Case study 11
School: A large urban primary school in London
Focus: Partnership teaching to support new arrivals

Background

This school is one of the largest primary schools in the country with 874 children on roll. It serves an area of considerable economic and social deprivation. A significant minority of children are asylum seekers and refugees, which contributes to the much higher than average number of children joining or leaving the school at other than the usual times.

The school is a multilingual multi-ethnic school, rich in cultural and linguistic diversity where two out of three children speak English as an additional language (EAL). There is a high level of mobility among families within the school, mainly due to the surrounding temporary accommodation. Approximately 88% of the school population is from a minority ethnic group (overall borough figure: 58%) and 66% of children are learning EAL. Within these groups, 115 children are refugees or asylum-seekers. A total of 56 languages are spoken in the school of which Turkish, Somali and Albanian are the main ones.

The school believes that the most effective use of the ethnic minority achievement grant (EMAG) funding is to provide teachers who are able to contribute directly and significantly to the curriculum through their input into curriculum planning for inclusion, partnership teaching and assessment. The ethnic minority achievement (EMA) team is considered to be an integral part of the school, and all members are involved in carrying out assessments of new arrivals and developing resources.

‘At the heart of its work is an extremely successful commitment to welcoming and including all children whatever their background or ability. This is widely recognised by parents who hold the school in high regard. One, representing the views of many, commented, “I am proud to have my child attend this school. Staff work outstandingly well with a range of outside agencies to ensure that children are all exceptionally well cared for. This is particularly true of the many vulnerable children that arrive on a regular basis, sometimes with little or no English.”’ (Ofsted 2007)
What is being done?

The school is surrounded by temporary housing and therefore the teachers are used to mobility and mid-term admissions. It is accepted that no one teacher, including the EMA teacher, can answer all the needs of the bilingual children; the language development of the new arrivals is therefore seen as a whole-school responsibility. Teachers are given the opportunity to access training and develop skills which help them enable new arrivals to settle into school life quickly.

Wherever possible, mid-term admissions will be placed in a class where there is a same language peer. Teachers know in advance when a new arrival is joining the class and are able to prepare both the other children and the necessary basic equipment the child will need when they start. EMA teachers are attached to year groups and on the first day their role is to meet the child and their parents/carers, take them on a tour of the school, give them the translated welcome booklet and arrange to meet the parent/carer at the end of the day to deal with any questions that may have arisen. Children due to start in Reception receive a home visit and are slowly integrated into school routine. There are two EMA-funded bilingual assistants to support children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Within a few days of arrival children in Years 2 – 6 are assessed by the EMA teacher and this assessment is shared with the class teacher. Decisions are then made about mathematics sets and whether the new arrival should attend the induction group.

EMA teachers plan together with class teachers to ensure that lessons take into account childrens’ language needs and the language demands of the curriculum. Partnership teaching takes place where there is an identified need for extra support. The EMA teacher will design and suggest additional communicative language activities which can be used, as well as assist in the assessment and analysis of spoken and written language.

The school recognises that the most effective context for second language acquisition is in the mainstream classroom with EAL learners working within the National Curriculum alongside their peers. The partnership teaching model supports this process. Partnership teaching takes places in Years 2 – 6. Lesson content is planned with the EMA teacher and class teacher working together and responsibility for the different parts of the lesson is shared with class teacher and EMA teacher seamlessly swapping roles as lead presenter, working with a group or groups, presenting from the front, gathering feedback on the carpet or
providing the plenary. A number of strategies are used to help new arrivals access the work and meet the learning outcomes of the lesson. These include:

- good use of key visuals including picture cues and puppets as prompts;
- talk partners;
- opportunities for oral rehearsal;
- use of first language to consolidate meaning;
- use of sentences/picture cues to sequence a story;
- key word cards to help with sentence structure;
- hotseating;
- use of mini whiteboards;
- mixed ability pair work;
- mixed ability collaborative group work.

This school has worked hard to plan and structure the learning environment to create the right conditions for successful learning for all children, including new arrivals. In addition to partnership teaching, the following supportive strategies have been employed:

- clear mid-term admissions procedure for children new to English;
- partnership teaching in Years 2 – 6;
- writing group in Year 4 for EAL learners working at level 2C;
- Roll on reading project with local library – Albanian and Turkish children in Years 3 and 4 receive first language support for reading fortnightly at the library;
- annual writing project aimed at Year 4 children of Caribbean origin;
- Year 6 Turkish children have one science revision session per week in Turkish run by a Turkish EMA teacher (from January to National Curriculum tests);
• in Year 6 the EMA teacher works as a first language support teacher in literacy supporting Turkish children within the classroom, including new arrivals and advanced bilingual children;

• weekly extended writing group for Year 1 and for more able children identified in Reception, led by the EMA teacher;

• EAL learners identified in Years 5 and 6 needing support with basic grammar attend an intensive, time-limited support group;

• EAL learners at the early stages of learning English receive extra support with reading and phonics on an individual basis;

• the ‘language of the month’ project demonstrates the value placed on the community languages within the school and the linguistic and cultural heritage of the children;

• Somali book lending library;

• reading with parents using dual language books in nursery and Reception;

• a weekly Turkish parents’ surgery led by Turkish-speaking member of EMA team for parents to share issues or concerns;

• Somali parents’ surgery led by two EMA teachers and a volunteer from the Somali community;

• parent volunteers working in classrooms, a family learning group and the school a venue for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes;

• parents involved in planning cultural events – 900 attended the most recent cultural evening;

• interpreting and translation is used at parent meetings;

• information morning for Turkish parents focusing on reading and telling stories in home language;

• training is provided for teaching assistants with a focus on moving the EAL learner on;

• regular meetings take place between the EMA coordinator and senior management team (SMT);
• collaboration with local college to encourage parents to attend ESOL classes and to train as teaching assistants with an EAL focus;

• a global link with a school in Ghana.

Outcomes

• Partnership teaching is used to good effect throughout Years 4–6 and class teachers are able to benefit from working closely with EMA specialists to benefit not only new arrivals but all the children in the class.

• A value-added score for EAL learners of 100.6 in Key Stage 2 in 2006.

• Turkish children showed above average improvement in Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests in 2006. This reflects the impact of the initiatives started by the EMA team including the science revision class in Turkish, the Turkish reading project and the allocation of a Turkish teacher specifically to Year 6.

• Children feel part of the school community, learn routines, make friends quickly and join school clubs. They also feel that their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are valued; this is clear from the confidence with which they use their first language in the classroom. When interviewed a group of children agreed that what helped them when they started was being given a dictionary, having books in their language, being able to speak and write in their home language, having a buddy who spoke the same language and having targets to aim for.

• ‘Children are proud of their heritage, have an excellent understanding of cultural diversity and show great respect for the beliefs of others. Children have very positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is good. Children are proud of their school and one described it as “a colourful, joyful and happy place where teachers always help them to do better.”’ (Ofsted 2007)
Feedback

‘We are constantly evolving and trying to improve, the needs of children change and we need to come up with different solutions. For example, if we have a child with no previous education she would need something different.’ (headteacher)

‘Bilingualism at our school is considered an asset.’ (EMA coordinator)

‘The EMA team is at the heart of the school; we work closely with our mainstream colleagues and together make inclusion happen. Mid-term admissions are part of our school and the whole school, administrative staff, teaching assistants, teachers, EMA teachers and the leadership team work towards ensuring that each child arriving at the school has a positive experience and is integrated into the learning environment as quickly as possible.’ (EMA coordinator)
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