Hampshire County Council

Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service

# Multilingualism in education

**This Position Statement focuses on policy, practice and provision for multilingual pupils, families and staff in education, in line with Article 30 of the UNCRC [1].**

**The intended audience includes Head Teachers, Senior Leaders in school, EAL Co-Ordinators/Inclusion Managers, Governors with responsibility for EAL, English subject leads, Class/Subject Teachers, Learning Support Staff and Early Years practitioners.**

## Key Considerations

### What is multilingualism?

Multilingualism recognises that people may navigate different languages for different purposes and in different contexts. In children, it is the ability of a child to understand, speak, read or write in more than one language. A multilingual child may access two or more languages in their daily life, depending on their family, community and educational experiences. A multilingual child is not necessarily fluent to the same degree in all four skills in all their languages, but they are still multilingual and any level of skill they may have in any of their languages should be recognised and valued.

Multilingualism is a strength and resource that pupils bring to their learning, rather than something that competes with their English development. Where it is embraced, it can enrich the whole school environment, preparing all children for life in an increasingly diverse society.

### Maintenance of multilingual skills

The guidance around maintaining their languages is pertinent to all multilingual learners; those born in the UK and to those arriving from overseas; those with well-developed skills in English; and those with underlying SEND. School staff should advise parents to maintain use of all their languages within the home and the community.

[1] *'Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.'* Article 30 UNCRC

Children with strong multilingual skills

- can acquire other languages more readily
- may be successful at GCSE in one or more of their languages
- maintain links with family and friends
- maintain a sense of identity and belonging in different social contexts
- have a broader range of employment options open to them
- are often open to different cultural perspectives.

It is important that the school environment proactively promotes multilingualism. Positive promotion of languages throughout the school can support multilingual children and families to feel valued and to develop a sense of belonging. Multilingual adults affiliated with the school can also have a useful role to play in raising the profile of the linguistic diversity of the school community. This can be achieved by:

- reviewing the stock of children's books in the school, being alert to stereotypes, outdated views and language (including in children's classics)
- having multilingual signage around the school site
- having a translation facility on the school website
- making letters and other documentation accessible eg through the use of IT
- having multilingual displays in classrooms
- ensuring resources used positively reflect a multicultural dimension
- implementing the The Young Interpreter Scheme®
- ensuring after-school clubs and activities reflect the diverse school community.

## Understanding children's multilingual skills

Children may demonstrate variation in their multilingual speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. A conversation with them and/or their parents can help school staff understand:

- the quality of children's language use in different contexts and whether or not other people can understand them when they speak
- the languages to which children are exposed at home and whether or not they can understand them
- where relevant, children's prior experience of schooling in another language
- children's experiences of learning their other language(s) eg from parents, tutors, at community language classes and/or for religious purposes
- children's access to media in other languages (TV, books, online content etc.)
- children's level of engagement with their other languages
- the opportunities children have to engage with people outside their immediate family who share one or more of their languages.

Once school staff have built a picture of a child's multilingual profile, they can make informed decisions about how they integrate the child's other languages into the school environment, including teaching and learning.

## Teaching and learning

School staff can draw on the multilingual skills of their children to support learning across the curriculum in various ways:

- enabling children to discuss their learning in a shared language
- supporting children to demonstrate their learning through talk in their preferred language or a combination of languages
- sourcing translated texts and literature for children who are literate in their language(s) – or for sending home to parents to share with their children at home
- sourcing audio-enabled material to support children to access curriculum content in their language(s)
- encouraging pre-reading of curriculum-based materials in children's language(s)
- highlighting important vocabulary in texts in English so that children can translate it into their language(s) for homework ahead of the lesson
- encouraging children to create their own multilingual glossaries
- encouraging annotating and drafting in their language(s)
- promoting the use of translation tools in class and for homework
- offering training through the EMTAS Multilingual Study Skills Programme to give children experience of different tools and strategies they can apply in their lessons/homework
- where appropriate/available, entering children for the GCSE in their language(s). See the EMTAS website for more information about this.

Advice and guidance around multilingual approaches and school practice and provision remains broadly the same for children who may have underlying SEND, whether diagnosed or not. See Special Education Needs/Disabilities (SEND) or bilingual? for more information about this area.

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