



ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE AND ATTAINMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

Research Brief

English as an Additional Language (EAL) attracts much interest among policy makers and educationists and yet little is known about the performance of EAL pupils who are not fluent in English and who speak different languages at home. The findings of the analysis of 544,220 pupils KS2 results in England by language spoken at home and levels of fluency in English suggests that:-

- EAL pupils not fluent in English achieve significantly below the national average compared to monolingual English speakers in English schools.
- There is a wide variation in performance between regions in England with large attainment gaps in the Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, South West and the North West regions.
- A further analysis of the EAL data by languages spoken at home suggests over 208 languages are spoken in English schools. Of the Black African language groups, Lingala, Somali, Shona, Ndebele and Krio speakers were the lowest achieving groups while the Igbo, Yoruba, Luganda, Twi-Fante, Tigrinya and English speaking Black African pupils achieved better than White British and the national average. Within the Asian EAL groups the highest performing language groups were the Indian languages Telugu and Marathi speakers followed by Korean, Chinese, Hindi, Malayalam, Sinhala and Japanese speakers. Within the White Other category, there is a large variation in performance depending on the language that is spoken. The highest achieving groups were west European language speakers of German, Dutch, French and Swedish, who all out-performed pupils who had English as a first language. The lowest achieving groups were from Eastern Europe including Russian, Polish, Albanian, Czech, Slovak and Romany speaking pupils, with very few in these groups achieving level 4 or above. Also low-performing were Romanian, Latvian, Hungarian and Lithuanian speaking pupils with barely half of their pupils achieving expected levels. Of the larger European language groups in English schools, Polish, Portuguese, Turkish and Kurdish speakers were achieving below the national average.
- An examination of level of fluency in English on pupil performance also confirms that there is a strong relationship between the stage of fluency in English and educational attainment. The results suggest that the percentage of pupils attaining level 4 or above at KS2 increased as stage of proficiency in English increased. Pupils in the early stages of fluency performed at low levels, while EAL pupils who were fully fluent in English far outstripped those of pupils for whom English was their only language.

Overall the conclusion from this study suggests that language barriers remain the key factor affecting the performance of EAL pupils in English schools. We would argue that the worryingly low achievement of EAL pupils who are not fluent in English has been masked by failure of government statistics to distinguish EAL pupils by stages of fluency in English and languages spoken at home.

The recommendations from our findings are that if England is serious about tackling pupil underachievement in schools, policy makers need to recognise the importance of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Such data is fundamental in identifying which ethnic and linguistic groups are most at risk of underachievement and to design specific interventions that will be effective in raising achievement, whatever their background.

Notes for editors

1. The findings are published in a research report entitled '**English as an Additional Language and Attainment in Primary Schools in England.**'
2. The research was carried out by Dr Feyisa Demie, Head of Research and Adviser for school self-evaluation at Lambeth LA.
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