

ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE (EAL) WORKING GROUP
30 NOVEMBER 2009
(6:00 pm to 7:30 pm)

Present: Councillors Mrs McCracken (Lead Member), Burrows and Ms Whitbread

In attendance: Rosanna Border, Senior Adviser Inclusion and Diversity, Learning & Achievement
Kashif Nawaz, EAL & Diversity Team Leader
Andrea Carr, Policy Officer (Scrutiny), Chief Executive's Office

1. EAL Update

The Working Group's past review had included a recommendation to the effect that it would continue to have an involvement with the EAL & Diversity Team to monitor its progress and provide support and assistance where necessary. Accordingly, the Senior Adviser and EAL & Diversity Team Leader attended the meeting to give an update in respect of EAL in the Borough's schools and the activities of the Team.

The Team Leader advised that the report of the Working Group's review had an impact on readers and had assisted with raising the profile of EAL across the Borough and its schools. All the associated recommendations had been implemented within four months of the report's approval. Although the profile of EAL had been an issue one year ago when the report was agreed, this was not the case currently and a changed environment in schools was evident. The people with whom the EAL & Diversity Team worked now recognised supporting EAL as a mainstream function and not a 'bolt on' as was sometimes previously thought. These developments had increased school confidence in meeting the needs of EAL learners within Bracknell Forest schools and led to a more robust process involving the Team visiting schools and sharing their aims and objectives with school staff and inviting their agreement and support.

Improved relationships between the Team and schools, head teachers and extended services etc. were apparent. An event organised at the Council's education centre at Easthampstead Park Mansion in July 2009 enabled pupils to learn about a variety of religions and religious artefacts. The event was greatly enjoyed by pupils and generated positive publicity. EAL provision in the Sandhurst area had improved since the Working Group's last meeting and the Head Teacher of College Town Junior School was instrumental to supporting EAL in that school. The EAL Team had returned to College Town Junior School to meet the Head Teacher. The School now operated dance, music and cookery classes and a lunchtime language development club to assist EAL pupils. It was hoped that this advancement would be reflected in pupils' progress and examination results. The School welcomed a return visit by the Working Group.

Brakenhale School had received a significant number of EAL pupils in its new September 2009 intake and was in need of increased support such as more training for teachers and teaching assistants. The Head Teacher would welcome a return visit by the Working Group.

In the event that the Working Group chose to make any further visits to schools, Owlsmoor Primary School was identified as a possibility to discover how it had progressed with EAL provision. EAL support was co-ordinated by the School's

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and 'My Club' operated at lunchtimes to assist EAL pupils to integrate.

The EAL Team had been increasing its work with secondary schools during the last eighteen months. Areas for development were discussed with senior staff members and progress reports were sought every six weeks to ascertain whether the impact of interventions was successful. The Senior Adviser reported that, through its work, the Working Group had strengthened the EAL agenda at community level and the Place Survey had revealed that 80% of responders felt that Bracknell Forest residents got on well together. Sandhurst and College Town Schools had both held open evenings to share information with the local community. The Head Teachers welcomed the changing community and one had learnt some Nepalese words.

The guaranteed funding of £50,000 per year had allowed the full-time recruitment of a qualified EAL teacher who was able to deliver training in schools. The additional resource also enabled the Team to deliver its plan in the current year and consideration was being given to developing further training at Key Stage 1. The use of standard training slides for schools was beneficial. 27 EAL pupils had been supported last year and to date this year the number had increased to 37 and was expected to rise further. Minimal translation was carried out and the focus was on teaching English to EAL pupils with significant success. Support work in class in a group setting had proved successful. A winning bid to the GOSE Migration and Impact fund for £15,000 had enabled the development of an induction pack for new arrivals. New EAL pupils remained in class on arrival where they were supported by teachers and teaching assistants who had been aided by the EAL support programme. An EAL Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training programme would be developed in coming months and officers would be able to report on progress in a year's time. The training would target every school and encourage teachers and teaching assistants, who were enthusiastic to assist EAL pupils, to come forward.

The impact of cultural diversity in schools was being highlighted through training sessions welcomed by schools. A member observed that the role of schools was changing and that they were developing a new more open mind set through extended services. The Team Leader referred to the community cohesion debate of how diversity affected schools and communities and impacted on the young learner. He agreed that, although some issues around community cohesion remained, schools had assumed a more modern role and were proactive in promoting it. Expanded guidelines in the National Curriculum to improve community cohesion were sought.

Further to a member's question as to whether the previous blur between special educational needs and EAL continued, the Team Leader advised that the two aspects were now seen and accepted as separate entities. It was possible that some children may have educational needs in addition to having EAL and therefore awareness raising and teacher skilling were being pursued to facilitate recognition of such situations. Secondary school teachers were being discouraged from placing able EAL pupils in lower attainment sets.

Although EAL issues continued to emerge, there was confidence that they could be resolved more rapidly than had been the case a year ago. Two training sessions with primary and secondary consultants had enabled EAL issues to be recognised and addressed. In terms of attainment, it was noted that under achievers needed to progress faster than their peers in order to keep pace with lessons and not fall behind.

It was noted that the EAL & Diversity Team was monitored through an annual inspection regime.

Reference was made to a form of consistent sign language designed to assist EAL pupils, particularly in their early days at school when the limited ability to communicate tended to cause frustrations. This method of signing, which consisted of symbols displayed on classroom walls, was well promoted by all support services and parents.

The Team Leader advised that there had been 2251 Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) pupils in the Borough as at May 2009. The progress and attainment of each cohort was being monitored at Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. In March 2009 a Regional Adviser for EAL from the National Strategies had visited the local authority. The Team's work in developing a virtual school was now acknowledged at a national level. The Team would develop further EAL resources.

EAL support at Foundation Stage was already in place and advice and training was offered at Key Stage 1 where required. The curriculum at this stage was more conducive to language development and there was a different perspective at secondary schools and 6th Forms. It was noted that post-16 EAL figures would peak next year and the increase in numbers indicated that schools were encouraging EAL pupils to remain in education and progress to the 6th Form. EAL pupils represented 11% of the 6th Form population. Although the EAL Team's teaching support was currently concentrated on Key Stage 2-4 EAL pupils, focussed support was provided for younger EAL pupils. The summer holiday project for 18 secondary pupils at Secondary School was operated with the assistance of goodwill at Sandhurst School. A DVD had been made of the event and shown to the Bracknell Forest Community Cohesion Group.

The Working Group was reminded that responsibility for post-16 funding and associated EAL remit would transfer from the Learning and Skills Council to local authorities in 2010. There was entitlement to provision for young people with learning disabilities up to the age of 25 years.

The Working Group received copies of presentation slides produced by the Team which included information in respect of languages spoken in the Borough, relative increase amongst ethnic groups and specific challenges in mainly monolingual areas. The slides indicated the direction of the Team's work and where it sat in the local and regional context. It was expected that the top ten languages spoken in the Borough's schools would change from January 2009 to January 2010. £800 had been spent on translations last year which was a small amount compared with the number of residents in the Borough. A Bracknell Forest booklet had been translated into Hungarian and Urdu.

Through training the Team sought to challenge ethnic perceptions and stereotypes and address how people were influenced and formed opinions from hearsay and the media. A neutral view was needed. Year 10, 11 and 6th Form sessions enabled issues to be discussed. The Team was becoming more adept at leading training to challenge racial notions and perceptions. There was a CPD module in respect of challenging stereotypes. Prejudice was encountered on a daily basis at national level and the importance of respecting sensitivities was recognised. The Team had promoted inclusion since Bracknell Forest acquired unitary authority status and the Team's contribution to community cohesion had developed from there.

2. **Future Meetings and Activities**

The Working Group expressed a continuing interest and wish to remain involved in EAL matters in the Borough's schools provided that would be beneficial. The Team was invited to advise members of any assistance it sought from the Working Group.

It was suggested that the Working Group consider aspects of the EAL induction programme in the event that it met again.

It was agreed that the notes of this meeting be submitted to the next meeting of the Children's Services and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Panel to update the Panel in respect of developments in EAL in the Borough's schools and the work of the Working Group.