

First Language Assessment Guidelines

Content

- 1. Introduction and overview**
- 2. Organising an interpreter**
- 3. Checklist for admission of new EAL learners and information gathering**
- 4. Reasons for assessments**
- 5. Guidance for school staff on conducting First Language Assessments**
- 6. General information gathering questions.**
- 7. First Language Assessment Report Form.**

1. Guidelines for First Language Assessment Introduction - An Overview

When a pupil arrives in school with a little or no English language skills, it is important to gain information about his or her language ability in the first or home language. However, children need time to settle in to a new school and to feel confident and secure enough to learn in a safe and welcoming environment. It is not recommended, therefore, to organise a first language assessment too soon in the child's new school experience as this may require the presence of an unknown adult as an interpreter.

The best way to gather general and educational information about a child is therefore to meet the parents or carers. In this way, the prior knowledge and experience of the child, which may be relevant to the school curriculum, can be noted and built upon. Often, once a child is settled in the school with appropriate language support by class teacher and TAs, learning English in the context of the curriculum will develop quickly and there may be no need to assess the first language unless specific issues arise.

If the need for a first language assessment is identified, an interpreter can be requested from the Interpreting Service to support the assessor if there is no appropriate bilingual member of staff available. (Please see notes on organising an interpreter in section 2)

The school needs to organise the assessment format, tasks or tests that the interpreter will be interpreting for the child. Clearly, pupils of different ages will require different assessment approaches but all should be in a familiar environment. A child of 4 to 5 years needs an assessment that appears to them to be a friendly chat and a chance to play! Each assessment should meet the needs of the individual child in terms of their self confidence and possible first language ability. The tasks should include the age-related assessments that the class teacher will be completing with the class as a whole. If the child appears to have SEN, or has gaps in his/her education due to the different curriculum, or possibly has not previously had much formal education, there may be a need to use tasks for a younger age group. Informal language sampling through conversation and talk about stimulus material will provide extra information about the child's expressive language, grammatical accuracy and breadth of vocabulary.

The class teacher or INCO is often the best person to be the assessor to work with the interpreter, who acts as liaison with the child to ensure that he or she understands exactly what is required so that an accurate record of first language ability can be gained. For this reason the interpreter needs to be briefed about what is required and to see the tasks to be used before the assessment and to be given sufficient time for feedback at the end of the assessment. If a formal report is needed, this would normally be completed by the assessor using information provided by the interpreter about the child's first language competence.

The rest of this booklet includes some useful resources for first language assessment.

Good Luck!

2.

Organising an Interpreter

The provider of interpreting services for Hertfordshire County Council is INTRAN, which is the Interpretation and Translation Multi Agency for the Eastern Region. All HCC and school staff can access the INTRAN providers directly but will be responsible for providing the budget to fund the request. In some instances schools may be able to access a centralised budget for statutory translation or interpreting requirements.

First language assessments are not usually a statutory requirement, so the school will need to pay a booking fee of **£20** plus **£20** for the first hour and pro-rata for every **15 minutes** after that. Translations generally cost **9p** per word.

For information about services offered, charges and possible interpreter availability, please **either:**

Contact **Charulata Joshi**, Service manager for Translation and Interpreting

Telephone: **01438 844100**

Email: charulata.joshi@hertscc.gov.uk

or:

Alternatively you can access further information about INTRAN by visiting the BME Achievement homepage on the HGfL. The 'Interpreting and Translating Services' icon can be found on the right hand side of the homepage.

The online booking form for interpreters is available for schools via SOLERO (Schools OnLine Electronic Reports and Outputs)

When filling in the booking form you will need to state the exact language required and the purpose of the assessment. You may wish to specify the gender of the interpreter if necessary.

3. [Supporting newly arrived learners of EAL- A check list for admission to your school](#)

Preparing for an interview

Whom to invite

- The child and his/her parents or carers
- The Head Teacher, class teacher and INCO or EAL/EMA co-ordinator
- An interpreter if needed
- The designated 'buddies' to greet the child after the interview

What information does the family and the child need?

- The names of members of staff the child will meet in school. A copy of any 'names and faces' board in the school entrance would be useful
- Requirements for school's admissions forms
- A welcome pack, including details of daily routines and timetable activities, school policies, information about homework or reading books to be taken home etc.

- A calendar of school events, trips, holidays and occasional days
- Uniform and PE kit list with examples to show
- A list of any other clothing or equipment which the family is expected to provide
- Information about school meal and lunch time arrangements.
- Information about any support the school will put in place e.g. TA, buddies
- Information about any grants, benefits or assistance available
- Curriculum information
- General information about schools in England and Wales and about teaching methodologies e.g. play and active learning, group work, purposeful talk
- Information about Extended Schools provision and Children's Centre, if applicable
- A contact name and telephone number for the school

What information does the school need?

(It may be useful to refer to the BME Achievement 'Admissions Guidance' available from HGfL)

- The child's name and how to spell and pronounce it correctly
- Details to complete the admissions form during the interview
- Languages spoken within the family, including patois and dialects
- Language used for previous education. Literacy levels in first language if appropriate
- Language(s) learned at previous school(s) and pre-school situations
- Educational history, including age starting formal education and any significant gaps in education. Previous school records if available
- Any significant prior knowledge or experiences relevant to the National Curriculum
- Level of English acquisition (if possible to determine at this stage).
- Religion and any particular observances which the school may need to know about e.g. fasting during Ramadan, festivals
- Participation in any faith or community classes.
- Dietary requirements
- Communications with parents e.g. will an interpreter be needed? Will letter need to be translated?
- Find out about any particular interests or talents the child might have, likes and dislikes
- Find out if a pupil in Y5 or above has a bilingual dictionary to support learning in the first weeks and knows how to use it
- Find out if the parents or carers will be willing to support in class (if applicable) or provide other help such as labels in the first language for the classroom

4. Reasons for a First Language Assessment

- Skills developed in first language help to support a child's learning of a second or additional language. A child with a poorly developed first language, for whatever reason, will be disadvantaged, while a child with a well developed first language will be able to use this to support their wider understanding and learning across the curriculum.



Remember that a child will need a settling in period in order for a First Language Assessment to be effective.

5. Guidance for School Staff on Conducting First Language Assessments

The purpose of a first language assessment is to assess the pupil's linguistic competence in his or her first language, the surface fluency as well as in cognitively demanding language tasks. It should confirm if the pupil's first language ability is appropriate for his or her age and also identify areas of strength and weakness.

An interpreter will normally be needed, unless a member of staff is bilingual in the appropriate language, to explain what is required to the pupil and to interpret the responses in first language for the teacher or other staff member. An assessment is best conducted by someone who is familiar with the child so he or she is relaxed and at ease. I.e. the class teacher or SENCO/INCO

General Language Ability Assessment

Introduce the interpreter to the pupil and explain why they are there. Make sure that they are comfortable and happy to work with you. Begin with informal talk /questions e.g. journey to school, where he/she lives, his/her favourite television programmes. (See information gathering question sheet).

In order to get a full picture of a pupil's competency in his or her language, we need to assess all four areas of language i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing, depending on the pupil's age, developmental stage and his or her previous experience of schooling.

Listening

In assessing the listening skills comment on the pupil's ability to:

- Understand questions relating to everyday topics such as home /family social life, school etc.
- Understand simple instructions e.g. ask the pupil to find a book, show something
- Follow a sequence of 2/3 (or more) instructions
- Answer closed question –What? Who? When?
- Answer open questions – Why? How?
- Understand normal everyday speech
- Understand extended speech. (Take a topic the pupil has shown interest in and develop an extended statement /view/opinion yourself. Then ask the pupil questions to see if he or she has understood.)

Speaking

In assessing speaking skills comment on:

- Using 'here and now' language – ability to express basic needs (able to inform others of personal needs or use gestures to convey meaning e.g. pointing, leading by hand etc.)
- Language for describing and clarifying immediate experiences- ability to use language about a range of everyday topics, everyday experience (family interests, school etc.)
- Language of imagination - ability to tell a story with coherence showing developmental sequence - connected narrative with beginning, middle and an end.
- Describing and clarifying less immediate experiences – ability to recount an event with coherence, indicating time accurately.
- Fluency (hesitant /confident), length of utterance – single word/short phrases/extended speech.
- Clarity of speech – pronunciation, intonation, tonal differentiation.

N.B. Allow the child to express him or herself in some depth before you make your overall judgement.

Reading and writing

Ask the pupil if he or she can read/write in L1. Talk about his or her use of L1 for literacy – when does he or she use it and for what purpose? Then give him or her a short task which matches the level you judge to be appropriate.

In assessing reading skills comment on:

- Pre- reading skills such as directionality, recognition of shapes of words, ability to identify common shapes.
- Ability to read – single word /short sentences/ story / newspaper etc.
- Level of comprehension – understands literal meanings/ inferred meanings.

In assessing writing skills comment on:

- Letter/ character formation
- Ability to write – own name/single words/ simple sentences/short piece of descriptive writing (about self) short piece of narrative as appropriate

6. General Information Gathering Questions:

These questions are only for your guidance. Please feel free to add or change according to the needs of the pupil.

How old are you?
Where do you live?
Tell me about your family
What does your mother / father do?
You can also ask about his /her brothers or sisters depending upon the situation.
Tell me about your favourite food
What is your favourite TV programme/computer game and why?
What do you like playing at home and why?
Tell me about your friends. What are they like?
Who is your best friend in school?
What do you do together?

How does he/she help you?

Tell me about your school. What do you like about your school and why?

What do you not like about school and why?

Tell me about the type of music you like. Do you play an instrument?

Do you like sports? If yes, which ones? Do you play for, or support, any teams? Which sports did you do at your previous school?

Tell me/write about your previous school in your country. How is this school different from your previous school?

BME Achievement Team

First Language Assessment – Report

School: _____ Date: _____

Pupil's name: _____ Language: _____

Assessed by: _____

In relation to age related expectations:

- 1) Is the pupil's social /linguistic behaviour age-appropriate? (Body language, taking turns etc.)
- 2) Does the pupil understand a range of questions, instructions and a story, told or read in first language?
- 3) Is the pupil's speech clearly articulated?
- 4) Is the pupil able to speak accurately and at some length at a social level?
- 5) Is the pupil's vocabulary appropriate /sophisticated/limited?
- 6) Does the pupil use correct grammatical structures?
- 7) Can the pupil talk about the past, present and future using correct verbal forms?
- 8) Are there any concerns?
- 9) Any other comments about pupil's social interaction with the assessor?
- 10) Can the pupil read and write in first language?

You may wish to consider the pupil's ability outside his or her first language ability - for example:

- 11) Can the pupil complete appropriate age related mathematics tasks with limited language context?