Supporting children and young people whose first language is not English

About This Briefing

This briefing is provided on behalf of the Department for Education’s overarching strategic partnership for voluntary, community and social enterprise sector organisations that serve children, young people and families. Led by Children England, and working with Community Matters, NCVYS, NAVCA, the Race Equality Foundation and Social Enterprise UK, the programme includes information, learning resources and opportunities, and peer support networks. Find out more about the Department for Education’s overarching strategic partnership.

This briefing has been produced by Race Equality Foundation, a national charity that promotes race equality in social support and public services through exploring evidence, developing interventions and disseminating good practice.

Introduction

Overcoming language barriers in order to access relevant services is a challenge. The UK is an increasingly diverse population with seven percent of the populace from black and minority ethnic groups, according to the 2001 census. Experimental data from the Office for National Statistics in May 2011 indicates that the non-white British population has risen by 4.1 per cent per year between 2001 to 2009, leading to a growth from 6.6m in 2001 to 9.1m in 2009. In London alone, research has identified over 300 languages spoken by children at home.

Unmet language needs are a barrier not only in the receipt of services but also to employment, education, addressing health needs and social mobility. They can affect the ability of non English speaking people to settle into neighbourhoods. The provision of interpreting and translation services should aid in effective communication. Translation is the process of communicating the meaning of words or text from one language to another. Whereas, interpreting can be described as explaining the meaning of words and actions by translating orally from one person to another.

Interpreting and translation helps people understand information in order to make informed decisions, and also for parents to support their children and young people in their daily lives in schools.

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This briefing will look at issues for children, young people and their families who do not speak English and how these needs can be met, as well as issues for the organisations who provide support to them.

**Painting a picture of language**

Data on the numbers of people who have difficulty speaking or understanding English is based on estimates. However, the population breakdown can give an indication of language and communication needs. Black and minority ethnic groups now account for 73% of the UK’s total population growth, due to differences in birth rates and some inward migration. Although this figure includes UK born minority ethnic citizens, there is an increased likelihood of this group speaking English as an additional language.

There are a diverse range of languages spoken in the UK. In some cities, such as London, the number of languages ranges from a handful in some areas, to over 100 languages spoken in boroughs such as Ealing. This can be particularly challenging for schools with over 40.3% of primary school pupils having English as an additional language in Ealing, for example. There are areas in the North West of England where up to 42 different languages are spoken by children in schools, with the majority coming from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa. Some of these children do not speak English on admission to school.

There is no national data on the number of people who do not speak English. Work by Gill et al (2011) indicates that the proportion of people who cannot speak English increases with age and that fewer women speak English than men. Although language is not automatically monitored as part of the information collected on patients at GPs, Gill and others estimate that 2,520,885 GP consultations a year are with individuals who do not speak English.

Recent figures from the Department of Education schools census indicate that 957,490 pupils do not speak English as a first language. In state-funded primary schools 16.8 per cent of pupils’ first language (compulsory school age and above) was known or believed to be other than English, an increase from 16.0 per cent in 2010. (DfE 2011 p2)

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3 Ealing PCT (March 2010) Use of Language Interpreting and Translation Services, 1 April 2008 – 31 March 2009
4 Manyena, B and Brady E (2007) Intervention study, CfBT Education Trust
The impact of language and communication difficulties

Language and communication difficulties can cause the individuals concerned to experience inequalities. It is therefore preferable for organisations and service providers to try and address these difficulties in order to abide by the framework of the Equality Act (2010) by promoting equality of opportunity, and reducing unfair treatment or discrimination.

- Accessing Services

There is a wealth of research evidence, more often in regards to black and minority ethnic communities, which draws an association between language difficulties and access to services. Those within minority ethnic communities are often the most disadvantaged and also in greater need of health, education, social welfare services but are often least able to access these services readily due to communication difficulties. For example, early research found limited provision of holiday schemes and youth clubs that provide English language support to meet the needs of refugee children. Whilst other work has noted that refugee children and young people are at risk of developing psychological problems and that language remains a major barrier to accessing mental health support services.

- Making decisions

We all need to have some basic understanding of information and systems in order to make informed decisions. This will be of particular importance in certain life threatening health emergencies, for example, and in regard to the government’s agenda on patients’ choice (see below for more detail). In order to assist, GPs may have to use alternative strategies when consulting with patients whose first language is not English; one of which may be using their own language skills if they have knowledge and use of the language spoken by the patients.

- Poor experience of services

Language barriers can impact on the quality and perceived experience of services by those who do not speak English. Research shows that language barriers are a major cause of dysfunctional health encounters between black and minority ethnic patients and doctors. For

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7 Rabiee, F and Smith, P (2007) Being understood, being respected, UCE Birmingham and AFCAR
example, black and minority ethnic patients are less likely than the general population to feel that they had sufficient time with their GP\textsuperscript{10}.

Insufficient language support can act as a barrier to integration with local communities. Lack of knowledge about the education system, teaching and learning methods was found to impact on refugee and asylum children’s and parents experiences of the school system. This not only affected the parent’s interactions with the school, but how they supported their children doing their homework, for instance. It is also likely that overcoming language barriers to communicate effectively may seem inconceivable and can prevent some children attending school\textsuperscript{11}.

A recently published Department for Education report noted that lack of English language was identified as one of the barriers to parents making complaints at school. Moreover, if they do complain, these parents are likely to have higher support needs than English speaking parents.\textsuperscript{12}

- Engaging with policy

The funding cuts have had a major impact on the voluntary and community sector and how they engage in policy. Language as well as the cost of attending and recruiting interpreters were found to be key reasons for the low presence of migrant and minority ethnic community organisations in London participating in funding and policy events \textsuperscript{13}.

**Policy on language support**

- Education

Currently schools have obligations under the Equality Act 2010 not to discriminate against those who fall within the nine protected characteristics: disability, gender reassignment, age, marriage, pregnancy and maternity, civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. There is no specific reference relating to language and communication, however, as part of the commitment to provide education for all children, and requirements within the Equality Act, there is an implied duty to address language and communication needs. This is often interpreted as providing support to children with English an additional language. Most

\textsuperscript{10} No patient left behind report
\textsuperscript{11} Manyena, B and Brady E (2007) Intervention study, CfBT Education Trust
\textsuperscript{12} McKenna, K and Day, L (2012) Parents and young people’s complaints about schools, Department for Education
\textsuperscript{13} D’Angelo, A, Sanders, E and Burkmar, R (2010) Migrant and minority community organisations: funding, sustainability and ways forward, Interim Report, Middlesex University
local authorities provide advice on supporting such young people\textsuperscript{14}. Additionally, the Department for Education provides information and resources for teachers, such as, tools for assessing those where English is an additional language\textsuperscript{15}.

- Allocating resources

Schools can take positive action to address or alleviate disadvantages experienced by pupils with a protected characteristic. Language is clearly linked to race and ethnicity and it therefore follows that actions by schools will be targeting black and minority ethnic pupils. For example, a case could be made showing ‘X children speaking this language’ were underachieving because the school was failing to provide access to the curriculum due to a lack of bilingual support. Measures could be taken - such as a project to engage specifically with alienated Asian boys, for example.

- Learning English

The Department for Education website sets out three principles for the school curriculum. One of these is ‘responding to pupils’ diverse learning needs’, which includes pupils from ‘diverse linguistic backgrounds’. Teachers are advised to plan their approaches to teaching and learning so that these pupils can take an active part in lessons. Furthermore teachers should be aware of requirements of the equal opportunities legislation that covers ‘race, gender and disability’ to ensure pupils needs are met.

In relation to English as an additional language, teachers need to plan not only to ensure pupils develop their English but also to support them in taking part in subjects and their understanding of the subjects. The support provided through schools is in the acquisition of English language rather than interpretation. However, parents may still require the use of interpreting services in their interactions with the schools.

Many examples exist of how schools have responded to language needs of pupils. Hampshire County Council runs a Young Interpreter scheme where young bilingual people are trained to provide additional support to other young people who have English as an additional language through a buddy system\textsuperscript{16}. A support pack using child friendly English has been developed specifically for the different school key stages to help new arrivals access English and adapt to school life.

\textsuperscript{14} Bracknell Forest EAL and diversity website http://www.bfinclusion.org.uk/Information_context.htm
\textsuperscript{15} http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/inclusionandlearnersupport/eal
Health

Patient choice is a prominent agenda in health care and in a recent presentation about the Information Revolution the Department of Health stated the need to provide an opportunity for people to be involved ‘as much as they want to be in every decision about their care’\textsuperscript{17}. This can only happen if people are aware of the choices they can make and have the relevant information. Information enables people to ensure they get the right treatment and understand how they are being treated. Part of this understanding is likely to be through communication using interpreting and translation services for those who need it.

The need to understand information and the importance of access to interpretation is noted in the Future Forum phase two report: ‘Many people need face-to-face information along with an explanation of the information. Likewise, for many, access to an interpretation service is vital.’\textsuperscript{18} P.11

Integration

Being able to speak and understand English has become part of Government policy around community cohesion and social inclusion. The suggestion being that for full integration into society, a level of competency in English language is necessary. However, whilst this had been met through the provision of English as a Second Language (ESOL) course, financial cut backs have seen significant reductions in these services. Following the publication of Creating the Conditions for Integration\textsuperscript{19}, the Government announced on 29 February 2012 up to £10 million in funding\textsuperscript{20} funding for English as a second language classes, particularly for women and children living in areas ‘facing significant integration challenges’.

Young people

The Positive for Youth\textsuperscript{21} policy outlines the Government’s aspirations for young people including the promotion of ‘youth voice’ and avenues to engage young people, as well as targeted work to support disadvantaged young people in developing the ‘skills and qualities needed for life, learning and work’. Young people with little or no English could be limited in

\textsuperscript{17} Workshop 5, David Knight DH Informatics Directorate, Race Equality Foundation In your own words conference, http://www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/publications/Presentations
\textsuperscript{19} Communities and local government http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/2092103.pdf
\textsuperscript{20} Communities and Local Government Department, Andrew Stunell, Communities Minister press release, http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/communities/2097257
\textsuperscript{21} http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/youngpeople/positive%20for%20youth/b00200933/positive-for-youth-the-statement
their ability to take up the potential opportunities within the policy if their language needs are not met.

Responding to diverse language needs through interpreters

It is common to use interpreting or translation when groups of people do not share the same language.

- The range of interpreters

People with little or no English will use a variety of support sources in their interactions with services. Interpretation takes many forms including. Professional interpreters are trained, and bookable through an agency and recognised and used by public services. However the availability of, and the difficulty of accessing these professionals can act as barriers to those needing their services. Additionally, bilingual staff or professionals from the statutory sector may use their own language skills to interpret or view this as part of their role. Community organisations often use professional interpreters or volunteers to provide untrained interpreting due to the fact that they speak languages used by their service users. Informal networks including family and friends are also often used by individuals as there is existing trust and mutual understanding.

- The need for an interpreter

Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation\(^\text{22}\) has shown that requests for interpreters are partly dependent on the service user deciding whether their level of English is sufficient for the given situation (eg whether they need help at parents evening to understand if their child is doing well). Often, interpreters may be needed at different times and in different situations when accessing certain services, or dependent on the seriousness of the situation. There is also people’s changing need for interpreters throughout their life, with some getting by with basic English, but reverting to their mother tongue as they get older and their competency to speak English reduces. Within a mental health context it is argued that individuals need to be able to express themselves in their mother tongue\(^\text{23}\)

- Using an interpreter

It is expected that interpreters are competent in the language they are translating but having an understanding of the issue they are interpreting about, be it specific health issues or knowledge of the education system, is even more beneficial. Appropriate training of interpreters avoids inaccuracies and misdiagnosis for service users. It is likely


\(^{23}\) http://www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/dh-strategic-partners/ITS/in-your-own-words
that many people may not fully understand how services such as health, education or housing work; therefore necessitating an interpreter that is more proactive in explaining the situation and not just relaying what is said. The service user’s rating of the efficiency of an interpreter is sometimes associated the successful the outcome of the meeting for which the interpreter is used. For example, if the parent has been able to ensure their child is accepted at school.

Work by Mind (2009)\(^{24}\) has found a lack of knowledge among healthcare professionals of how to work with interpreters. Understanding the role of the interpreter is important and will have an effect on the interactions between the individual and service provider. Training for interpreters and practitioners to work collaboratively in the service they provide is necessary and one organisation, Mothertongue, provides this for work around mental illness\(^{25}\).

- Support within the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector

A range of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations (VCSE) internally meet the language and communication needs of minority ethnic groups. The South London Tamil Welfare Group\(^{26}\) provide a programme of support to Tamil children, young people and their families including a family learning curriculum to empower Tamil Parents with the knowledge, skills and confidence to give support to their children.

The Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities parent programme aims to help parents with the challenges they face in raising happy and successful children. The programme is interpreted and translated in a number of different languages which assists voluntary and community organisations running the programme to support parents and carers with poor or no English\(^{27}\).

Equally VCSE organisations are being commissioned to provide interpreting and translation services to non English speaking people. For example, Everyday Language Solutions\(^{28}\) is a social enterprise that is commissioned to provide interpreting and translations services in the public sector in the North East of England through the NHS Right to Provide. Work with schools has also enabled them to become a well recognized provider of interpreting and translation services.

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\(^{24}\) Mind (2009) A civilised society, mental health provision for refugees and asylum seekers in England and Wales
\(^{25}\) http://www.mothertongue.org.uk
\(^{26}\) http://www.sltwg.org.uk/
\(^{27}\) Race Equality Foundation, Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities parent programme parent information
\(^{28}\) www.everydaylanguagesolutions.co.uk
At the same time, VCSE organisations may also need to recognise and use interpreting services provided by professionally trained interpreters, as well as their own bilingual provision to assist young people and families. Some local authorities, such as Wandsworth Council, specifically encourage voluntary and community organisations to use qualified interpreters and provide information on how to do this.\(^29\)

Most local authorities either run their own language and interpreting support services or have agencies within their local area who can be booked by VCSE organisations. The Language Shop\(^30\) is one such organisation providing a range of interpreting and translations services across the London boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets and Hackney. The Language Shop has a number of resources to help communicate with those where English is an additional language. This includes cultural information and directories of voluntary and community organisations who provide support to minority ethnic groups.

**Funding**

The funding to support individuals who have English as an additional language has changed. Within education, one of the purposes of a ring fenced Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) was to provide support to address the specific needs of bilingual learners and under-achieving ethnic minority pupils. The practicalities of the grant were outlined in Aiming High guidance (DfE, 2004). From April 2011 the EMAG was mainstreamed into the dedicated schools grant. Despite there being an option for local authorities, with the agreement of schools, to maintain EMAG services centrally, concerns have been raised that in not keeping the grant ring fenced the ability to provide the same level of support to those who need it will be compromised. The Pupil Premium introduced in April 2011 enables schools to allocate extra funding to interventions aimed at boosting the attainment of pupils from deprived backgrounds, which is likely to include those where English is an additional language. Whilst language support isn’t specifically mentioned it is likely that the premium can be used to address language and communication in relation to duties under the Equality Act 2010. The affect of this new initiative has yet to be evaluated.

Cost and convenience are some of the reasons why professional interpreters are not always used by services. However, a review of interpreting services has found that patient satisfaction rates tend to decline when interpreters are not used despite the patient seeing a

\(^{29}\) Wandsworth Interpreting Service, A customer guide to our interpreting and translation service for voluntary organisations

[http://ww3.wandsworth.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/es7tsfno5bazivcofqckqh57wvwjva3o2v2c274x2xbi5opwtxd6gyrr7ex7nvmmlwip2xi4zyjy2ik6x46p7zpuyd/wisvoluntary.pdf](http://ww3.wandsworth.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/es7tsfno5bazivcofqckqh57wvwjva3o2v2c274x2xbi5opwtxd6gyrr7ex7nvmmlwip2xi4zyjy2ik6x46p7zpuyd/wisvoluntary.pdf)

need for them. Often, friends and relatives, including children and young people, are used to interpret for the non-English speaking patient. This in itself is problematic. Not only is there cause for misunderstanding, especially if it is a complicated health issue, for example, but confidentiality can be compromised in using informal interpreting.

**Challenging times**

We are at a time where changes in the structures and mechanisms of health, housing, education and social care as a result of Government reforms, and the drive for localism is placing more emphasis on the voices of local communities in determining the type of services they receive. The ability to engage with processes such as Youth Councils, local HealthWatches or tenants’ panels for example will be hampered by the inability of some individuals to communicate, understand, ensure decisions are made with consent and be able to influence the key stakeholder and decision makers.

**Resources**

Schools census


National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum

http://www.naldic.org.uk/eal-teaching-and-learning/outline-guidance

Regional Language Network Communicating in the public and voluntary sector 2008


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31 Gill et al (2011) The unmet need for interpreting provision in UK primary care, PLOs One, vol:6, issue 6, p1-6