

Assessment of pupils with English as an additional language

A National Literacy Trust membership resource

Learners of English as an additional language at all ages are having to do two or even three things at once. They are:

- learning a new language
- learning the curriculum through English
- (and maybe) learning to read for the first time in a second language.

In order to provide appropriate teaching and support, teachers may need help to make appropriate assessment of language and literacy.

EAL assessment is more than literacy assessment as it focuses on the development of speaking and listening, reading, writing and viewing across the whole curriculum. For example, if pupils cannot use comparative language such as “*more than...the highest...not strong enough to...*” they will struggle to express themselves effectively in science and maths.

Good EAL assessment will **highlight variation** in the EAL proficiency profile across the different strands of language. A fluent speaker of English may still need help with extended writing in some curriculum areas.

Good EAL assessment will also help teachers to differentiate lessons and plan provision to ensure fair access and appropriate learning pathways.

Three types of EAL assessment

1. Initial assessment

A school will need to spend time interviewing parents/carers and new children to ascertain the following:

- Family and community background
- First language development
- First language literacy
- Previous schooling experience
- Previous experience of using or learning English

At this stage the best resources for assessment are a teacher or support worker who shares the child’s language, dual language books (for example from [Mantra Lingua](#)) and a period of classroom-based observation. Newly arrived EAL learners may remain silent for some time as they key into the sounds of the new language and experiences of a new school culture.

It is important not to jump to conclusions if a pupil’s progress is initially slow as they settle in and make friends. Generally it is best to wait for a month or more before conducting any formal assessment of English. Reading and spelling age tests are particularly unreliable at this point, as the EAL pupil will not be familiar with all the sounds of English or even the basic vocabulary. Even non-verbal assessment can be unreliable if a pupil has not had much formal education and does not understand the topic or instructions.

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2. Snapshot EAL assessment (EAL proficiency stages)

Once a year, schools are advised to record an EAL proficiency stage for each pupil who speaks another language. Data about home or first language and ethnicity is collected as part of the pupil census in January each year. Details of the [DfE School Census](#) requirements are available to download from the government website. The EAL proficiency stages are set out below.

EAL Proficiency Stages (for schools in England and Wales)
A New to English May use first language for learning and other purposes. May remain completely silent in the classroom. May be copying/repeating some words or phrases. May understand some everyday expressions in English but may have minimal or no literacy in English. Needs a considerable amount of EAL support.
B Early acquisition May follow day-to-day social communication in English and participate in learning activities with support. Beginning to use spoken English for social purposes. May understand simple instructions and can follow narrative/accounts with visual support. May have developed some skills in reading and writing. May have become familiar with some subject specific vocabulary. Still needs a significant amount of EAL support to access the curriculum.
C Developing competence May participate in learning activities with increasing independence. Able to express self orally in English, but structural inaccuracies are still apparent. Literacy will require ongoing support, particularly for understanding text and writing. May be able to follow abstract concepts and more complex written English. Requires ongoing EAL support to access the curriculum fully.
D Competent Oral English will be developing well, enabling successful engagement in activities across the curriculum. Can read and understand a wide variety of texts. Written English may lack complexity and contain occasional evidence of errors in structure. Needs some support to access subtle nuances of meaning, to refine English usage, and to develop abstract vocabulary. Needs some/occasional EAL support to access complex curriculum material and tasks.
E Fluent Can operate across the curriculum to the level of competence equivalent to that of a pupil who uses English as his/her first language. Operates without support across the curriculum.

Detailed assessment is not required for the annual proficiency stage judgement. In most cases, the class teacher or English teacher will be able to use their overall knowledge of the pupil to give a **'best fit'** stage.

For EAL pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 who have not yet established secure literacy in any language, the best-fit judgement should be based on their oral competence and rate of progress in developing literacy compared with a monolingual child of a similar age. EAL pupils in that phase of education are unlikely to be beyond level C, developing competence.

Similarly, careful consideration should be made of EAL students in secondary schools who seem fluent when their proficiency is assessed in English lessons, but demonstrate the need for further support to produce complex and extended writing in *other subjects*, in which case proficiency stage D, Competent would be appropriate.

3. Assessment for learning (formative)

For teaching purposes, both in English and literacy and other subject areas, more detailed formative assessment will help to identify a pupil's strengths in communication and point to areas for development. Schools will need to select a framework that they feel is most suitable for their context.

Questions that may help selection include:

- Does the framework link to the DfE proficiency 'best fit' stages?
- Does the framework take account of different rates of progress in speaking, listening, reading/viewing and writing?
- Does the framework take account of the differences between informal use of English and formal language?
- Does the framework look at progression in vocabulary and grammar in the context of the school curriculum?
- Are there guidelines for assessing English in the context of different subject areas?
- Are there case studies which also demonstrate pupil's home-language use and social behaviours?

There are various formative EAL assessment frameworks available nationally. The first two mentioned below are suitable for all phases of schooling in England and Wales, but may need some modification for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

- a) [Bell Foundation EAL Assessment Framework](#) based on research by the University of Cambridge and King College London.
- b) [NASSEA EAL Assessment Framework](#) published by The Northern Association of Support Services for Equality and Achievement (NASSEA) This is an eight step framework with guidance and support for teachers and adults working in the classroom.
- c) Some local authorities in England and Scotland have produced their own summary frameworks and policies. for Scotland, see for example [Learning in 2+ languages](#)

Resources for EAL assessment and teaching across the curriculum

The [Bell EAL resources](#) website has many teaching and learning resources for a range of curriculum subjects, ages and stages of language and literacy development.

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