

ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE SUPPORT FOR NEW ARRIVALS – EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES SINCE SUMMER 2004

A HIGHLAND RESPONSE

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(This article has previously been published by the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC))

English as an Additional Language (EAL) support in The Highland Council has been accessed through Support for Learning (SFL) for the last ten years. Each of three EAL support teachers belongs to a separate SFL team which is managed by a SFL Team Leader. There are eight SFL teams which provide support to pupils for nursery and primary schools across the council area. Highland Council has two hundred and nineteen schools and covers an area almost the size of Belgium.

Working within approximately a fifteen mile radius of Inverness on a regular basis EAL teachers offer consultation, direct support and advice to nursery, primary and secondary schools. They also deliver an outreach service to include all schools throughout the region, maintaining regular contact with the SFL team leaders for the five remaining teams. Schools outwith the Inverness area are supported through consultation, advice, staff development and the recommendation of useful resources. The teachers outline useful strategies which help bilingual pupils to progress and during initial school visits the contents of the Highland EAL Information Pack are explained. Outreach areas are visited according to need but pupils requiring EAL support are reviewed at least once a term.

EAL support teachers consult and collaborate with all appropriate staff in order to assess need, to agree an appropriate level of support and to monitor pupil progress. Working in partnership, they aim to integrate and support the bilingual pupil within suitable peer groups in mainstream classes. They also consider course choices and cultural and religious issues, carry out home visits and offer advice and support during multi-agency meetings.

Many bilingual pupils speak several different languages and an EAL annual survey of all schools helps keep language information current. It is also an important tool for the monitoring of pupil progress and achievement. National test and SQA information gathered by this means helps determine the nature of development on an individual basis.

As the bilingual pupil number in Highland has more than doubled in the last three years the role of the EAL teacher has increasingly been as consultant. Recommendations for appropriate levels of EAL support in schools arise from discussions mainly with SFL staff in schools and these teachers are becoming progressively more involved with the delivery of in-class EAL support. The EAL teacher has an important role in helping to monitor the effectiveness of that support and can be contacted by phone, email or videoconference in order to offer immediate advice should further concerns arise. The shift in the nature of EAL

support provision now mirrors the advisory service which has invariably existed for the outreach areas of Highland.

Since the expansion of the EU last summer and the introduction of ten new countries from Eastern Europe there have been a significant number of new arrivals. Local employment agencies have sought to employ mostly Polish, Czech, Latvian and Lithuanian workers for fish processing plants, the construction industry and catering establishments. Their children are now enrolling in schools in all areas within the Highland Council and there are implications for the provision of suitable support.

Extra funding has been made available to provide CD ROMs, dictionaries and dual language books in Eastern European languages. However, the immoderate cost of transporting in approved translators and interpreters from Aberdeen or the Central Belt has resulted in the use of local contacts. A primary school janitor has offered his services as he is a native Polish speaker. He has been involved during enrolment and for meetings with parents and is immediately accessible through telephone link. He would not be included within these discussions unless there has been parental approval and would not interpret for sensitive issues. There are also workers used as interpreters by individual fish processing plants and they have worked in a similar way to try to help support fellow workers and families. An audit of school staff has been proposed to provide a list of possible interpreters willing to be accessed through the school system. Recently, the Equal Opportunities Officer for the Highland Council consulted with EAL staff to discuss an existing list of local people willing to work as translators and interpreters. She is working assiduously to produce a local accredited Interpreting and Translating Service which will be promoted to all sectors of the council. A paper entitled "Proposal and Specification for the Feasibility and Provision of Services" has been produced.

At present, the majority of incomers originate from Poland and there is now a sizeable Polish community living and working in Highland. Most do not, as yet, have families with them but those who do tend to encourage the extended family to join them once they have become established. This trend could have further implications for schools. Polish parents may find that they have little or no need to use English in the workplace or at home as they tend to spend their days with fellow Poles. As they are not exposed to English language to any great extent, the language learning process becomes extended. Unless there is a conscious effort to reach out and offer English lessons parents will find it difficult to access information in school newsletters and information sheets or be able to offer help with homework. For this reason it is often necessary for schools to offer to arrange to have their prospectus explained or translated.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Highland runs courses for the learning of English at all stages and EAL teachers actively encourage parents to take part. They liaise frequently with ABE passing on any requests for lessons to co-ordinators. Participants are given help to understand letters from school but the classes are heavily oversubscribed and it is not often easy for workers to attend as the sessions are delivered during the day. In order to help overcome this problem there has been a suggestion that tutors offer classes in the workplace. It is then up to the companies to ensure that their employees have time for study. The proposal would result in the provision of a tutor for the fish processing industry and one for catering.

In one large primary school specific conditions have been set up to allow a class teacher and new parents from Poland to meet after school one day a week for a short while. During this time the class teacher clearly explains the week's homework and indicates how the parents can help.

As new pupils from Eastern Europe can enrol in any school in the Highlands however remote without notice, it may not be possible for an EAL teacher to make an immediate visit. In order that class teachers can access useful approaches for the support of bilingual pupils it has been proposed that some suggestions should be included on the schools' intranet site. The route for referral for access to EAL support, the Referral forms and some strategies for the organisation of the nursery, primary and secondary classroom have been included. Information about useful websites for translation, activities for English practice and suppliers of dual language resources has also been added. A bilingual support assistant familiar with Eastern European languages and able to travel and work across all sectors of education would add an invaluable aspect to this support system.

There is often little community support in most areas outside Inverness and therefore new pupils can feel very isolated. They may find themselves the only bilingual pupil in a remote area, unable to find anyone of their own age to speak to in their first language. Culture shock can be severe, especially if the pupil has moved to a small Highland community from a large urban area which offered sophisticated services a full social life and a variety of entertainments.

Every secondary school in Highland has a videoconference facility and consultation meetings for class teachers and SFL staff have been delivered using this facility. EAL tutorial support can also be provided by this means. As peer support is desirable and especially beneficial if there is shared experience, links between schools have been set up so that youngsters can converse using their mother tongue. Topics have ranged from exams and teachers to Xmas dances, shopping in Hong Kong and Orlando Bloom! Experience has revealed that once pupils are shown how to use the videoconference equipment they delight in taking responsibility for the arrangement of sessions. A recent visit from the EAL teacher from the Western Isles has introduced a welcome opportunity to widen the network.

Parents have also been linked using the language information on the EAL pupil list and this association has helped support many new families from Eastern Europe. Those who have been here longer can help explain systems and available services. A multi-ethnic group of parents meet regularly in one primary with a large number of bilingual pupils from various countries. Members of the school staff have also attended to offer help for the discussion of issues which may, as yet, be unfamiliar to new arrivals. So far, they have debated the transition from P7 to S1, Support for Learning provision in the secondary school and reading schemes used in classes. Although they have a focus these meetings also provide an opportunity to air concerns, to ask for information or to socialise and find out more about other cultures. It is hoped that a library of books, videos and tapes may be set up using materials donated from the homes of all pupils in the school. Access to suitable resources for learning in English can then be offered through the borrowing system.

The steady increase of new pupils from Eastern Europe is a trend which seems set to continue and it seems likely that there will be further arrivals after the summer break. Therefore, the work to produce a professional translation and interpreting service

must result in an affordable resource for Highland. In addition, the employment of Eastern European bilingual support assistants could ensure a more effective EAL support service for schools. The successful integration of families from Eastern Europe within Highland should provide an exciting opportunity to reverse the trend for depopulation and provide a welcome opportunity to help revitalise the more remote communities.