

HOW TO PROVIDE EAL SUPPORT FOR REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN

ADVICE FOR SCHOOLS

This advice sheet provides schools with key information about how to support the EAL (English as an Additional Language) needs of refugee and asylum-seeking pupils. It provides top-level guidance on good practice.¹

KEY FACTS: RIGHTS AND ENTITLEMENTS TO EDUCATION IN ENGLAND²

- All children have the right to education, as enshrined in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Under UK law, refugee and asylum-seeking children of compulsory school age have the same entitlement to full-time education as other UK children, and schools should not ask about a child's immigration status.
- It is the responsibility of the local authority to provide suitable full-time education for all children of compulsory school age resident in their area.
- Statutory guidance for England states that an education placement should be secured for all looked after children – including unaccompanied and asylum-seeking children – within 20 school days of coming into care.
- Being undocumented or having a 'no recourse to public funds' condition on a visa does not prevent a child from accessing education: education is not a 'public fund' as set out in the immigration rules.

For more detail on the rights and entitlements of refugee and asylum-seeking children to access education, see [Education for Refugee and Asylum-seeking Children: Access and Equality in England, Scotland and Wales](#) and Coram Children's Legal Centre's [guidance on access to compulsory education for migrant children](#).

EAL SUPPORT: HOW TO HELP

Lots can be done to provide EAL support for refugee and asylum-seeking pupils. There are actions that you as an individual can take now, and things your institution can do in the longer term.



Personalised approaches work best, particularly with regards to EAL support. English language is a major factor influencing the degree of support a refugee or asylum-seeking pupil will need.³ Schools need to accurately assess and flexibly accommodate the distinct needs of each pupil.



CONDUCT A THOROUGH INITIAL EAL ASSESSMENT

Why this matters: Refugee and asylum-seeking children have often missed out on large chunks of their education. Assessing their EAL needs rapidly at the outset gives them the best possible chance of thriving.



THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

If you are carrying out an EAL assessment, ensure that EAL support needs are not confused with SEN (Special Educational Needs). Do not automatically place EAL students in lower level academic groups. Instead, consider ways to support them in appropriate placements for their academic level. Remember, EAL students' academic ability may be masked by their lack of English language fluency. See NALDIC's [guidance page](#) on SEN and EAL for more.

Recognise that refugee and asylum-seeking students are not a homogenous group. There are a range of factors that will distinctly influence their EAL support needs, including: age, length of time in the UK, home environment, and levels of previous education. These factors need to be taken into consideration during the assessment.

Some refugee and asylum-seeking pupils may have limited literacy in their first language, and some may have extremely disrupted experiences of formal education. A rapid intervention will be needed for these students. For more information, please visit the Bell Foundation's [guidance page](#).



THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO

Become a member of [NALDIC](#).

Conduct a thorough EAL assessment to help you understand a refugee or asylum-seeking student's starting point, and set realistic targets for their progress. Use the Bell Foundation's EAL Assessment [framework](#) and [guidance](#) for schools.

[The Bell Foundation](#) recommends that a student is given a period of time to settle in before an EAL assessment is carried out. Informal observations can be made beforehand, but formal testing should be postponed for two to three weeks.

Ensure a formal EAL assessment is carried out in an environment where the student feels comfortable and at ease.

Look at the Bell Foundation's [helpful guidance](#) on developing an induction programme for EAL pupils for some tips on things to do just before a refugee pupil arrives, through to their first few weeks at school.



INTEGRATE EAL SUPPORT INTO MAINSTREAM CURRICULUM LEARNING

Why this matters: Refugee pupils cannot wait to be highly proficient in English language before they start engaging in curriculum learning. The integration of refugee students into mainstream classrooms is encouraged as far as possible.



THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

Conduct pre-lesson workshops or teaching sessions where refugee and asylum-seeking pupils are able to familiarise themselves with key subject-specific terms and vocabulary.



THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO

As far as possible and as appropriate, allow refugee and asylum-seeking pupils to participate in learning the curriculum while simultaneously learning English.



ENSURE ONGOING EAL SUPPORT

Why this matters: It is important that refugee and asylum-seeking pupils continue to receive EAL support after their initial assessment and throughout their education trajectories.



THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

When implementing a buddy scheme, try to connect refugee students with other students who are able to speak their first language, if possible.

Look into any EAL groups or networks, or those that cover EAL or refugee education issues, in your borough. Attend their meetings – these can be helpful spaces to connect with other schools with EAL provision, and exchange ideas and good practice.

Reach out to a [School of Sanctuary](#) in your area for ideas on implementing EAL support activities and good practice.

Look at the Bell Foundation's [guidance page](#) which provides lots of ideas for teaching methodologies and approaches that are particularly helpful for EAL learners.

Celebrate a refugee student's home language in the classroom. For example, have bilingual displays and dictionaries in the classroom.



THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO

Ensure a pupil's progress from the initial EAL assessment is monitored and reviewed at regular intervals.

Ensure that there is a trained focal point for EAL support in your school. Ensure that this focal point engages with teachers to provide ideas for strategies and activities to support EAL students.

Establish EAL intervention groups – during schools hours in breaks, or before or after school hours – where refugee and asylum-seeking students can meet with other EAL students, teachers and tutors for additional support or subject-specific questions.

Ensure these intervention groups are well advertised. Where possible, try to hire multilingual staff at school, particularly if your school has a larger population of EAL students.



ENGAGE PARENTS/ GUARDIANS WITH EAL

Why this matters: The support of refugee and asylum-seeking children's families for their education is important for their progression. But parents/guardians may also have language barriers that hinder their ability to support their children's school work.



THINGS YOU CAN DO NOW

Signpost refugee and asylum-seeking parents/guardians and families to external English language courses to help them independently improve their English. Consider connecting refugee families with other families who speak their first language, who may be able to share advice and guidance.

Explore having interpretation during parents' evenings or other key meetings with parents/guardians. Consider collaborating with voluntary sector organisations, community volunteers, or trusted interpretation services. If this is not possible, be ready to use Google Translate.



THINGS YOUR INSTITUTION CAN DO

Run free basic English lessons and workshops for parents/guardians and refugee and asylum-seeking families.

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- 1 For more detailed information, guidance and advice, please visit: NALDIC (National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum), the UK's national subject association for EAL; and the Bell Foundation, a charity which aims to overcome exclusion through language education.
 - 2 Please note these facts cover provision in England, and do not cover provision in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
 - 3 Strand, S, Malmberg, L and Hall, J (2015) English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England: An analysis of the National Pupil Database. University of Oxford: 12.
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