculum and Assessment Review team to support the DfE in designing and implementing curriculum and assessment practices that would ensure our multilingual children, and the teachers who work on a day-to-day basis with them, are able to achieve their full potential and make valuable contributions to the communities they belong to.

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