

Catering for the needs of more advanced learners of EAL

Most schools have a range of children working at different stages in their learning of English as an additional language. Those schools which actively track progress using a specific EAL assessment framework will be aware that rates of progress vary enormously depending on the context of the child, their age and the specific curriculum area within which they are working at any given time.

Broadly speaking pupils who are new to English or at an early stage of learning EAL make rapid progress with inclusive teaching and learning practices. However, research shows that more advanced learners, those who have been studying English for around two or more years, can plateau in their learning at various points in their school career. More advanced EAL learners often require specific types of literacy-based support for many years after acquiring oral proficiency.

So, who are our more advanced EAL learners? These learners, who are often but not exclusively British born, appear to speak and understand English at an age appropriate level, yet still require specific support to overcome the cognitive and academic challenges of the curriculum. Some, but by no means all, will also be literate in one or more other languages.

These pupils sometimes slip under the radar of schools, whose focus is often more on beginners; in some cases, they may not even be flagged up on the school's data systems as EAL at all. There are obvious indicators to look out for, such as reading miscomprehension of key texts and evidence in writing of typical grammatical errors or where writing has obviously been copied from peers or indiscriminately drawn from online sources. However, a more rigorous focus on diagnostic assessment is the only sure way of identifying the specific areas that need attention for each pupil.

Practitioners need to consider the language demands of the curriculum in order to ensure that they plan to teach the specific language and literacy elements presented by each subject area. And practitioners shouldn't underestimate the significance of the cultural context of the curriculum either. EAL learners, whether UK born or not, sometimes grow up lacking a degree of cultural capital that means they miss important nuances that inhibit understanding. That's why the best practitioners make meaning explicit for all their learners through well-

planned sequences of lessons using a range of multimodal sources; this helps to make messages abundantly clear.

Abridged texts, simple English versions of key information and translated sources, where appropriate, will aid reading comprehension. Digital texts can be made more accessible via text to speech synthesis. Pupils will also benefit from specific guidance on how to make the most of dictionaries and thesauri.

Schools which cater well for more advanced learners of EAL often have a whole school focus on developing academic oracy and talk for writing approaches; strategies which benefit all pupils. Well planned collaborative activities, drama and role-play, presentations, Dictogloss and Socratic talk activities will convert thinking and talking into better academic writing across the curriculum. Recording thoughts and conversations and replaying them prior to writing has also been shown to improve the cohesion of pupils' writing.

Another beneficial strategy is a specific focus on pre-teaching and rehearsing the use of key vocabulary, both technical and academic, including exam terminology. A specific focus on Greek and Latin stem and root words can be helpful. Call-out games like follow-me, Bingo and vocabulary Jenga are fun ways to consolidate vocabulary knowledge. Card-based matching games are also very useful. Word clouds drawn from key texts are a great way to get children thinking about subject content, text-type and genre.

Converting thinking and talking into great writing is a perennial problem for some more advanced EAL learners. Technology has a role here - supportive word processors and in-built soft keyboards can help pupils compose digital texts – for example through speech to text, word prediction and integrated spellcheckers and thesauri. The process need scaffolding using knowledge organisers, writing frames and key word banks. And text-types like recount, persuasion and argumentation need modelling to help pupils understand the conventions most frequently required for each specific subject area.

Above all more advanced EAL learners want approachable teachers who understand their needs, make explicit the next steps in their learning and maintain high expectations at all times.