

Involving Parents

Educating pupils with English as an additional language is not a one-way process. Schools have much to gain from the experiences and knowledge of pupils, their families and communities. Drawing on their expertise enriches a school in a range of valuable ways.

Many parents are fluent bilinguals and can provide excellent support for their child. In many cases either one or both parents may have enough knowledge of English to understand what is being taught in the curriculum. Even parents who don't understand any English can provide valuable support for their child.

Home-school links

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

- What is going on in school, 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.
- The following week's class topics and new vocabulary the child may need to prepare for these.
- Specific help with homework that they can provide.

A few days after the initial meeting, invite new parents into the classroom to see the type of activities taking place. Provide opportunities for them to ask further questions. English schooling may be very different from that experienced in their country and parents are often anxious and uncertain about school routines.

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 for the curriculum. 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 school.)
- Encourage their child to read and write in the first language.
- Discuss school work and current topics with their child in the first language. This will support the child's understanding, and will help to develop the child's first language which will support their learning of English.
- Explain meanings of key vocabulary using a dual language dictionary or a list of key words with pictures. The pupil can show the English word or picture to the parent and the parent can talk about the word in the first language.
- 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 support their children in the following ways. They can:

- Translate key instructions words and phrases.
- Translate class work that the child has written in the first language. This enables pupils to produce valid written work and actively helps in the learning of English.
- Translate key words included in worksheets or written in word-books. Translated subject-specific vocabulary is extremely helpful in making the curriculum more accessible.

- Discuss in the first language forthcoming class topics, texts, and new vocabulary the child needs to understand. Parents could help children to find key words in a dual language dictionary. They could support children to keep a vocabulary book of key words with translations (and/or an explanation written in the first language, and/or a picture).
- Discuss current topics and texts in the first language to consolidate understanding.
- Read dual language story books with the child in the first language and 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. They should encourage their child to read and write in the first language as they will develop skills that are transferable to reading and writing in English.

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

- 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.

See 'Useful websites and publications' for resources to support work with parents.