

EAL Policy



RIVERSIDE BRIDGE SCHOOL
INSPIRE, EMPOWER, ACHIEVE

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1. Introduction

Riverside Bridge School is a specialist all-through provision for pupils with complex learning needs, communication differences, autism, sensory processing needs, medical conditions, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many of our pupils also use English as an Additional Language (EAL), and a growing number come from multilingual, multicultural families. This diversity enriches the school community and provides opportunities for celebrating a wide range of cultural identities.

The purpose of this policy is to outline how Riverside Bridge School identifies, assesses, and supports pupils who use EAL within the unique context of a complex-needs special school. Our pupils' communication profiles vary significantly; many are non-verbal, pre-verbal, or rely on alternative communication pathways such as signing, AAC, gestures, sensory cues, or sounds. As such, "EAL" is understood through a broader lens, not simply the acquisition of English, but how pupils engage with communication, identity, and culture in the ways available to them.

We are committed to creating an inclusive environment where every language, culture, and family identity is respected and celebrated. Our policy aligns with our Total Communication ethos, our SCERTS-informed practice, and our pre-formal, semi-formal, and formal pathways. It also reflects our duty under the UNCRC to ensure pupils' rights to language, culture, and identity are preserved and championed.

2. Definition

A pupil is considered to have English as an Additional Language when English is not their primary language at home or within the family unit. This includes:

- pupils who speak or understand one or more languages other than English at home
- pupils who are newly arrived in the UK from non-English-speaking countries
- pupils exposed mainly to another language through family or community
- pupils from multilingual households

At Riverside Bridge School, many EAL pupils also have profound communication differences. Therefore, we look beyond spoken language and examine:

- the pupil's home-language exposure;
- the communication methods used at home (gesture, objects, AAC, vocalisations);

- the pupil's cultural identity and sensory preferences;
- emotional responses connected to familiarity, predictability, and home routines;
- how home languages interact with their communication profile.

We view multilingualism as a valuable asset. Home languages offer scaffolds for emotional regulation, attachment, identity formation, and communication development. Our practice reinforces that learning English does not mean diminishing or replacing a pupil's home language.

3. Identification and Assessment

Because our pupils have diverse and complex learning and communication needs, EAL identification requires a sensitive, holistic approach. Identification begins during the Local Authority consultation stage and is strengthened at the parent/carer admission meeting.

Assessment draws on multiple sources:

- EHCP documentation, medical reports, and supporting assessments;
- parent/carer interviews and cultural background information;
- home-language context and how communication happens in the family;
- baseline pathway assessments upon entry;
- observations by class team and SaLT;
- multi-agency reports from previous settings.

We use the DfE proficiency codes (A–E, N) only as guiding descriptors, not rigid assessments.

| Code | Name | Description |
|------|------------------------------|--|
| A | New to English | Minimal or no literacy in English; may use first language for learning; needs considerable EAL support. |
| B | Early Acquisition | May be able to follow more complex written English; needs a significant amount of EAL support to access the curriculum. |
| C | Developing Competence | Copes with familiar words/word patterns and able to extract basic meaning from a familiar text; requires ongoing EAL support to access the curriculum fully. |
| D | Competent | Reads accurately but has difficulty interpreting complex texts related to the curriculum; needs some/occasional EAL support. |
| E | Fluent | Can operate across the curriculum to a level of competence equivalent to that of a pupil who uses English as their first language; operates without EAL support. |

Due to the complexity of needs across our school, most of our pupils do not fit neatly into national codes, especially those who:

- are non-verbal;
- use sensory communication;
- have limited receptive language in any language;
- use AAC as a primary communication form;
- have emerging communication rather than conventional spoken language.

Therefore, assessment focuses on:

- receptive understanding within English and symbolic systems;
- meaning-making through sensory experiences;
- emotional and regulation needs linked to communication;
- use of AAC or alternative systems;
- consistency of responses across contexts;
- ability to generalise communication strategies;
- engagement and interaction during learning.

Assessment is ongoing, with progress monitored at least termly through pathway assessment frameworks, SaLT reviews, class team evaluations, and Annual Reviews.

4. Admission and Induction at Riverside Bridge School

A personalised induction process ensures families feel welcomed, valued, and understood.

During admission:

- the family's linguistic, cultural, and religious background is explored without assumptions;
- parents/carers share how the pupil communicates at home, including the languages, gestures, cues, or behaviours they understand;
- interpreters are arranged when required to ensure clarity, dignity, and equity;
- staff gather key information that can support co-regulation and emotional readiness, such as familiar songs, words, objects, routines, or sensory preferences;

- families are informed about our Total Communication approach, including symbols, signing, AAC, sensory cues, timetables, and structured routines;
- class teams create personalised materials for transition, which may include home-language labels, dual-language symbols, or familiar auditory cues to reduce anxiety.

The pupil's home culture and language are integrated into their learning environment wherever appropriate to strengthen emotional regulation and continuity between home and school.

5. Provision

EAL provision at Riverside Bridge School is embedded within our universal teaching model and closely integrated into our communication systems. We recognise that communication is multimodal and personalised, and this principle underpins all EAL support.

Provision includes:

- highly differentiated teaching across pathways;
- multi-sensory approaches that reduce reliance on verbal language;
- Total Communication strategies, including symbols, signing, AAC, eye-gaze, tactile cues, and objects of reference;
- culturally inclusive resources, stories, visuals, and artefacts that reflect diverse identities;
- dual-language visuals when appropriate to support transition and emotional connection;
- environmental cues to reduce linguistic load, such as consistent routines, clear symbols, colour-coded zones, and object-based transitions;
- language-rich experiences, not limited to spoken English but including gesture, prosody, rhythm, sensory stories, dance, music, and co-active exploration.

For many pupils, the priority is not English acquisition, but functional communication, co-regulation, and symbolic understanding. EAL support is therefore inseparable from communication support.

6. Teaching and Learning

Teaching EAL pupils within a complex-needs setting requires sensitivity, expertise, and adaptation. Staff understand that language learning is highly dependent on:

emotional regulation

- predictability
- sensory processing
- relationship-building
- familiarity and trust
- symbolic development

Effective teaching includes:

- clear and consistent routines with visual and sensory anchors;
- modelling communication through AAC, signing, facial expression, gesture, and non-verbal approaches;
- using objects of reference, sensory cues and tactile exploration to support meaning-making;
- repeating and embedding key learning in practical, functional contexts;
- allowing extended processing time, recognising that pupils may need more time to respond;
- breaking down tasks into small, accessible steps;
- removing unnecessary verbal complexity so that language does not become a barrier;
- using pupils' home-language knowledge to support emotional comfort and engagement;
- incorporating cultural experiences into sensory stories, art, music, cooking, dance, and celebrations;
- ensuring pupils can engage through preferred communication modes, not solely spoken language.

The goal is to ensure our pupils understand, express themselves, and access the curriculum in the way that best fits their needs.

7. Roles and Responsibilities

Because Riverside Bridge School does not employ a designated EAL Coordinator, responsibility is distributed across the school.

Senior Leadership Team

SLT ensures all systems, processes, and expectations around EAL are implemented consistently. This includes oversight of:

- admissions and accurate recording of EAL status;
- staff training related to communication and cultural responsiveness;
- monitoring of pupils' experience and provision;
- ensuring the environment remains inclusive, diverse, and accessible.

Teachers

Teachers lead the planning and adaptation of lessons to ensure all EAL pupils can access learning and communication opportunities.

Teachers are responsible for:

- embedding EAL considerations into personalised learning and pathway planning;
- ensuring that communication systems and resources are culturally responsive;
- capturing meaningful evidence of progress;
- working collaboratively with families to share strategies and feedback;
- ensuring that dual-language or culturally relevant materials are used where appropriate.

Support Staff

Support staff play a crucial role in modelling communication, supporting co-regulation, reinforcing language strategies, and ensuring pupils experience consistency and clarity throughout the day.

Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT)

SaLT provide essential specialist input, including:

- assessing communication needs that overlap with EAL considerations;
- advising on AAC adaptations, symbol use, or sensory communication;
- ensuring communication plans reflect home-language context when relevant as well as preferred communication mode, current level of attention and engagement, receptive and expressive communication abilities, sensory and behavioural factors impacting communication;
- supporting staff to interpret communication behaviours through a culturally informed lens

Home Language Preservation - The home language enriches cognitive development, strengthens identity, and does not hinder the acquisition of English. At our parental workshops, we encourage the use of Home Language(s) by supporting families to continue using their home language for emotional and relational connection.

Where feasible, we also incorporate home-language key words and pictures into communication supports

Whole-School Responsibility

Because communication permeates all routines, transitions, and learning activities, every member of staff contributes to providing a linguistically inclusive environment for EAL learners.

8. Monitoring and Recording

EAL status is recorded on Bromcom from the point of admission. Staff ensure that any new information relating to home languages or cultural background is added to the system promptly.

Monitoring includes:

- termly pathway assessments;
- communication profile reviews;
- SaLT reports;
- annual Reviews and multi-agency meetings;
- pupil progress meetings;
- parental engagement and feedback.

Progress for EAL pupils is not judged on English acquisition alone. Instead, we evaluate:

- understanding of routines;
- emotional readiness and regulation;
- functional communication;
- engagement in learning;
- symbol comprehension;
- interaction with peers and adults;
- ability to express needs, preferences, and feelings.
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A holistic approach ensures that progress is meaningful, fair, and reflective of each pupil's abilities.

9. Pupils who are Looked After (LAC) and EAL

Pupils who are Looked After and also use EAL may have unique vulnerabilities, such as disrupted attachment, trauma, displacement, or interrupted schooling. Staff work closely with the Designated Teacher, Safeguarding Team, Virtual School, and external agencies to ensure that:

- cultural identity is protected and nurtured;
- home-language connections are maintained where possible;
- communication systems reinforce safety, predictability, and emotional regulation;
- additional pastoral support is provided sensitively
- education plans reflect linguistic and emotional needs.

10. Communication with Families

Strong partnerships with families are essential. We recognise that parents of EAL pupils may face barriers to communication, such as unfamiliarity with SEND terminology, language differences, or systemic pressures.

We ensure that:

- interpreters are provided for key meetings;
- forms, letters, and reports are explained clearly;
- staff take time to understand family traditions, values, routines, and communication expectations;
- families are supported to maintain their home language;
- cultural practices are respected and included in school celebrations where appropriate;
- parents/carers are encouraged to share home-language words, songs, objects, or sensory resources that comfort or motivate their pupil.

Respectful, accessible communication strengthens trust and improves pupil outcomes.

11. Resources

A wide range of resources support EAL pupils at Riverside Bridge School, including:

- Total Communication Toolkit;
- widgit symbols and multilingual symbol sets;
- AAC devices (Grid, LAMP, Proloquo, GoTalk, eye-gaze devices);
- multicultural storybooks, sensory books, objects, and artefacts;
- dual-language environmental print where appropriate;
- sensory stories that reflect different cultures;
- visual timetables with home-language references where helpful;
- national guidance (NALDIC, Bell Foundation) adapted for SEND contexts.

Our resource base evolves continuously alongside pupil needs.