

Involving Parents

Educating pupils with English as an additional language is not a one-way process. Schools have much to gain from the experiences and knowledge of pupils, their families and communities. Drawing on their expertise enriches a school in a range of valuable ways.

Many parents are fluent bilinguals and can provide excellent support for their child. In many cases either one or both parents may have enough knowledge of English to understand what is being taught in the curriculum. Even parents who don't understand any English can provide valuable support for their child.

Home-school links

Set up a two-way diary between home and school for new arrivals. Use this to inform parents about:

- what is going on in school, changes in routines, new events;
- how the child is coping and praise for the child's achievements;
- questions that may arise about the child during the day;
- the following week's class topics and new vocabulary the child may need to prepare for these;
- specific help with homework.

A few days after the initial meeting, invite new parents into the class to see the type of activities taking place. Provide opportunities for them to ask further questions. English schooling may be very different from that experienced in their country and parents are often anxious and uncertain about school routines.

Parents who are bilingual can support their children in the following ways. They can:

- translate key instructions for beginners in English such as those in the 'Phrases for School' booklets (see Websites and Publications list)
- translate class work written in L1 (the first language). This enables pupils to produce valid written work and actively helps in the learning of English;
- discuss forthcoming class topics and the new vocabulary the child needs to understand;
- translate key words included in worksheets or written in word-books. Translated subject-specific vocabulary is vital in class and makes the curriculum more accessible.

Parents who don't speak English can also offer vital support for the curriculum:

- they should continue to develop the home language by reading to the pupil, sharing books, telling stories;
- discuss class work in the pupil's L1 where possible;
- explain meanings of key vocabulary using a dual language dictionary or a list of key words with pictures. The pupil can show the English word/ picture to the parent and the parent can respond in L1.
- The website, www.primaryresources.co.uk/letters, provides 14 standard letters for parents in 30 languages.

Parents are a valuable source of cultural information. Ask parents to:

- to write words in L1 for class displays,
- provide information, pictures and cultural artefacts from country of origin.

See 'Useful websites and publications' for resources to support work with parents.