



Bilingual support

Key principle

Secure and trusting relationships with a key person are vital to a child's development in all areas. Bilingual support is a highly desirable resource but it has to be accepted that appropriate first language support may not be available for all children in all settings all the time.

An increasing number of maintained schools and settings, particularly children's centres, have outreach teams which may include bilingual practitioners, community officers or assistants. LAs may also have teams offering support in home languages from staff with appropriate Early Years qualifications who are able to work effectively with young children and their families across a range of settings. These teams are typically part of Ethnic Minority Achievement Services or Inclusion teams within Children's Services, Early Years or School Improvement teams.

Even where there are not yet dedicated Early Years staff there will usually be interpreting and translation services within the LA, which families and practitioners in all settings can access. Practitioners should find out what support is available to them and their children's families; LAs should ensure that they are providing sufficient and appropriate support. Early Years advisers will be able to signpost practitioners to the appropriate services.

As the population becomes more linguistically diverse so the profile of bilingual teachers and other professionals in Early Years and childcare increases at all levels of qualification and professional development. Many experienced practitioners in settings across the sectors in maintained and non maintained provision will themselves be bilingual and will bring their own personal and professional experience to supporting the achievements of young bilingual learners.

Sharing a language with a child or a family does not by itself qualify someone to be the most appropriate person to support a child or a family. Practitioners should do everything they can to ensure that appropriate support is found by consulting with community groups and support services such as Ethnic Minority Achievement (EMA) teams, Traveller Education Services (TES) and Refugee and Asylum Seeker (RAS) support groups.

The following key points summarise why, where possible, it is important to seek bilingual support:

- Children who speak little or no English at home may be at a disadvantage when they enter an Early Years setting without some support in the language with which they are most familiar.
- To deny children the opportunity to express themselves and to learn through their home language is to disregard their home language development and skills.
- Support in home languages can help you find out essential information about a child's competency in the home language which will inform your expectations of their learning needs.
- For a child who has limited understanding of English, opportunities to use their home language can be like turning on a light in a dark room; the setting and all its possibilities are opened up.
- For parents it may be a real relief to be able to communicate with practitioners via first language support, to have an opportunity to inform practitioners about their child's care, learning needs and achievements, and to find out about the aims and values of the setting.