

EAL Teaching Activities For Primary Children

How to support EYFS, KS1 and KS2 children with English as an additional language

Did you know that over 1.1 million children living in the UK, that's around 1 in 6, do not have English as their first language? They speak another language at home and are learning English as an additional language (EAL) when they come to school. There are around 6,500 different languages spoken around the world and English is only one of them, so this shouldn't come as a surprise. In recent years however, this has had an increasingly more significant impact on schools as the number of EAL children attending has risen by more than 20% in just 5 years. Most schools today will have children in their Early Years setting for whom English is not their first language, and who's English may range from fluent to very limited.

Young EAL learners come from very diverse backgrounds. Some will have moved to the UK with their families for economic reasons including employment. Some arrive seeking asylum. Others may have been born and raised in the UK by non-English speaking parents and will speak another language or languages at home. The most common first languages spoken by **EAL learners in the UK include Arabic, Bengali, French, Gujarati, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish, Tamil and Urdu.** Consequently, the needs of EAL pupils vary greatly, from new pupils arriving with little or no English language skills or prior schooling, to those who are slowly becoming more fluent in English.

What does this mean for schools and for their EAL pupils?

All EAL children will require support in their language development alongside their English speaking peers. It

is important that, as education professionals, we do everything that we can to support EAL children so that they feel safe and secure in their setting and make good progress. **Language is how we bond, make friends, and learn about and understand all the different things that we need to know as we go through life.** It is essential for a child to have a proper grasp of English if they are to grow and develop feeling happy and confident. It can be a very daunting experience living in a place where you don't understand or speak the language. Even more so for younger children at EYFS, KS1 and KS2. For them, it may be scary and intimidating enough going to school for the first time without your parents by your side, even more so if you don't understand what everyone around you is saying!

Teachers who have EAL pupils in their class can adapt lessons to make sure that all of their children get the most out of them. They do this by involving pupils in activities where the language is challenging, but appropriate to their abilities, and centred on their interests. But because EAL children might have various levels of English or prior experience of schooling, it is no understatement to say that this can be tricky to achieve. Some schools receive extra support from their local authority and others are able to employ EAL consultants or have their own EAL specialists. But many schools do not receive any additional expert EAL advice at all. In some cases, children with little or no English may attend intensive English courses before they start, or at the same time as joining mainstream classes, but this is not common practice around the UK.



We have put together a few ideas to help ease the transition into a school environment for your EAL children, so that they can quickly feel settled and happy and go on to achieve their full educational potential as confident English speakers:

1. Embrace a child's home language and culture and involve their family

Spend some time finding out about an EAL child's culture and learn and offer some welcoming words. **If a child comes into your classroom and sees that you understand even just a little about their background and their own language, it will make them feel welcome and valued.** A touch of familiarity makes for a far less intimidating environment.

Make the most of the challenges faced by turning them into an opportunity to share experiences and understand the importance of different cultures among your children. **The more kindness and respect that children show to their EAL peers, the happier they are all going to be.** EAL children will have some different and interesting experiences of their own that they may wish to share, not to mention some extra language skills that they can use to help teach English speaking children about other languages! Celebrating different cultures within your classroom gives you a great opportunity to make observations of all the children's personal, social and emotional development and their understanding of the world.

Try to involve an EAL child's family as much as possible. Research has shown that while a child may be progressing well with the English language in school, sometimes their parents have very little or no English at all and this makes it very difficult to communicate information about what is going on in school, or anything that the school may need to know about the child's home situation. You can support the family of EAL learners by helping them to understand how the education system works and how to support their child's education. This is absolutely crucial to their child's success. Invite them into the classroom and let them see what their child is experiencing. Taking the time to find out a little about their culture and/or religion, as well as things like specific dietary requirements or restrictions on certain activities, will make a huge difference and will help both the school and the family. And if a child's parents feel at ease

then this will reflect onto their child.

It is also important to recognise the potential in an EAL child for bilingualism or multilingualism, and to encourage them to develop their language skills in their mother tongue as well as in English. Not only is this good for their academic and cognitive ability such as problem solving, but it will serve them well in the future when they go on to choose a career. Many employers actively seek out employees with more than one language under their belt.

2. Go visual! Take advantage of visual resources and use minimal language in the first instance



EAL children need to have the chance to learn key vocabulary by using just key words and short, simple sentences at first. As they become more confident when speaking English, they can build on this. Just focusing on everyday language, and using pictures and graphics to prompt new vocabulary is the best way to start.

Any child who may be struggling to understand something, not just EAL learners, **will benefit from words or concepts being described or emphasised in a visual way.** Resources with visual content provide context for EAL learners trying to make sense of new information. Flashcards are great for visualising and memorising vocabulary and concepts, and for stimulating discussion. You can create a richer, more vibrant and inspiring environment by using plenty of thoughtful visual displays around your classroom. Pictures and photographs with bold and clear descriptions next to them are key for word association, and make a huge difference to children learning English as an additional language.

For classroom displays to succeed, they need to be large enough for everyone to be able to clearly see or access from a distance. They need to be changed regularly to avoid them becoming like wallpaper that isn't noticed any more! **You can use wall displays to teach new vocabulary, to reinforce positive messages about diversity, and to encourage inclusivity.** Even better if your displays can be interactive, calling children to engage with and respond to them to reinforce key learning points. Questions to answer, blanks to fill in, options to contribute words or pictures, and 3D elements with different textures to touch, all make for an engaging wall display from which EAL children can recognise and learn new vocabulary.

Children can also have fun making their own displays and thinking of their own ideas for them. Make use of [Mark Making Panels](#) to engage them in making daily themed displays and having a go at writing out and displaying words that they have learned and pictures to go with them each day. This will really boost their confidence as they see their own language skills developing.



3. EAL children love to learn through play!

Play is an essential part of learning for all EYFS children. For EAL children, it is particularly crucial as they will learn and memorize so much more vocabulary if they are having fun with it. You can increase a child's language ability by engaging in their play and moulding the language around the activities they are enjoying, for example, "the big red fire engine is racing down the ramp. Its noisy blue siren is flashing brightly!" Playtime is the perfect time to develop language as children feel more happy and relaxed in such an informal environment. There is no end to the exciting and fun scenarios that you can create if you employ imaginative and creative playground equipment and

toys, so that an EAL child's daily activities come to life and take on real meaning, and they learn how to express what they are thinking or doing.

Innovative play, dance, music and drama, play a key role in language development. Drama and role play make learning memorable and encourage understanding, especially if children work with partners or in small groups using language for a specific purpose rather than out of context. This creates the perfect opportunity for an EAL child to hear good models of English language in a meaningful context. Role play demonstrates how to communicate and use language in real life. KS1 and KS2 children love to put on a show and even more so if they have a performance stage or similar platform to showcase their talents! Encourage EAL children to join in with these types of activities as much as possible to build on their vocabulary and understanding of context.

Back in the classroom, barrier games provide a great experience for EAL learners to practice newly acquired vocabulary and sentence structures. These are fun, social activities where two or more children see different information with the task of communicating it to each other through speaking and focused listening. Examples include filling in gaps in a text such as a line from a favourite story, describing a picture and the other person drawing it, spotting the difference between two pictures, or guessing a character from their description. **Asking EAL children to put in order a life cycle of a frog or a butterfly is a really fun way of developing language at the same time as learning EYFS science!** Take it outside to your [Wildlife Area](#) to let them see language coming to life!

4. Enjoy story time and Reading Every Day!

As a fundamental base element of the National Curriculum, it is no secret that reading is an absolute essential skill for any child to have and is a core method of developing language. Fluent readers use a range of strategies to decode and understand text. Many EAL children will already have good literacy skills in their first language that they can build upon to become fluent English readers. Even if they arrive at school with absolutely no prior reading ability, EAL children must be encouraged to enjoy the pleasure of books and of reading from day one.

It's actually better if you spend some time with the whole class or in smaller groups every day enjoying a story on the carpet, or outside in a [Storytelling Circle](#), where supported reading and then group discussion about the text can be enjoyed.



5. EAL learners can thrive with outdoor learning

We all know that in most cases, if you put a group of children outside on a playground with a ball, they will end up playing with it! If you are creative with opportunities for outdoor games and sport, this can be the spark that starts off a real desire to learn relevant language for an EAL child. In many settings, the first mainstream lesson that an EAL child can attend or actively participate in, is Physical Education and Outdoor Games. Sport is universal! **Good quality P.E. lessons with plenty of relevant language thrown in can help an EAL child to develop their understanding of the English language** more than they could ever imagine. Even better because they are having a good time and aren't even aware that they are learning!

[Multi Use Games Areas](#) should be taken advantage of every week, especially if you have EAL children in your class. **Team games play a key role in interactive, collaborative group work, and provide a wonderful opportunity for purposeful communication with teachers and peers**, who will be able to provide good language models for an EAL child to follow. Think of all the vocabulary that can be used during an exciting game of netball or football! Such activities encourage EAL children to develop speaking and listening skills within the context of an enjoyable curriculum topic, and this can unlock their potential to improve their understanding across all other areas of the curriculum.

6. Take advantage of EAL resources and local support

There are many EAL resources available on the internet to support learners. Your local council should have a team dedicated to supporting children with English as an Additional Language. They are likely to have access to books and resources in the child's home language for you to use in your setting, helping the child to feel more at home. Your local library will also be able to help, and may have details of social activities and language classes taking place that may be useful to you or your EAL learners.

Setting up a "buddy" system can really help too. Ask an English speaking child in your class, or an older junior child if appropriate, to act as a "buddy" and keep an eye out for a new or younger EAL child, particularly at lunchtime or playtime. Many children will enjoy this responsibility and it is good for their own confidence and self-esteem as well as teaching them how to be responsible and look out for others. EAL children will appreciate having a peer that they know is looking out for them and takes a kind interest in them, and this in itself can help them to interact and improve their understanding of English. Having the confidence to find their way around a new school and to understand its rules in itself means that they will be absorbing a great deal of language, even if they are not yet ready to voice it all.

Most of all, have patience (even if it may be very challenging!) and embrace the opportunities for learning that having an EAL child in your class can bring. You can measure how well an EAL child is settling in by the smile on their face, and if this is happening, well then you can't be going far wrong!

Do you have experience of teaching children who have English as an additional language? Please share some of your great knowledge on this subject on our [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) page. If you'd like to know more about how our playground products can help develop and break down the language barrier, simply [Contact Us](#) for a friendly chat.

To find out more about our unique process as well as view our entire product range, [case studies](#) and educational [blogs](#), make sure to visit our website at www.pentagonplay.co.uk