

Involving Parents

Educating pupils with English as an additional language is not a one-way process. Settings have much to gain from the experiences and knowledge of children, their families and communities. Drawing on their expertise enriches a setting in a range of valuable ways. Parents, including those who do not speak English, can provide very important support for their child.

Home-school links

If parents have some understanding of English, set up a two-way diary between home and setting for new arrivals. Use this to inform parents about:

- What is going on in the setting, changes in routines, new events
- How the child is coping and praise for the child's achievements
- Questions that may arise about the child during the day
- New vocabulary the child could benefit from learning.

A few days after the initial meeting/ home visit, invite new parents into the setting to see the type of activities taking place. Provide opportunities for them to ask further questions. The English education system may be very different from that experienced in their country, and parents are often anxious and uncertain about routines in schools/ settings.

How can parents of EAL learners help their children?

Parents can support their child by providing a language-rich environment at home in whatever language they speak best.

If parents don't speak good English they can still offer vital support. They should:

- Continue to develop the first language by reading to the child, sharing books, telling stories. (It will be particularly helpful if parents read dual language books with the child, which are then read to the child in English at the setting.)
- Discuss activities done in the setting
- Explain in the first language the meanings of key vocabulary using a dual language dictionary or a list of key words with pictures
- Let their child watch good quality English TV programmes
- Invite English speaking children home to play
- Join the library
- Become involved with the school

In addition, parents who speak English as well as other languages can:

- Talk to their child in their first language about routines and other information about the setting
- Discuss in English and the first language new vocabulary the child needs to understand
- Discuss in the first language stories that have been or will be read in the setting
- Read dual language story books with their child in the first language and in English

Parents should continue to speak to their child in the first language. Having a strong and developing first language will help the child to learn English.

Parents are a valuable source of information for staff. Ask parents to:

- Write words in the first language for class displays
- Demonstrate to school staff how to pronounce a list of basic words and phrases in their first language
- Provide information, pictures and cultural artefacts from country of origin.