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## RAISING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF BILINGUAL LEARNERS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: EVALUATION OF THE PILOT/PROGRAMME

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*Kerensa White, Karen Lewis and Felicity Fletcher-Campbell  
National Foundation for Educational Research*

### Background

In January 2004, it was announced that the Primary National Strategy (PNS) would work in partnership with the Ethnic Minority Achievement Unit within the DfES, to develop a pilot project in 21 local authorities (LAs), with the aims of increasing 'the confidence and expertise of mainstream primary teachers in meeting the needs of advanced bilingual learners' and of closing the attainment gap between bilingual learners and those whose first language is English.

[\(http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/raising\\_achievement/whats\\_new/EAL\\_Pilot/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/raising_achievement/whats_new/EAL_Pilot/)

Within participating local authorities, the pilot was led, and the pilot consultant managed, by the respective managers of the Primary National Strategy and the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service. This helped to ensure that the pilot was embedded within the Primary National Strategy - and thus able to access its structures for professional development - while local specialist expertise was utilised. In some authorities, the collaboration between the two LA teams was innovative as respective managers/teams had not previously worked together.

The structure of support was that whereby pilot consultants, appointed by the local authority, and trained and supported by the local authority as well as by PNS regional directors, provided participating schools with a programme of whole-staff professional development sessions and an allocation of time to be used flexibly to meet the specific needs of the school. Once a consultant was employed, his/her input to particular schools was negotiated following a structured audit undertaken by the school's senior leaders and relevant middle managers, the consultant and relevant local authority advisers. A leadership team within the school was responsible for implementation of the pilot.

### Key Findings

The findings are presented under the research questions which structured the evaluation. 'Transient' findings - that is, issues which arose at the beginning of the pilot but were resolved and ceased to be concerns in the course of the evaluation - are not reported here.

## **The effects of the pilot in improving teacher confidence in meeting the needs of their bilingual pupils**

Across all case study schools, which themselves represented a range of school profiles and background characteristics, the confidence of teachers and teaching assistants was reported to have been enhanced. Teachers' increase in confidence was relative to the gains in:

- insight into the general difficulties encountered by key stage 1 and 2 pupils on account of their dual language use and the reasons why these difficulties inhibited the pupils' attainment in national tests
- insight into the specific difficulties encountered by individual groups of pupils within the bilingual cohort (e.g. languages with different profiles of tenses or anomalies in vocabulary)
- understanding of the rationale behind, and scope of, 'EAL pedagogy'
- awareness of how 'EAL pedagogy' related to good teaching as promoted in other current initiatives such as Assessment for Learning
- understanding of how the discrete pilot strategies could be integrated into regular classroom routines and approaches and benefit all pupils in the class whether or not they were bilingual learners
- extension of the individual's repertoire of strategies, techniques and presentations to enact the enhanced understanding and awareness and transform theory into action in the classroom
- opportunities to observe new models and get constructive feedback from the consultants
- support organised by senior leaders, which ensured consistency within the school, allowed for discussion and the sharing of ideas and resources, and thus increased motivation and ensured innovation was sustained.

There was evidence that the pilot activities made a significant contribution to bringing about these gains. Staff in the case study schools reported that the effect of pilot activity had encouraged bilingual pupils:

- to have higher expectations of themselves
- to be more confident
- to ask more questions and 'expect to understand'
- to be more prepared to use their home language in school
- to be more 'on task' and focused.

## **The effects of local authority management arrangements and school improvement interventions in supporting schools to meet the needs of their bilingual learners**

There was evidence that local authority management arrangements and school improvement interventions were powerful in terms of supporting the pilot within some of the case study schools. However, much of this potential was as yet unrealised. For example, some consultants relied substantially on support from the Regional Directors, rather than their LA management team. While this is unsurprising, it carries strong messages about facilitating conditions which need to be recognised at a time when the programme is being more widely applied.

Local authority management was most effective where it facilitated:

- a judicious choice of pilot schools based on sound knowledge of a school's position regarding provision for bilingual pupils and the capacity of the school to make good use of the pilot resources
- clarity both about the pilot itself and its application to schools in the authority (including the target group of pupils), and the communication of this vision to participating schools
- the appointment of a consultant who had the relevant pedagogical knowledge and expertise and the skills necessary to work not only strategically with school senior leadership teams to effect school improvement and change, but also operationally, with teacher practitioners in the classroom
- the inclusion of the necessary senior leadership within the authority to support pilot activities and to engage in collaboration in order to promote a coherent local authority approach via other current interventions and across specialist teams

- the identification of, and access to, sources of resources
- means of monitoring and evaluating the progress and outcomes of the pilot in order to support and disseminate as appropriate
- the identification of networks and provision of opportunities for the sharing of good practice.

## Other Findings

### The most successful interventions and practices in achieving the aims of the project

Across the case study schools, reference was made to a wide range of routine practices and specific interventions which aimed to raise the standard of achievement of bilingual pupils: some of these were related to, and/or adapted from, other interventions in which the school was engaged; some were pilot-specific; and some were already in existence in the school but took on a wider significance when linked to pilot activities.

Specific interventions and changes in policy and practice at school level were successful when they:

- were grounded in an action plan which facilitated their implementation, set accessible targets, allocated adequate resources and made the contextual arrangements for implementation and sustainability
- were applicable right across the curriculum (i.e. not just within literacy or numeracy, even if grounded in these)
- were applicable right across the school (i.e. not confined to key stage 2 or a particular cohort of pupils)
- raised the standard of achievement of all pupils (not just the target group)
- addressed specific difficulties that had been identified by the school
- were resource-light, serviced by resources which could be produced by teachers themselves or readily available from other sources
- were able to be assimilated into regular classroom routines and planning, and were compatible with other curriculum practices and pedagogic approaches which teachers valued

- caused reflection on, and subsequent action on, other aspects of the curriculum and school life which could support bilingual learners more effectively (e.g. contact with parents)
- took teachers out of their comfort zone but encouraged them to challenge themselves rather than to have imposed challenge
- generated immediate positive feedback from pupils within the classroom thus encouraging teachers to continue with the practice, whatever it was
- were supported by school structures (facilitated by the senior leadership team) and effected changes in staff deployment (e.g. in relation to teaching assistant support, the use of leading teachers)
- were grounded in purposeful and manageable record-keeping which informed practice.

**Particular teaching approaches** referred to widely (i.e. applicable across a range of contexts) which seemed to be of particular benefit to pupils, enhanced their understanding and developed language use were:

- use of curricular/layered targets to plan for language development and curriculum access
- planned opportunities for speaking and listening using 'talk partners', talk frames and role play
- prioritising of speaking and listening as a prelude to writing
- use of first language by children to learn - rather than limiting use of first language by adults for explanations.

Other **positive elements** of the pilot included:

- focusing schools' attention on the needs of bilingual pupils, reminding teachers of effective practices which they may have used previously but which had become low priority
- establishing means of analysing assessment tasks and results of assessments to identify exactly what pupils found difficult
- establishing means of monitoring the progress of bilingual pupils and setting relevant targets and, thereby, challenging expectations about what they could, or could not, achieve
- encouraging different LA providers to collaborate and present messages in a coherent and unified way in order to make a stronger impact.

Within schools, **the reception by staff and impact of the PDM programme** was most favourable when it:

- was negotiated from the outset by the senior leadership team and the consultant
- was jointly delivered by (internal) school staff and the (external) consultant
- made explicit reference to the particular profile of needs in the school at the time
- offered new ideas and approaches while reminding staff of practices in which they may have engaged in the past but which presently lay dormant
- was accessible by all staff, including teaching assistants, at the same time (so the school had 'the common experience')
- was supported by effective use of consultant time to ensure that 'the talk' of the PDM became enacted in practice (with targeting of support and input carefully planned by the senior leadership team).

### **Implications**

#### **Challenges to the EAL programme**

The pilot became a programme before the evaluation was completed. This is justifiable given the positive reception that it received in the majority of schools. However, the evidence from the evaluation was that the programme had the greatest immediate impact when an effective consultant had support from local authority colleagues (at an individual level to share ideas and expertise and to orchestrate the sharing of good practice) and went into a school where there was strong commitment to the programme on the part of the senior leadership team (who, again, were able to *manage* the process of implementation). Arguably, the actual materials were the least important part of the equation. Thus there are questions over the degree to which the programme will flourish without any of the elements identified above unless its messages are incorporated into other ongoing interventions.

The findings from the research gave rise to a series of developmental questions for different agencies involved in the programme. These

questions could be applied to authorities and schools which participate in the programme in the future.

#### **Questions for local authorities**

- what information is being used to identify schools that might benefit from the programme?
- how is the expertise gained by previous pilot schools being used as a resource within the authority?
- is all relevant expertise and experience in the authority, wherever located (i.e. in a non-pilot school, in a specialist service, in a community resource), being used to generate the practice which will contribute to realising the key pilot outcome of raised achievement of bilingual pupils?
- how can the programme help to foster good working relationships between EMA and PNS teams?
- are the contribution and responsibilities of all relevant senior leaders within the authority clearly delineated in the programme action plan?
- has the action plan been subject to relevant consultation without going through unnecessary bureaucratic channels?
- has the person appointed to implement the programme got the relevant experience for the tasks involved and, if not, has professional development been made available?
- is regular mentoring/coaching/line management available to support this person in what is a challenging role?
- have monitoring and evaluation plans to measure pupil progress been established at the beginning of the programme?

#### **Questions for new schools in the EAL programme**

- is the leadership team clear about the purposes of the programme and the way in which it will meet needs current in the school?
- have roles and responsibilities been clearly delineated in the light of the corpus of information about implementation in other schools?
- how can responsibilities for taking forward the programme in schools be most effectively allocated to promote individual development, capacity-building and general ownership?

- what arrangements are being made for the optimal use of staff time (e.g. systems for sharing and accessing materials; sharing ideas)?
- what informal and formal arrangements will best engage parents and carers?
- what are the implications of the programme for the linkages between the schools and their communities and how could these contribute to raising pupils' standards of achievement
- is on-going support from the local authority available in a manner acceptable to, and helpful for, the school?

#### **Questions for established pilot schools**

- what have been the most significant outcomes of the pilot?
- have these been finalised (i.e. task completed) or do they need sustaining and embedding?
- what arrangements are in place to engage new members of staff who have not had the 'common experience' of the PDM programme ?
- how are innovations in teaching practice and school leadership and management being built upon, developed and embedded in other initiatives?
- what systems are in place to assess the effects of changes made (e.g. assessment data)
- what is the best use of expertise gained at middle management level (e.g. by the EAL coordinator)? Should the post-holder continue in the role or should the role pass to another member of staff to develop his/her skills?

#### **Questions for DfES (or its representatives) on initiating a programme**

- what national, regional and local agencies need to be fully engaged in this initiative at the design stage?
- how can the new messages which this programme is intended to give be related to existing messages (so that there is a perspective on existing practice/policy rather than a change of track)?
- is the lead time adequate for effective planning so that the initiative is as strong as possible before it is implemented in the field?

- are the systems and mechanisms for delivery as simple as possible and do they make the maximum use of existing systems and mechanisms at national, local and school level?
- has a relevant LA team been recruited/identified and adequately trained?
- are there plans for the identification and dissemination of good practice in order to maximise the effects of this particular programme?
- how will the DfES promote the nationally produced materials/resources/information in order to engender confidence in potential users who may have other competing claims on their attention?

#### **Messages from the EAL programme for other educational programmes/interventions**

A key strength of the EAL programme was its ability to reach a broader range of pupils. While the extent of its adaptation may not have been in the original design and, ironically, may have been a factor of confusion about its exact designation, much of the programme's success in schools lay in the fact that it could, with careful planning, apply to all bilingual learners - not just the 'advanced' bilingual learners for which it was originally conceived - and to a range of settings in which they were being educated (for example, schools with high or low proportions of these pupils). Indeed, given the fact that schools persistently highlighted differences between the achievement of different ethnic groups this flexibility was critical. While the programme identified its target group as 'advanced bilingual learners', this group, despite having a common definition, is not homogeneous and different needs are represented within it.

A second key strength of the programme was its alignment with other initiatives and priorities. Its centrality within the Primary National Strategy, with focus on contribution to the inclusion agenda and delivery of the *Every Child Matters* outcomes was significant given the past history of provision for bilingual learners.

However, there were some weaknesses which could be instructive for other educational programmes/interventions. While too long a lead time may be demotivating and reduce the momentum of implementation, too short a lead time is liable to result in inadequate preparation, too little time for the most

effective appointments and the potential for confusion as to the purposes of the initiative. In this particular case, there was evidence that some authorities may have been limited in their choice of candidates for consultants' posts and/or did not have adequate time to support these candidates before they had to take up their post. In addition, there was unease about the fact that the PDM programme was not finalised and the materials were incomplete at the start of the pilot; this did not help the confidence either of the consultants (who had to prepare to deliver sessions without adequate time to absorb the messages or exploit their potentialities) or of headteachers who felt accountable to their staff to guarantee an effective programme of whole-school training. Messages about the cohort at which the programme was explicitly directed were often misunderstood along the lines of communication.

#### **Research aims**

The broad aims of the evaluation were:

- to assess the effects of the pilot on the attainment of bilingual pupils in the primary schools participating in the pilot and in improving teacher confidence in meeting the needs of their bilingual pupils;
- to examine local authority management arrangements and school improvement interventions in supporting schools to meet the needs of their bilingual learners; and
- to identify the most successful interventions/practice in achieving the aims of the project

#### **Research methods**

Seven local authorities were selected to participate in the evaluation.

##### *phase 1 (May 2004 - March 2005)*

- telephone interviews with the Primary Strategy Manager, the manager of the EMA service and the pilot consultant
- visits to 19 schools across the seven authorities to interview a range of staff (total of 116 interviews)
- telephone interviews with two further schools

##### *phase 2 (April 2005 - March 2006)*

- telephone interviews with local authority managers (as phase 1)
- follow-up visits to 13 phase 1 schools
- visits to a further four schools recommended by the LAs for having made interesting developments in their initial year of the pilot
- telephone interviews with a further seven phase 1 schools

Three interviews were conducted with the regional director(s) in the course of the two phases.

##### *(phase 3: ends April 2007)*

Pupil performance data will be analysed for the years 2004, 2005 and 2006 and any patterns with regard to schools participating in the pilot will be noted. The report of this analysis will be available in spring 2007.

## **Additional Information**

*Copies of the full report (RR758) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.*

*Cheques should be made payable to "DfES Priced Publications".*

*Copies of this Research Brief (RB758) are available free of charge from the above address (tel: 0845 60 222 60). Research Briefs and Research Reports can also be accessed at [www.dfes.gov.uk/research/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/)*

*Further information about this research can be obtained from Tara Cooke, 6D, DfES, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.*

*Email: [tara.cooke@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:tara.cooke@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)*

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