



Integrating non-English speaking students into the school and curriculum

Handbook for schools

**Prepared by Integrate Ireland Language and
Training in collaboration with language support
teachers working in post-primary schools throughout
Ireland**

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INTRODUCTION

This handbook is based on the experiences and ideas of language support teachers working with non-English speaking students in post-primary schools throughout Ireland.

The purpose of the handbook is to answer questions that may be raised by others in the school - principal, year heads, subject teachers etc. and to raise awareness to the work of language support and its cope and limitations.



1 What is the legal status of newcomer students?

The legal status of the family is irrelevant to the students of school-going age. All students have a right to education and this is not affected by the status of their parents. Legal status does, however, become a serious issue when the student reaches third level.

- 1 A student may come from a family of **asylum seekers**. In this case the family is in an uncertain situation while waiting for the decision on their application for asylum. Parents are not entitled to work. The family may be living in direct provision (e.g. hostel, hotel etc.) and there may not be good facilities for studying or doing homework. Students living in such accommodation have more problems socializing with Irish peers because it is difficult to invite other students home with the freedom that is generally associated with teenagers.
- 2 **Separated minors** (unaccompanied children) are those teenagers who arrive in Ireland without their families. They are in the care of local Health Boards and are generally housed in hostels. At present, separated minors are located in the Dublin area only. Their way of life is entirely different to students who are living with their family unit. They must be largely self-sufficient and require considerable motivation to apply themselves to studying.
- 3 The student whose family has **refugee status** has all the rights of the Irish student. The parents are entitled to training, education and work. The family will live in rented or purchased accommodation. If the family complies with residence requirements, the student will be entitled to free third level education (should this system continue). Residence requirements are the same as for Irish families.
- 4 Students of **EU nationals** have all the rights of Irish students. In general they are in Ireland because parents are working here.

- 5 Students of **non-EU migrant** workers. The parents of these students are in Ireland on a Work Permit or Work Visa. This is generally for a specified length of time. Typical of this group is the many students whose parents are working in the hospital/medical sector. These students will possibly spend five years in Ireland and may continue or conclude their education elsewhere.



2 What is the best way to deal with the newly arrived student?

Supporting the early steps into integration in the school

Both mainstream and language support teachers can help the student achieve **social integration** in the classroom and social areas of the school as quickly as possible by:

- Ensuring that the newly arrived student can understand and use the basic language of the classroom (e.g. toilet, be quiet, take this down etc.)
- Equipping the student with knowledge of the rules and procedures of the school so that he or she does not unwittingly infringe these rules (it may be necessary to demonstrate these by miming etc.)
- Helping the student to understand different norms of behaviour that may exist in the new culture/society (in classroom, school, playground etc.)
- Helping to build the confidence and self-esteem of the student who may feel different, excluded and less able than those around him or her.

It is important that teachers throughout the school are aware that newcomer students may be in a totally alien environment and that the normal 'culture' of the school is unknown and incomprehensible to them. In many cases they will not be able to depend on parents for explanation and preparation.

Clearly there is a good case for the provision of a **short induction programme** for newcomer students to support them in gaining confidence in 'being' in a new school environment before they even begin to acquire proficiency in English. It is particularly important to remember to do this when a student joins the school during the school year.

Working with the language support teacher

It has been noted frequently that newcomer students first develop confidence in the language support class where they may be talkative and fully engaged in learning. At the same time they may be quiet, unresponsive and apparently unwilling to participate in the mainstream classroom. This is a question of security and confidence and, in this case, the mainstream subject teacher can gain insights into the student's *real* personality and ability by liaising whenever possible with the language support teacher.



3 How can we assess the language proficiency and existing education of newly-arrived students?

Trying to achieve accurate assessment of a new student on arrival is both difficult and unwise. In the *Language Training Manual* produced by IILT there is an initial interview assessment which helps to define broadly the level of the student's English language proficiency on first meeting. However, real ability and particular subject interest will only emerge over time as confidence develops.

An **on-going assessment** period should be used (for example a four-week period). During this time the language support teacher should observe the student's communicative ability, level of literacy, and coping skills in the classroom. The combination of information from the language support teacher, and any other subject teachers with whom the student is in contact, will allow an accurate profile to be identified and will highlight the potential strengths and weaknesses of the student.

It should be noted that many students are overwhelmed by the new environment in which they find themselves and their anxiety and uncertainty can initially mask their real abilities and interests.



4 What is the rôle of the language support teacher?

What is the language support teacher?

Language support teaching is sanctioned for a school on the basis of an allocation of contact hours per student in need of English language support. All information about grant assistance and sanctioning of temporary posts may be found in the booklet *Information booklet for schools on ASYLUM SEEKERS* (Department of Education and Science). Applications for grants for resources should be applied for as soon as the school meets the numbers specified. It is unusual for grants to be issued retrospectively.

The **primary responsibility** of the language support teacher is to support the student's development of **English language proficiency** so that he or she can gradually **gain access to the curriculum**, ultimately achieving the same educational opportunities as English-speaking peers by:

- Working in collaboration with the mainstream subject teacher to set relevant and achievable learning targets for each student
- Preparing the student, on an on-going basis, to access mainstream learning, initially in part and later more fully

- Helping the student to develop appropriate strategies and skills to support future formal education in general.

The responsibility of the language support teacher is to deliver a programme of English language tuition which is **based on the post-primary curriculum** (see *Language Proficiency Benchmarks IILT*) and which prepares and supports the student in:

1. Accessing classroom learning
2. Socializing with peers.

Evidence from other parts of the world clearly indicates that the development of the language essential for school learning and socialization provides a sound basis for the student's **ongoing acquisition** of language outside the classroom. It is essential, therefore, that language support in the school is firmly focused on the linguistic demands of life in the school and curriculum learning.

The language support teacher, however, **cannot teach the curriculum** and this remains the rôle and responsibility of the various subject teachers. Students spend the greater part of their week in mainstream classes and attend language support for a small proportion of specialized class time. The benefit of this time, which is focused on English language learning, can be maximized through **liaison and a flow of information** between the mainstream subject teachers and the language support teacher.

At present, each student requiring English language support is allocated a two-year period of support on a withdrawal basis. Whether the student begins school in September or at a later point of the year, he/she is entitled to **two full school years of support**. It is critically important that **the student does not lose language support time** during these two years as this will inevitably have a negative effect on his or her progress and ultimate potential.

When a student has additional difficulties such as a low literacy level, it may be appropriate for him or her to receive **learning support** after this time.



5 What basic resources and facilities are necessary for effective language support?

In order to support continuity of learning, it is important that **a room is dedicated** to language support. This allows for posters to be kept on the walls to support on-going learning and for the collection of suitable resources such as books, posters, real-life objects, tape recorder, computer etc.

Where possible, **liaison between the language support and learning support teachers** (where there is a resource teacher in the school) is very valuable as much

material used for learning support is suitable for different stages of language learning. Learning support teachers have been very helpful in providing this support in schools throughout the country.



6 The mainstream teacher – challenges and possibilities

For the mainstream subject teacher, the introduction of non-English speaking students into the class is a challenge. Drawing the newcomer student into classroom activities can require time, planning and thought. However, **close cooperation with the language support teacher** can result in the student being prepared for classroom activities so that he/she is able to work on the same things as peers, perhaps in a reduced or slower way.

If the subject teacher informs the language support teacher about **forthcoming themes**, units etc. then it will be possible for the student to gain some access, even in part, to what is planned for the class. If the subject teacher can also keep the language support teacher informed about how the student is reacting in class, coping with classroom language, interaction etc. then these matters can also be addressed in language support sessions.

It should be noted, however, that in the limited contact time that the language support teacher has with each student it is not possible, or appropriate, for the entire curriculum to be visited, even in an introductory way. It is rather a case of opening the doors to learning so that the student can gradually begin to gain more and more benefit from mainstream classes.



7 How do we bring the new student into engagement with the curriculum?

The language support programme, based on the *English Language Proficiency Benchmarks for post-primary learners*, reflects the thematic demands of the post-primary curriculum. The development of the Benchmarks was informed by a focus group of post-primary teachers working with non-English speaking students.

The sole purpose of language support is to allow the student to gain access to mainstream learning and to understand and socialize within the community of the school. Language proficiency in other areas will develop naturally as the student interacts with peers.

Students with very low levels of English language proficiency

Those students with very low levels of English on entry, below A1 level, will **require proportionately more language support time** if they are to make any progress in accessing mainstream subjects.

It is possible that their formal learning abilities may be further reduced due to interruptions in their schooling or little previous formal education. In this case, concentration on developing English language skills and integration with the mainstream through subjects such as Art, P.E. and Music should be the first option. As language and learning skills develop the student should attend carefully-selected subject classes.

Low levels of literacy

The problem is magnified if the student is **not literate in the Roman alphabet**; or has **never gained literacy in any language**. Students have presented with this additional complication right through the educational system. In this case the language support teacher will first have to address the question of literacy and the student may also attend the learning support teacher. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, that the student should be assigned **exercises to do in the mainstream classroom** to support language and literacy development. These activities may not relate to what is happening otherwise in the classroom.

It should be noted that students who are already literate in another alphabet will make the transition to the Roman alphabet relatively easily because they understand the concept of sound symbol relationships.

IILT has produced **basic English language learning activities** for post-primary students which support literacy and numeracy development.

Students with higher levels of English proficiency

For those students whose English language proficiency levels are at A2 or B1 on the language proficiency benchmarks, their principal language support needs will relate to the **demands of different subject areas**, the **development of strategies to deal with text** and the **development/improvement of writing skills**. IILT has produced materials based on Junior Cycle textbooks in four subject areas to demonstrate how school textbooks may be used for language support.



8 Why record students' progress?

It is vitally important that a record is kept of every student's linguistic development. This development is key to all future educational achievement which is a critical issue at post-primary level. Language support teachers record achievement in checklists which provide an **instant overview** of what the student 'can do'. Additional information from observations by mainstream subject teachers is important to the development of this profile.

Subject choice

The **combined view of language support and subject teachers** should be used to help inform appropriate subject choices for a student in order to give him/her the best opportunity of achieving success. Subjects at second level may be divided into three categories of challenge for non-English speaking students.

- 1 Those subjects which have broadly **universal application** and these include Mathematics and the Sciences. They may also include subjects with an applied element such as Home Economics and Woodwork.
- 2 The subjects which have a **heavy cultural load** which includes History and English literature
- 3 The subjects which are well supported in text books with pictures, graphs etc. but which have **specialized terminology** such as Geography

Engagement with **practical subjects** may be undertaken at an early stage but not until the student has a clear understanding of the **safety issues** inherent in the practical component. Liaison between the subject teacher and the language support teacher can be used as an effective means of communicating safety matters. This information can be dealt with in language support until the student can clearly understand what is involved.



9 When should language support be brought to an end?

The stage of linguistic development reached by the student will determine the amount of language support that will be necessary. This will allow the decision to be made to reduce or terminate language support. It is important that the student engages fully with carefully-selected mainstream subject learning as soon as possible.

However, even after language support has ended, there are occasions when the non-English speaking student may need reassurance or some particular support. Many full-time language support teachers have introduced an **'open' period** each week when students can come to discuss a particular language difficulty or can be referred by the subject teacher for some extra support. This system has worked well.



10 What about public examinations?

Mother tongue examinations

From 2004 examinations will be available in the Leaving Certificate in **Arabic**, **Japanese** and **Russian** in addition to the European Languages that are currently available.

Language examinations can also be provided in the Leaving Certificate for students with the following mother tongues – Dutch, Portuguese, Swedish, Finnish, Modern Greek and Danish. It is necessary to make application to the DES in advance so that an examination paper may be set. These examinations test **mother tongue** knowledge, not the level of knowledge of a foreign language learner.

Marking scripts

Inevitably newcomer students in post-primary schools will face the challenge of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. At present, the only concession is the permission for non-English speaking students to bring a translating dictionary into the examination. In addition, however, examiners when marking scripts can consult with their supervisor in all cases when they feel that another view is necessary in the interest of fairness.



11 Entitlements and entry to third level

Entitlement to entry to third level depends, in the first place, on the legal status of the student. Length of residency in Ireland is taken into account with regard to the payment of fees and this condition applies to Irish students as well.

Trinity College Dublin

No concessions are made for students seeking entry to TCD. They must fulfil the matriculation requirements of six Leaving Certificate subjects, appropriate points for the course they wish to take and a second language.

National University of Ireland

The NUI (UCD, UCC, UCG and Maynooth) accepts exemption from Irish on the basis of 1) the age of the student and the stage at which he/she came to school in

Ireland (birth certificate necessary) or 2) the provision of a Certificate of Exemption from Irish which has been obtained by the school.

Prospective students must fulfil the six subject Leaving Certificate requirement and relevant points for the course they wish to enter. A foreign language is required and this may be certified by the provision of examination certificates from the student's country of origin.

In the absence of relevant documentation a student may seek an exemption and such applications will be considered by the Admissions Officers on a case-by-case basis. It is important to address this issue at an early stage by making contact with the National University of Ireland.



12 Creating an intercultural school community

With the introduction of students from different cultural background to the community of the school, issues can arise that were not evident before. The failure of newcomer students to integrate into the school may be due to ethnic or religious constraints that preclude involvement in many activities or may be due to racist attitudes on the part of other students.

In recent years material has been developed to support the integration of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The NCCA has produced cross-curriculum guidelines for schools.

IILT has also produced a set of simple checklists which allow a principal to assess what actions are already being taken in the school and to explore other possibilities for making the school more interculturally aware. These checklists are included at the end of this booklet.

The language support teacher is an invaluable resource for mediating activities to contribute to intercultural understanding. He/she gains many insights into the lives, traditions, beliefs and values of newcomer students through close contact in small language support groups. Regular or sporadic involvement of the language support teacher in mainstream school activities has proved to be very effective in many schools.



13 What is the language support programme?

A grant for the provision of teaching hours for language support is sanctioned for a post-primary school as follows.

Students in need of language support	No. of extra hours	Students in need of language support	No. of extra hours
1	3	8	12
2	4	9	13.5
3	6	10	15
4	8	11	16.5
5	10	12	18
6	10	13	19.5
7	10.5	14	22 (Full Post)

Details of where to apply and the grants available for additional resources may be found in the booklet **Information booklet for schools on ASYLUM SEEKERS** (Department of Education and Science). Sanction for teachers/teaching hours and grants for resources should be applied for as soon as the school meets the numbers specified. It is unusual for grants to be issued retrospectively.

The responsibility of the language support teacher is to deliver a programme of English language tuition which is based on the demands of the post-primary curriculum and which prepares and supports the student in 1) accessing classroom learning, and 2) socializing with peers and understanding the norms of the school and local community.



14 What is the role of Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT)

Integrate Ireland Language and Training was set up by the Department of Education and Science in 1999. Among other activities it is responsible for the development of materials to support the learning of English as a second language in schools (primary and post-primary); and the presentation of materials, methodology and supplementary aids via an ongoing in-service training programme for language support teachers.

Before the in-service programme began, the Department of Education and Science commissioned IILT to analyze the linguistic demands of the primary and post-primary curricula and to identify the language needed by non-English-speaking non-national students in order to participate fully in the educational process. The *English Language Proficiency Benchmarks* which reflect the linguistic demands of the primary and post-primary curricula respectively have been in use in schools throughout the country since their introduction in the autumn of 2000. These Benchmarks form the basis for language support, assessment and monitoring of newcomer students in schools.



15 How do we deal with apparent psychological problems?

It is important not to assume that **language learning difficulties** are manifestations of psychological or learning problems. A particular example of this is the ‘Silent Period’ that young students may pass through when immersed in an unknown language. During this time they fail to communicate while absorbing and coming to terms with a new language. While the Silent Period is more closely associated with younger studentren, there is evidence that **teenagers may also become uncommunicative** during the early stages of entry to post-primary schools.

If there is evidence of real **psychological or behavioural problems**, the same procedure should be followed as for an Irish student. For **behavioural problems** the Local Health Boards should be contacted. For **learning problems**, NEPS should be consulted. In any event, parental permission must be sought in the first instance and **seeking parental permission for assessment can be problematic**. Due to their vulnerability, for example as asylum seekers, some parents are unwilling to allow their student to be ‘questioned’. In some societies there is a considerable stigma attached to psychological matters and this may also be an obstacle to gaining parental permission.



16 Can we get access to interpreters?

The Department of Education and Science will fund the provision of an interpreter but only in **exceptional situations of extreme concern**. The problem should be discussed in advance with the Department of Education and Science, before any decisions are made.



17 How can we communicate effectively with parents

Achieving satisfactory communication with parents can present some difficulty, particularly if parents have little English themselves. A Parent-Teacher meeting report form has been produced by IILT and is intended to provide some support when communication seems impossible.

Parent-teacher days

Parent-teacher days can be confusing to parents who don't understand the system and cannot find which 'queues' to join in order to meet the appropriate teachers. It is suggested that a reception procedure for newcomer parents on these days would help them to find their way around so that both teachers and parents can gain from the meeting. It is important that the Language Support teacher should also meet parents during these sessions.

Ensuring equality of opportunity for non-English speaking students in post-primary schools.

Introduction

The integration of students into the community of any school and, by implication, supporting their engagement with the curriculum and with education in general, frequently implies an examination of the procedures and structures already present in the school to ensure that they provide an appropriately inclusive environment.

Checklists

This set of checklists has been derived from practice in a number of countries where experience of newcomers is extensive. It is likely that many of the points on the checklists are already in place in Irish schools, or can be implemented with relative ease. Some, however, may be more difficult to plan, organise or implement.

The checklists are intended to provide a quick and easy means for school principals to identify the extent to which a school is supporting newcomers and, at the same time, supporting teaching staff in the challenge of working with students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds can place constraints on integration and learning.

The checklists are categorised under the headings, *environment at a whole-school level*, *assessment and placement*, *inclusivity in the subject classroom*, and *provision of language support*.

Future directions

Inevitably, as experience with a multicultural environment grows, principals, teachers and students themselves will be able to contribute to a more extensive view of how to address this situation effectively and with the best results for all concerned. However, the path to good practice must begin at some point with the ultimate objective of identifying what is 'best practice' for the Irish context.

**CHECKLIST 1:
ENVIRONMENT AT A WHOLE-SCHOOL LEVEL**

		YES	NOT YET	NOT APPLICABLE
1	Notices, display material etc. acknowledge and provide positive images of different ethnic groups			
2	The reception area has multilingual welcome notices, a world map indicating where students come from (including different parts of Ireland), photographs showing the diversity of the school population, a list or graph indicating the range of mother tongues represented in the school etc.			
3	There is a clear and sympathetic reception process in place			
4	Parents of new students receive the 'booklet for parents' produced by the Dept of Justice and IILT			
5	New students receive a 'starter kit'			
6	Classroom and library material reflects positive images of ethnic and cultural diversity			
7	Artwork reflects the cultural profile of the school			
8	Games and hobby activities in the school can adjust flexibly to support inclusion.			
9	A fund is available to support extra activities (trips, equipment etc.)			
10	Food served in the school cafeteria includes items that meet the cultural and dietary needs of students			
11	Special events are scheduled throughout the year to mark all cultures and heritages represented in the school			
12	A planned peer mediation programme is in place*			
13	Students who are already bilingual are given training to act as assistants*			
	Anti-racism education is included as a natural part of the curriculum			

**some excellent models exist and can be adjusted to meet the needs of Irish schools*

**CHECKLIST 2:
ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT**

		YES	NOT YET	NOT APPLICABLE
1	There is a planned procedure for assessment of each new student			
2	The student's English language proficiency is assessed in relation to the Language Proficiency Benchmarks (IILT)			
3	On-going assessment in different subject areas is used to determine educational background (when this is unclear)			
4	Opportunity to learn (e.g. language/cultural constraints in different subjects) is considered when subject choices are made			
5	Subject choices are kept under observation for an initial period			
6	An assessment portfolio is maintained for each student from the day of arrival which focuses on, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. psychosocial adjustment, 2. language learning 3. continuity of academic learning 			

**CHECKLIST 3:
INCLUSIVITY IN THE SUBJECT CLASSROOM**

		YES	NOT YET	NOT APPLICABLE
1	There is a protocol for introduction of new students into different subject classes			
2	All students and teachers are aware of the importance of pronouncing the names of new students correctly			
3	Newcomers are introduced to other students who speak the same language where possible			
4	The teacher makes personal contact with a newcomer at least once during each class			
5	Teachers use team-building activities as a natural part of the class programme			
6	Students often work in collaborative groups			
7	Classroom routines are predictable and explicit			
8	Classroom displays are inclusive			

**CHECKLIST 4:
PROVISION OF LANGUAGE SUPPORT**

		YES	NOT YET	NOT APPLICABLE
1	Language support is provided in relation to the <i>Language Proficiency Benchmarks for Post-primary Schools</i>			
2	The amount of support to be provided is calculated with reference to the guidelines produced by IILT			
3	The development of English language proficiency is monitored in relation to performance in subject areas (see checklists provided by IILT)			
4	Liaison between subject teachers and language support teachers is used to focus the programme of support			
5	Feedback is provided to subject teachers			