

28th June 2018

Withdrawal of English as an Additional Language (EAL) proficiency data from the Schools Census returns

A Response from the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC)

We understand that the DfE has decided to remove EAL proficiency data as a requirement in the school annual returns. We are, as a national subject association, deeply concerned about the negative consequences of this reversal of a very important initiative introduced barely 18 months ago. We set out the reasons for our concern below.

In 2016, NALDIC strongly supported the introduction of the reporting of EAL proficiency levels and agreed with the rationale behind their introduction.

'The data on the English proficiency of EAL pupils is used to inform policy on this high needs group with the basic rationale being that current data on EAL pupils does not distinguish between pupils who lack a basic command of the English language versus those who are bilingual and have mastered English sufficiently to access the curriculum. This information will help the department understand how effective the education sector is for EAL pupils. It will provide valuable statistical information on the characteristics of these children and, together with their attainment and destinations, will allow us to measure whether the individual pupils, or the schools they attend, face additional educational challenges.'

School census 2017 to 2018 Guide, version 1.6 January 2018

NALDIC believes that it is vital that we assess the language proficiencies of EAL learners accurately as good quality assessment can yield crucial information for teaching and curriculum planning. Assessments based on the NC English do not reflect the differences between the language development of a first and additional language learner. The introduction of the DfE EAL proficiency levels for all schools provides a valuable opportunity for teachers and schools to use a national system for EAL learners to support assessment. The current EAL proficiency screening and identification requirement is a very important step in the right direction. Indeed, we have publicly re-affirmed our support for the current assessment provision in our *EAL Journal* (Autumn 2017):

'The inclusion of 'proficiency in English in the annual school census (since September 2016) is an official recognition of our linguistically diverse school population. It also tacitly signals the beginning of the end of an ill-advised practice, which held that the curriculum and assessments for subject English are adequate and appropriate to the needs of EAL pupils from diverse backgrounds.'

EAL Journal, Autumn 2017

There is no doubt that all teachers who are committed to providing a high-quality school experience for pupils from diverse language backgrounds (approx. one-fifth of the school population as a whole) support the introduction of EAL proficiency screening in September 2016. Over the longer term the proficiency data would be very useful for curriculum planning, resource allocation and teacher development purposes.

The collection and use of data on the English proficiency of EAL pupils are totally different from that currently collected about a pupil's nationality and country of birth. EAL is now a permanent feature of our school population. Our ability to provide a high quality inclusive education for all pupils requires accurate EAL proficiency data for planning and teaching purposes. Data about the performance and progress of pupils with special educational needs is collected to meet the requirements of the Equality Act. Pupils with English as an additional language deserve the same attention and focus in accordance with equalities legislation. EAL proficiency data are systematically and routinely collected in other Anglophone countries.

We recommend that if schools are no longer required to assess proficiency in English for the purpose of the census they continue to do so internally in order to provide informed provision for their EAL learners.

We strongly advise that the Department reviews its recent decision for the withdrawal of the requirement for schools to collect data annually on proficiency in English. This is a retrograde step.

Peta Ullmann

Chair of NALDIC