



An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Meeting Additional Language Needs: Whole-school and Classroom Approaches for Inclusive Language Learning

Findings from Primary and
Post-primary school inspections of
English as an Additional Language
February 2024

Foreword from the Chief Inspector



I am pleased to present *Meeting Additional Language Needs: Whole-school and Classroom Approaches for Inclusive Language Learning* on behalf of the Department of Education Inspectorate. Inspection is a key component of the quality assurance of education provision in Ireland. Its focus is on promoting improvement in the learning and wellbeing of children and young people, and on advancing goals of equity and inclusion. We share findings from inspection with the education system to further the national education, inclusion and equity goals to which educators and policy makers in Ireland aspire.

This report provides an analysis of, and reflection on, findings from school inspections of English as an additional language (EAL) undertaken in the latter half of 2023. Ireland is a multicultural country with many children and young people learning EAL and with many schools working to support them on their learning journey.

To reach their full potential, the children and young people require particular teaching and learning approaches in order to develop their language skills and to progress through the curriculum. Effective provision involves the creation of an environment where they feel welcome and valued for who they are, assessment of learning needs using valid assessment approaches, clearly identified targets for improvement, and effective teaching approaches complemented by additional support as required.

The inspection findings show that primary and post-primary schools are, in general, very welcoming and inclusive places of learning. They show that many schools have good or very good systems in place to support the learning of EAL. Some aspects of provision were less than satisfactory in some schools.

The Inspectorate hopes that by evaluating and reporting fairly and objectively on the quality of provision to the schools themselves, to Ministers and their Departments, to the various services that support schools and to the public, it can assist the Irish education system to continue to provide high-quality learning for this and future generations of children and young people. Our common objective is to improve the learning and life experiences of all children and young people. I trust this report will contribute to that goal.

I also want to say thank you to all the children and young people who shared their views and ideas about the work of their schools during the inspections. We value their views and engagement highly, and we look forward to supporting schools and the education system to respond to the perspectives expressed.

Yvonne Keating
Chief Inspector
February 2024.

Contents

1. Context of provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL)	1
1.1 Teaching supports for EAL in schools	2
1.2 Policy supports for EAL across the education system	4
2. Profile of the schools inspected	8
2.1 Inspection of EAL provision	8
2.2 Primary schools	9
2.3 Post-primary schools	10
2.4 Total EAL allocations in the primary and post-primary schools inspected	10
2.5 Legacy EAL posts	11
3. Assessment and target-setting	12
3.1 Overall quality of assessment	12
3.2 Assessments aligned to the CEFR	14
3.3 Quality of target-setting processes	14
4. Teaching and learning	16
4.1 Whole-school structures to support EAL	16
4.2 Maintenance of and support for home languages	18
4.3 Teaching and learning in mainstream settings	20
4.4 Teaching and learning in support settings	22
4.5 Schools' engagement with <i>Oide</i> and NCCA	25
5. Other relevant issues highlighted during the inspections	27
5.1 Assessment instruments	27
5.2 Allocation of EAL teachers	27
5.3 Teacher supply	28
5.4 Irish-medium schools	28
5.5 Welcoming and support measures	29
6. Conclusions and recommendations	30
6.1 Conclusions	30
6.2 Towards improvement in teaching, assessment, and target-setting for inclusive language learning	33

1. Context of provision for English as an Additional Language (EAL)

The Department of Education Statement of Strategy¹ commits the Department to supporting the provision of high-quality education and to improving learning experiences to meet the needs of all children and young people. The Statement of Strategy also highlights the importance of ensuring equity of opportunity in education and supporting all children and young people to fulfil their potential.

Ireland is evolving as a multi-cultural, multi-lingual nation with an outward-looking global perspective and schools reflect this diversity. In this context, a significant number of children and young people in primary and post-primary schools speak languages other than English and come from diverse cultural backgrounds. The diverse nature of our society also means that many schools have children and young people whose mother tongue is neither English nor Irish and whose home language is different from the language of instruction of their school. The presence of these children and young people in Irish classrooms enhances teaching and learning experiences by providing rich and diverse opportunities to develop the linguistic skills, knowledge, dispositions and attitudes of all students. The integration of a wide variety of home languages in classroom experiences can support every child and young person to develop an understanding and appreciation of diversity. This, in turn, can foster greater social cohesion and positive dispositions towards other languages and cultures.

Children and young people learning EAL gain significant benefit from specific teaching and learning approaches in order to access the curriculum and achieve their potential in school. This report looks at the educational contexts for children and young people learning EAL and it comments on the quality and effectiveness of current provision in primary and post-primary schools.

The research literature highlights a number of aspects of provision that schools should consider when addressing the needs of children and young people learning EAL. These include school culture and environment, effective assessment practices and inclusive teaching approaches that are appropriate in responding to their language needs. An inclusive and welcoming school environment, which openly respects and celebrates diversity, can enable children and young people with EAL needs to optimise their learning² and to feel a sense of belonging. This accords with the Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2019)³ which emphasises the need for children and

¹ Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2021-2023. Available [here](#).

² Bartlett, L., Mendenhall, M. and Ghaffar-Kucher, A. 2017. Culture in acculturation: Refugee youths' schooling experiences in international schools in New York City. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 60, 109-119.

³ Department of Education and Skills, 2019. Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2019-2025. Available [here](#).

young people to experience a sense of belonging and to feel safe, connected and supported in school.

Effective assessment of linguistic ability is important for identifying the language learning needs of children and young people, for setting appropriate language learning targets for them and for monitoring their progress in attaining those targets⁴.

The literature outlines two distinct sets of language skills that teachers should consider in addressing EAL needs⁵:

- i. **The language for everyday social interactions, referred to as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS):** Children and young people acquire these skills through immersion in the language of the school and of the wider environment. It is important that children and young people who require support to develop their English language skills can learn in mainstream classrooms with peers who are native speakers of English in a scaffolded, immersive environment. Their full involvement in all aspects of school life is an important factor in supporting them to acquire effective communication skills as encompassed in BICS.
- ii. **The set of language skills and abilities needed for understanding and expressing concepts and ideas to access and experience the curriculum:** These educational and linguistic competencies are referred to as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and require significant fluency in English. Appropriately tailored and responsive teaching and learning strategies are important to support the acquisition of CALP.

The Department of Education provides schools with dedicated resources to support children and young people who are learning EAL. These resources are provided to schools to enable them to support children and young people to access the full breadth of the curriculum and to become successful learners.

1.1 Teaching supports for EAL in schools

The Department of Education provides all schools with a Special Education Teaching (SET) allocation. This resource is a unified allocation to support teaching and learning based on each school's educational profile. The guidelines⁶ on the use of the SET allocation advise that schools may use this additional resource for children and young people who have identified special educational needs as well as children and young people learning EAL. The inclusion of EAL in the SET allocation was part of an initiative to allow schools to provide EAL support on a small scale from within their SET allocations. However, the greater

⁴ Thommessen, S. A. O. T., Corcoran, P. and Todd, B. K. 2017. Voices rarely heard: Personal construct assessments of Sub-Saharan unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee youth in England. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 81, 293-300.

⁵ Cummins, J. 1979. 'Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters', *Working papers on Bilingualism*, 19, 121-129.

⁶ Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (2017)
Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (2017)

recognition of special educational needs and increased diagnosis and prevalence rates in the education system mean that this has largely not been possible.

It is also important that schools appreciate that children and young people with EAL needs do not automatically have special educational needs. Conflating EAL with special educational needs can lead to misconceptions regarding the abilities, potential and appropriate supports for children and young people learning EAL.

Separate from the SET allocation, schools that had high numbers of children and young people in receipt of EAL support received extra EAL teaching resources. The Department of Education based this allocation on the number of temporary EAL posts needed by the school to meet the existing language learning needs. For example, a school that had four temporary EAL posts received three permanent EAL posts in 2012/13. These are referred to as legacy posts. In total, the Department of Education provided 429 legacy posts to schools: 378 in primary schools and 51 in post-primary schools.

In 2022, when the enrolment of children and young people from Ukraine commenced, the Department of Education provided additional resources to support schools in meeting the needs of the children and young people arriving in Ireland from other countries. The enhanced resources comprised additional EAL hours based on the number of children and young people arriving in Ireland who had EAL needs.

Under the New Entrant Allocation Scheme (NEA)⁷ the Department provided 1,470 additional whole-time equivalent (WTE) posts, which included 1,034 posts in primary schools and 436 posts in post-primary schools.

Schools may appeal their EAL allocation to an independent staffing appeals board. This was designed to provide enhanced support to schools that had high numbers of children and young people who had received EAL support for two years or more, and who continued to experience significant difficulties with English and in accessing the curriculum through English⁸. The Department has allocated 233 WTE posts under the appeals process in the 2023/24 school year: 205 in primary schools and 28 in post-primary schools. These posts are in addition to the posts allocated under the NEA.

In summary, all schools receive a SET allocation that may be used to assist children and young people who need support with English in order to access the curriculum. In addition, a school may have all or some of the following additional resources:

- Legacy EAL posts, based on high numbers of children and young people learning English as an additional language, approved in 2012/2013
- EAL allocation through the NEA scheme, on the basis of new entrants enrolling in the school in the years 2022/23 and 2023/24

⁷ This scheme applies to the enrolment of Ukrainian pupils and to all pupils for whom English is an additional language.

⁸ Registering less than level B1 (level 3) on a standardised proficiency test in English.

- EAL extra allocation based on the outcome of the EAL appeals process.

The total Department of Education allocation to support EAL needs in schools, in the current school year to date⁹, stands at 2,132 WTEs. This allocation is broken down as follows:

Table 1.1 Total Department of Education allocation to support EAL needs October 2023

	Primary	Post-Primary	Total
EAL legacy posts	378	51	429
NEA scheme	1,034	436	1,470
EAL Appeals Process	205	28	233
Total	1,617	515	2,132

In addition to the bespoke EAL teaching support, the Department's Special Education Section manages an Additional Temporary Special Education Support Scheme. This scheme is for schools with enrolments of children and young people from Ukraine, international protection applicants (IPAS) and children with recognised status.

This scheme is designed to ensure that children and young people can continue their education in the most inclusive environments possible. The scheme provides additional special education teaching hours and additional special-needs assistant (SNA) hours, based on graduated thresholds of additional enrolments. The thresholds are revised approximately every six weeks to take account of changes in enrolments.

At the time of publication, a total of 225 temporary SET posts (127 in primary schools and 98 in post-primary schools) and 305 SNA posts (168 in primary schools and 137 in post-primary schools)¹⁰ have been allocated under this scheme.

1.2 Policy supports for EAL across the education system

Curriculum

The primary resource to inform teaching and learning for all children and young people, including those with EAL needs, is the curriculum. In primary schools, the vision, principles, key competencies and statements on learning, teaching and assessment contained in the Primary Curriculum Framework guide teachers' practice. The Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) provides specific reference to the value of linguistic diversity and supports learning in children's home languages. The language curriculum also supports teachers to facilitate enriching learning experiences where pupils share their knowledge and awareness of languages, engage in language activities and learn from each other.

⁹ Figures as of 15 February 2024

¹⁰ Figures from Special Education Section as of 8 January 2024

The principles,¹¹ the statements of learning and the key skills of Junior Cycle should inform teaching and learning for all students at Junior Cycle. Students in Senior Cycle may have an opportunity to complete the Transition Year Programme if the school offers the programme. All students should follow either a combination of subjects from the Leaving Certificate Established Programme and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme or the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme.

All resources, including teaching and non-teaching resources, should be used to enable children and young people to access the appropriate curriculum. Additional resources should be used to complement the curriculum and should not replace it. The main additional resources are available from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and *Oide*: the support service for teachers and school leaders¹².

Additional Resources from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

Assessment toolkits to support primary and post-primary English language assessment are accessible on the NCCA website. They feature examples of children and young people's language learning, progression continua and support materials for teachers. [[Primary Language Toolkit - Curriculum Online](#)] [[Post-primary - eal-fv_1.pdf \(ncca.ie\)](#)] These resources enable teachers to identify the EAL learning needs of children and young people.

The NCCA has also published *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools* and *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School: Guidelines for Schools*.¹³ These publications provide guidance to support the development of a culturally responsive school environment and are currently being updated.

*English as an additional language in Irish Primary Schools: Guidelines for teachers*¹⁴ is designed to support teachers in meeting the language and learning needs of primary-school pupils. It contains specific sections on language learning, school and classroom planning and appropriate teaching and assessment practices.

*Up and Away*¹⁵ is a comprehensive resource for English language support in primary schools. It provides general information on EAL, specific information for language support teachers, and a varied collection of classroom activities and resources.

The Primary Language Toolkit provides a range of supports for teachers of EAL including examples of children's learning, supporting material on EAL and progression continua.

¹¹ Principles include learning to learn, choice and flexibility, quality, creativity and innovation, engagement and participation, continuity and development, inclusion and wellbeing.

¹² Oide is a support service for teachers and school leaders, funded by the Department of Education, formed from the integration of the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST).

¹³ NCCA, 2006

¹⁴ NCCA, 2006

¹⁵ Integrate Ireland Language Training, 2006

Additional Resources from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)

NEPS offers a [Welcoming Children to our Schools](#) webinar, designed to assist schools to meet the wellbeing needs of children and young people from Ukraine and other countries. NEPS also offers a four-hour training session on *Embracing Diversity: From Psychological Theory to Educational Practice*. This aims to increase awareness, among school staff, of important psychological theory and concepts in the area of diversity and inclusion and their application in education. As part of its model of service to individual schools, the NEPS psychologist can offer advice to teachers and school leaders about how best to support children and young people learning English as an additional language, enabling the staff to meet the learning needs of individual children and young people in a school.

Recognising the important role that school leaders play in embedding best practices in their schools, NEPS provides an online webinar for School Leaders called *Introducing Trauma Informed Practice – The Stress Factor, Getting the Balance Right*. This webinar focuses on a whole-school and class approach to trauma informed practice. It explores stress and its impact on wellbeing, learning and behaviour. It provides practical advice on how best to manage stress for all in the school community including children and young people with additional needs and those who have experienced trauma. During the webinar, school leaders receive information on a new eLearning course on trauma informed practice designed for all staff working in primary, post-primary, and special schools in Ireland. The format has been developed to allow for self-directed, self-paced learning.

Additional Resources from Oide: National Support Service for Teachers and School Leaders

Oide provides digital resource spaces (notice boards) or “padlets” for primary and post-primary teachers. Both the [primary padlet](#) and the [post-primary padlet](#) are updated regularly with relevant research and resource materials for teachers. Oide also offers both online and in-person guidance to schools on supporting culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people as part of whole-school support for EAL. These include:

- seminars on leading and supporting the inclusion of children and young people learning English as an additional language for primary schools
- national seminars for post-primary teachers on supporting EAL in the language support and mainstream classroom
- in-school support visits, tailored to the bespoke needs of the school in relation to EAL provision
- elective professional development for EAL support teachers¹⁶ and other primary and post-primary school staff.

¹⁶ EAL support teacher is the term used in Circular 0015/2009 to describe the teacher appointed to meet the needs of children and young people with EAL needs.

Additional Resources from Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI)

PPLI is a dedicated unit, under the auspices of the Department of Education, with responsibility for implementing key actions in *Languages Connect – Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017-2026*. The Department of Education, through PPLI, funds the teaching of home languages including Polish, Portuguese, Lithuanian, Romanian and Chinese. This is designed to support home language maintenance and the inclusion of young people learning EAL.

There are dedicated resources and grants available from PPLI to support plurilingual classrooms in post-primary schools. For example, PPLI has developed a website: [An Intercultural Look at Our School](#) which provides practical strategies for post-primary schools to support intercultural and linguistic diversity using the school self-evaluation process.

PPLI Intercultural Guidelines: Language and Languages in the Primary School was produced by PPLI to provide guidelines and good practice exemplars for primary schools to support home languages. These guidelines were specifically designed to support teachers in the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum and provide detailed suggestions on including home languages and developing intercultural learning in classroom practice.

The *Say Yes to Languages* primary languages module is also available to all primary schools. This scheme provides primary schools with an opportunity to support home languages in the classroom through focusing on plurilingual and intercultural awareness. In the 2022/2023 school year, fifteen home languages were supported under this initiative and there were twelve hundred participating schools.

2. Profile of the schools inspected

2.1 Inspection of EAL provision

In September and October 2023, the Inspectorate conducted eighty-three Incidental Inspections with an EAL focus (in forty-seven primary schools and thirty-six post-primary schools). These inspections focused on the following aspects of provision:

- Assessment and target setting
- The quality of teaching and learning in mainstream and support settings
- The use of resources to support children and young people learning English as an additional language.

The Incidental Inspections were unannounced inspections. They provided the inspectors with an opportunity to evaluate whole-school approaches to meeting the needs of children and young people and to evaluate teaching and learning in classrooms and other learning settings. They also provided inspectors with an opportunity to engage with teachers and school leaders and to discuss each school's approach to providing for children and young people learning English as an additional language.¹⁷

Many of the findings reflect those arising from another programme of inspection, undertaken between September and December 2023, which focused on the quality of provision for children and young people from Ukraine in primary and post-primary schools. The report arising from those inspections¹⁸ highlighted many strengths in provision for Ukrainian children and young people. For example, almost all schools had specific measures in place to ensure that children, young people, and their parents experienced a sense of belonging in the school community and almost all schools placed the children and young people in age-appropriate classes. The report also identified the need to increase the participation and engagement of Ukrainian children and young people in primary and post-primary schools.

Measures to improve provision recommended in that report included the following:

- encouraging parents of pre-school children from Ukraine to access Early Learning and Care (ELC) provision
- carefully monitoring the school attendance of children and young people from Ukraine in schools and taking action to improve attendance when this is required
- providing accurate and clear information on progression pathways for Ukrainian young people transitioning from post-primary school to further education and/or the world of work.

¹⁷ The published Guide to Inspection in Primary and Special Schools outlines the full procedures for Incidental Inspections in primary schools. The procedures for Incidental Inspections in post-primary schools are outlined in the published Guide to Inspection in Post-primary Schools.

¹⁸ The Quality of Education for Children and Young People from Ukraine (Department of Education, 2024)

The schools inspected as part of the focus on EAL were selected from the Department of Education list of all schools with allocations for EAL support. In total, eighty-three schools were inspected, forty-seven primary schools and thirty-six post-primary schools.

2.2 Primary schools

The enrolments in the forty-seven primary schools varied, as set out in table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Enrolment figures in the forty-seven schools selected

Enrolment	1 – 99	100 – 199	200 – 299	300 – 399	400 – 499	500 +
Number of primary schools	7	7	12	10	8	3

The largest primary school had 601 children on its roll and the smallest had thirteen. The forty-seven primary schools were located across sixteen counties and all four provinces. They included schools in rural and in urban locations. Five of the thirty-two schools that provided education through the medium of Irish and that had EAL teaching allocations were included in the final sample. The remaining forty-two schools in the sample were English-medium schools.

In total, there were eighty-nine EAL teaching posts in the forty-seven primary schools; twenty-eight of these were EAL legacy posts, eight were granted through the EAL appeal process and thirty-nine were allocated through the NEA scheme. The number of EAL teaching posts in the individual schools ranged from 0.2 to five.

Table 2.2 EAL allocations in the forty-seven schools selected

Allocation of EAL teaching posts	0.2 – 0.9	1 – 1.9	2 – 2.9	3 – 3.9	4 – 4.9	5
Number of primary schools	9	12	17	8	0	1

Nine of the forty-seven primary schools had less than one full-time teaching post; two of these schools had an allocation of 0.2 of a post. One school had five EAL posts, which was the largest allocation in the sample. Over 60% of the schools had between one full-time post and three full-time posts for EAL support.

2.3 Post-primary schools

Eighteen of the thirty-six post-primary schools were under the patronage of the Education and Training Board; thirteen were voluntary secondary schools and the remaining five were community and comprehensive schools. The smallest post-primary school had 167 students enrolled and the largest had 1,187 students. The enrolments in the thirty-six schools are set out in table 2.3 below.

Table 2.3 Enrolment figures in the thirty-six schools selected

Enrolment	100 - 300	301 – 500	501 - 700	701 - 900	901 – 1,100	1,100 +
Number of post-primary schools	5	10	9	8	2	2

The post-primary schools were drawn from seventeen counties across all four provinces, and included schools in both urban and rural locations. Three post-primary schools that provided education through the medium of Irish had EAL teaching allocations; one of these schools was included in the final sample. The remaining thirty-five post-primary schools in the sample were English-medium schools. In total, there were just over forty-five WTE teaching posts for EAL in the thirty-six post-primary schools. Of these, almost thirty-six were granted through the NEA scheme; almost three were granted through the EAL appeals process and the remaining five were EAL legacy posts.

The number of EAL WTE in the thirty-six post-primary schools ranged from 0.23 to 4.7 as follows:

Table 2.4 EAL allocations in the thirty-six schools selected

Allocation of EAL teaching posts	0.2 – 0.9	1 – 1.9	2 – 2.9	3 – 3.9	4 – 4.9	5
Number of post-primary schools	18	12	2	3	1	0

Over half of the post-primary schools had less than one WTE post and almost two-fifths of the schools had between one and three WTE posts. Only one of the schools had an allocation of greater than four WTE posts.

2.4 Total EAL allocations in the primary and post-primary schools inspected

There were almost 120 EAL teaching posts in the eighty-three schools inspected. 63% of these posts were granted through the NEA scheme and 27% of them were EAL legacy posts. The remaining posts were authorised through the EAL appeals process. While the number of posts allocated through the NEA scheme was broadly similar in the primary and

post-primary schools, there was a greater number of EAL legacy posts and posts allocated through the EAL appeals process in the primary schools than in the post-primary schools.

Table 2.5 Total EAL allocations in the eighty-three schools inspected

	Primary	Post-Primary	Total
EAL legacy posts	28	5.50	33.50
NEA scheme	39	35.92	74.92
EAL Appeals Process	8	2.90	10.90
Total	75	44.32	119.32

2.5 Legacy EAL posts

There were thirty-three and a half WTE legacy EAL posts in the eighty-three schools inspected. Twenty-eight of these were in primary schools and five and a half in post-primary schools.

Sixteen of the EAL legacy posts in primary schools were used exclusively to meet EAL needs at the time of the inspection and five posts were assigned to special education teaching duties. In the remaining schools, the EAL legacy post was integrated into the schools' special education team and all teachers on the special education team supported both EAL needs and special educational needs in assigned classes.

The EAL legacy posts in post-primary schools were spread over eight schools. In six of these schools the hours were used to support EAL and/or special educational needs. The remaining two schools were not using their total EAL allocation to support young people with EAL needs or with special educational needs; a proportion of the EAL hours were, therefore, subsumed into their overall teaching allocation.

3. Assessment and target-setting

Inspectors evaluated the quality of each school's assessment and target-setting for children and young people learning EAL. Inspectors established the extent to which the schools were assessing language proficiency in English using assessments aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages. Inspectors also evaluated the effectiveness of schools' processes for reviewing and monitoring targets and for planning to meet the needs of the children and young people.

3.1 Overall quality of assessment

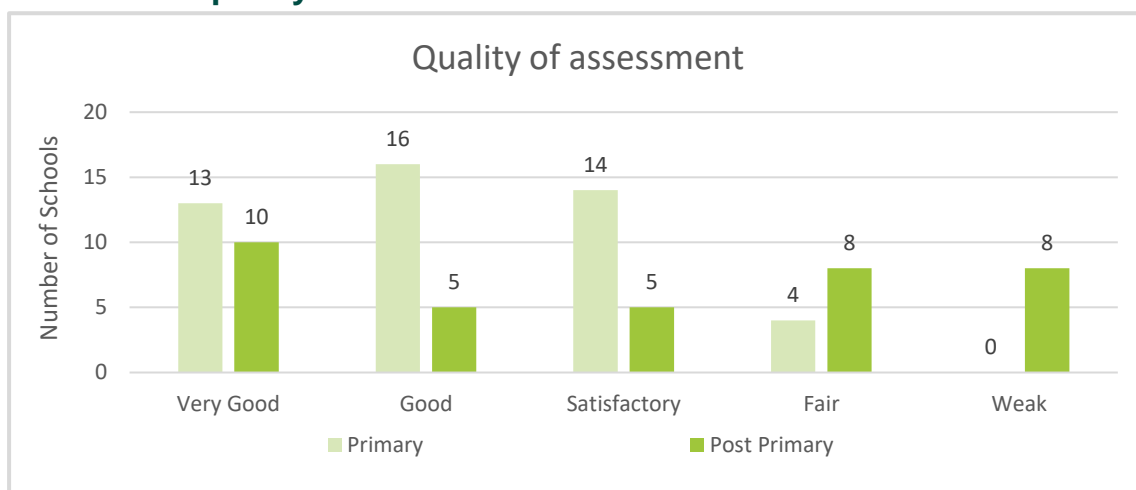


Table 3.1 The quality of assessment of children and young people with EAL needs

	Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Fair		Weak	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	13	27.7	16	34.0	14	29.8	4	8.5	0	0
Post-Primary	10	27.8	5	13.9	5	13.9	8	22.2	8	22.2
Total	23	27.7	21	25.3	19	22.9	12	14.5	8	9.6

Assessment practices were good or very good in just over half of the schools inspected. They were less than satisfactory in almost a quarter of the schools. Assessment was satisfactory in the remaining 23% of schools inspected.

The percentages of primary and post-primary schools with very good assessment practices were broadly similar: 27% in both sectors. However, there were noticeable differences between the sectors at the other quality levels. Assessment practices were good in sixteen of the forty-six primary schools, which is just over 30% of those schools. Assessment practices were less than satisfactory in four schools, or 8% of the schools. At post-primary level, assessment was good in five of the thirty-six schools; it was less than satisfactory in eight schools or 44% of the post-primary schools.

Quality of assessment – Strengths in assessment practices

In the thirteen primary schools where assessment was very good, teachers used a range of assessment tools to assess children's English language needs. These included the Primary School Assessment Kit¹⁹, teacher observation tests and pre-testing and post-testing of literacy initiatives. A number of these schools also used self-assessment by children and teacher self-reflection. Other common features of very good assessment practice included a high degree of consultation between special education teachers, EAL teachers and class teachers, the sharing of assessment data with parents, and clear links between assessment data, language targets and learning activities.

In one school, where practice was particularly effective, the inspector noted that assessment results were used to target gaps in pupils' learning and to link these directly to pupils' support plans. The support plans were then translated by an interpreter and signed by parents. In this school, pupils also completed self-assessments after each topic taught and teachers completed language passports for pupils transferring to post-primary school. All ten post-primary schools, where assessment was very good, used the Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) assessment toolkit to test students' language skills. Test results were then shared with subject teachers and used to set language targets. This informed the language support that students received. In many of these schools testing occurred at fixed times throughout the year, typically in September and May.

Quality of assessment - Some shortcomings in a number of schools

Assessment was fair in twelve of the eighty-six schools: four primary and eight post-primary. Some of these schools did not have a whole-school approach to assessment; this led to inconsistent assessment practice among teachers. Other schools relied exclusively on teacher-designed assessment, or on tests not designed for EAL needs such as the Cognitive Abilities Test Fourth Edition (CAT4). A number of schools, where practice was fair, had plans in place to assess language needs; however, at the time of the inspection assessment had not yet commenced. This points to the need to ensure that assessments are timed in a way that facilitates the accessing of language supports by children and young people.

Eight post-primary schools had weak assessment practices. In five of these schools, there was no testing of the language needs of young people; and in the remaining three schools, inappropriate tests were used. Some teachers had limited awareness of the language tests, assessment tools and other resources available to schools to support provision for young people with EAL needs. Assessment was also a focus of the evaluation of the quality of education for children and young people from Ukraine²⁰. Those inspections found that one of the main issues in schools where teaching required improvement related to assessment practices, including assessment of language skills and use of assessment information to inform teaching.

¹⁹ This was developed by Integrate Ireland Language and Training (IILT) and is currently hosted by the NCCA.

²⁰ The Quality of Education for Children and Young People from Ukraine (Department of Education, 2024)

3.2 Assessments aligned to the CEFR

Assessments aligned with the CEFR place children and young people on a scale ranging from A1 (most basic) to C3 (native speaker fluency) across the skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Seventy-eight of the eighty-three primary and post-primary schools in the EAL inspections were assessing the language needs of children and young people. Of these, thirteen (15%) were not using assessments aligned with the CEFR.

3.3 Quality of target-setting processes

Following assessment, the CEFR framework enables teachers to set targets to support the child or young person to move to the next level of language proficiency and to enable them to access the curriculum more effectively. The targets should be recorded in the Student Support Plan and should be shared with the child or young person, their parents and with all relevant teachers.

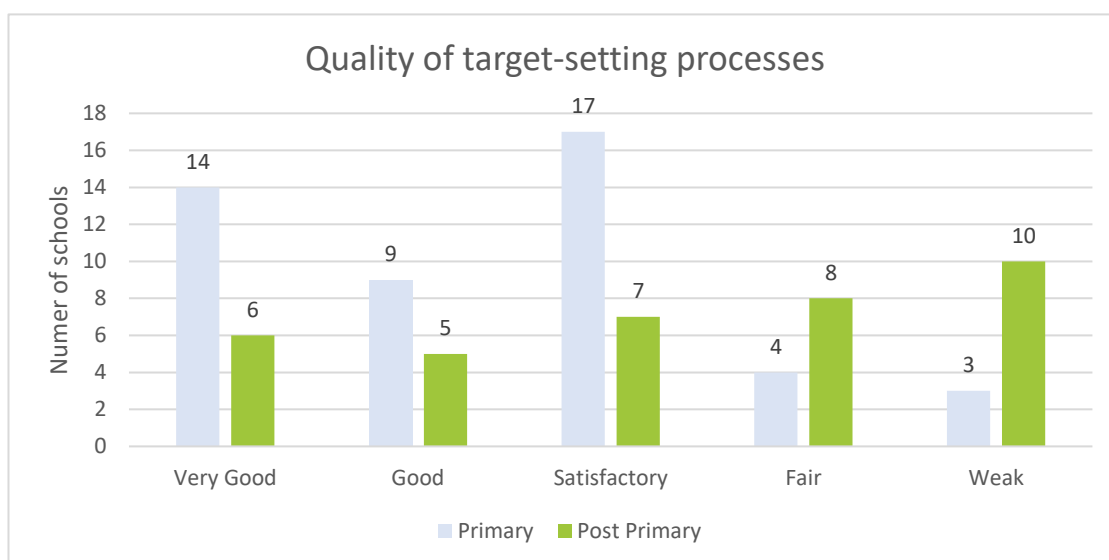


Table 3.3 The quality of target-setting processes in place for children and young people with EAL needs

	Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Fair		Weak	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	14	29.8	9	19.1	17	36.2	4	8.5	3	6.4
Post-Primary	6	16.7	5	13.9	7	19.4	8	22.2	10	27.8
Total	20	24.1	14	16.9	24	28.9	12	14.5	13	15.7

Target-setting was very good in almost 25% of the schools inspected; that is, in fourteen primary schools and six post-primary schools. Target-setting was good in almost 20% of the primary schools and in 14% of the post-primary schools. Target-setting was fair or weak in half of the thirty-six post-primary schools. It was fair or weak in just 15% of the forty-seven primary schools.

Features of very good target-setting common to primary and post-primary schools included the use of specific, measurable targets informed by clear assessment data, which were regularly reviewed. Such schools shared the targets with all teachers who were involved with the young person and some of them involved young people and their parents in target-setting.

Where excellent practice was observed, there were clear links between the targets and teaching and learning activities in both mainstream and support settings and there was clear evidence of the young person's progression in language learning.

In the thirteen schools where target setting was weak, teachers had not established targets for language acquisition. Targets in the twelve schools where practice was fair were very general in nature and lacked any clear link with assessment outcomes. In some of these schools the targets were whole-school targets, with the intention that all children and young people might improve their language proficiency, rather than individualised learning targets. A common feature of schools with fair or weak target-setting was an overemphasis on the use of simple instructions and the use of very simple workbooks for the children. In such schools, reducing the reliance on comprehension work and worksheets in the support setting would have better supported the learning.

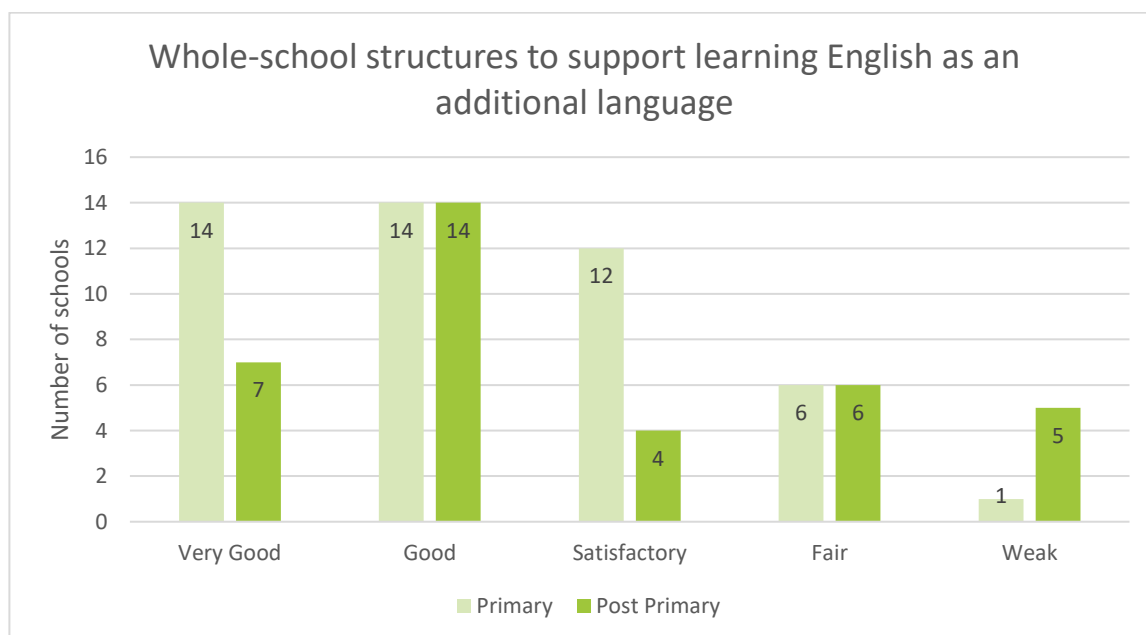
4. Teaching and learning

Inspectors evaluated the quality of the following dimensions of teaching and learning:

1. Whole-school structures to support EAL
2. Maintenance of and support for home languages
3. Teaching and learning in mainstream settings
4. Teaching and learning in support settings
5. Engagement with *Oide* and the NCCA to support teaching and learning.

4.1 Whole-school structures to support EAL

An important part of supporting children and young people learning EAL is the promotion of a shared understanding among school personnel about how best to create a culturally responsive school²¹ where all children and young people feel welcome. Essentially, in line with the Department's Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice, the environment of the school should reflect the languages, cultures, and diversity of its community.



²¹ Bazron, B., Osher, D., & Fleischman, S. (2005). Creating culturally responsive schools. *American Educator*, 11(1), 38-47.

Table 4.1. Quality of whole-school structures to support EAL needs

	Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Fair		Weak	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	14	29.8	14	29.8	12	25.5	6	12.8	1	2.1
Post-Primary	7	19.4	14	38.9	4	11.1	6	16.7	5	13.9
Total	21	25.3	28	33.7	16	19.3	12	14.5	6	7.2

Whole-school structures were good or very good in over half of the primary and post-primary schools inspected. They were satisfactory in 19% of schools inspected; this represented over a quarter of the primary schools and 11% of post-primary schools. Whole-school structures were less than satisfactory in eighteen schools (15% of the primary schools, 30% of the post-primary schools).

Whole-school structures for EAL - Strengths in schools' systems and structures

In forty-nine of the eighty-three schools visited, good or very good whole-school structures were in place to support children and young people with EAL needs. In these schools, highly effective leadership by the principal, senior leadership and other school teams was a consistent feature of practice. Effective leadership ensured that whole-school structures and cultures were in place to support children and young people with EAL needs in two main areas: communication between teachers and support for parents and their families.

Effective communication structures between EAL teachers and mainstream teachers featured strongly across these schools. The structures facilitated teachers to plan together for EAL provision and to implement a common approach to target-setting and to teaching strategies. Almost all schools with good or very good communication structures facilitated mainstream teachers informing EAL teachers about lesson content in advance of the lesson. This enabled teachers to prepare children and young people with EAL needs for engagement in mainstream activities.

Other examples of good and very good practice included weekly meetings between the EAL teacher and class teachers to review the effectiveness of their team teaching and the EAL co-ordinator providing regular inputs on effective EAL teaching approaches at staff meetings. In many schools where practice was good or very good, all relevant school personnel, including Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and Student Support Teams, were involved in EAL provision. One school, in which practice was very good, had established a network with other schools to share practice about EAL provision.

The primary and post-primary schools that provided most effectively for EAL also had well-developed structures to support parental engagement. These included communicating with parents in home languages, arranging events such as welcome coffee mornings, translation of key documents for the school's website, and ensuring that parents of children and young people with EAL needs were represented on the parents' association.

In one school, videos were available on the website to support parents in key aspects of language development and listening to sounds. Schools in which practice was particularly effective had established ‘buddy systems’ for both parents and students. The buddy system ensured that parents and their children were matched with people who spoke the same home language and who could support them in dealing with the school system. In some schools, there were links with community organisations that support families whose first language is not English.

The importance of supporting parental engagement in school life was also a finding from the inspections that focused on the quality of education for children and young people from Ukraine. The report arising from those inspections²² noted that schools with the most effective practice had structures in place to involve parents from Ukraine in school life. Those structures included, for example, encouraging parents to become involved in the parents’ association.

Whole-school structures to support EAL - Areas for development in a number of schools

Whole-school structures were less than satisfactory in 15% of the primary schools and 30% of the post-primary schools inspected in the EAL focused evaluations. In such schools, there was little or no evidence of effective whole-school structures to support young people who had EAL needs. Coherent whole-school systems for assessment, teaching and learning were not in place and, while there was some good practice among individual teachers, a more consistent approach was needed to improve provision for children and young people with EAL needs. In a minority of schools, there were no systems to support parental engagement and there was a lack of understanding at whole-school level of the importance of knowing which home languages the young people spoke. Where whole-school structures were less than satisfactory, overall EAL provision tended to be disjointed and links between learning activities in support classes and in mainstream classes were inconsistent.

4.2 Maintenance of and support for home languages

Effective practice for children and young people learning EAL requires schools to acknowledge and foster their home languages. By using and maintaining the home language, children and young people can better access and understand academic content appropriate to their age and stage of development in the second language. Maintaining the home language also serves to recognise and support the child’s identity and sense of self, which are important contributors to overall wellbeing.

²² [The Quality of Education for Children and Young People from Ukraine](#) (Department of Education, 2024)

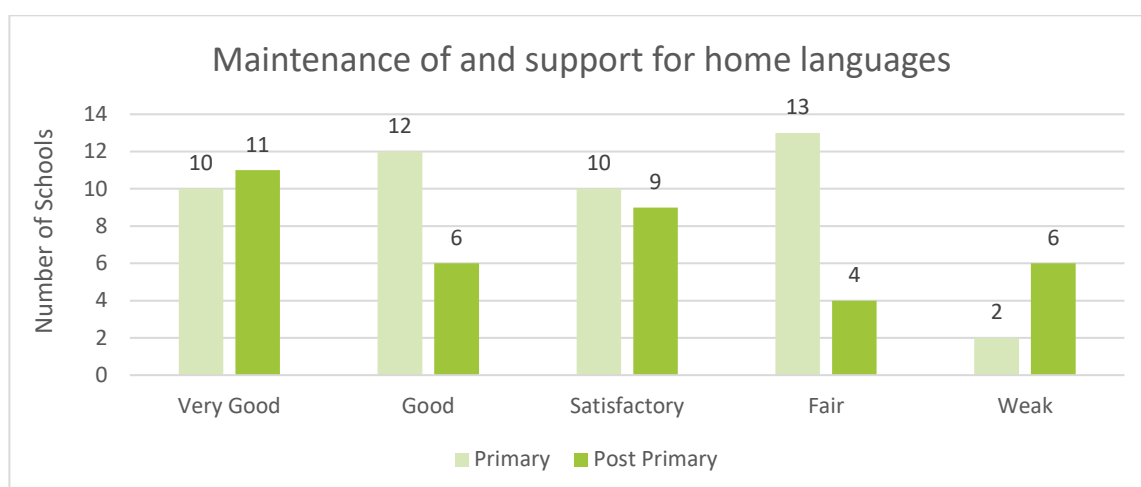


Table 4.2 Quality of maintenance of and support for home languages

	Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Fair		Weak	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	10	21.3	12	25.5	10	21.3	13	27.7	2	4.2
Post-Primary	11	30.6	6	16.7	9	25.0	4	11.1	6	16.7
Total	21	25.3	18	21.7	19	22.9	17	20.5	8	9.6

There were good or very good efforts to maintain and support the children and young people's home languages in just under half of the schools inspected (21% of primary schools and 30% of post-primary schools). Maintenance of and support for home languages were satisfactory in a quarter of post-primary schools inspected and just over a fifth of primary schools. How home languages were supported was less than satisfactory in the remaining 30% of schools inspected.

Maintenance of and support for home languages - Strengths evident

There were a number of common themes in the schools where practice was good or very good. A multilingual and multicultural print-rich environment was created through displaying signs, posters and other visual materials in the home languages of the children and young people. Importantly, these displays were evident both in the classrooms and in public areas of the schools. In many schools, maps of the world were displayed highlighting the countries and towns from where the children and young people had come. In some schools, they were invited to make and display posters about their home towns and present them at assemblies.

Another feature of good or very good practice was the use of the children's home language to support learning. Many teachers encouraged and facilitated children and young people to use their home language during lessons. This involved children and young people using

digital and translation tools or a system of language buddies, where children and young people who spoke the same home languages worked together to support one another in learning. A third feature of good and very good practice related to resources in home languages. Some schools had availed of the Post-Primary Language Ireland (PPLI) languages grant²³ to purchase books in the mother tongues of their students. Consequently, children in these schools had access to dual language books in classrooms and libraries.

Maintenance of and support for home languages - Some challenges

In 30% of schools, maintenance and support for home languages were less than satisfactory. In these schools there were few opportunities for children to speak to each other in their home languages, there was little celebration of the cultural or linguistic diversity of the children, and there were no displays of home languages in classrooms or public areas in the schools. In some of these schools there was limited understanding of the value of home languages to support learning in the second language and limited understanding of the difficulty young people had experienced working through an additional language all day. A whole-school approach to support home languages was typically lacking in these schools also.

Recommendations for improvement in these schools focused on two main aspects: enabling children and young people to use their home languages as a scaffold for new learning and celebrating the cultural diversity of the school through displays in classrooms and in common areas of the school. Inspectors advised schools where practice was less than satisfactory to implement an agreed whole-school approach to supporting EAL provision. In primary schools, this typically involved developing and implementing a whole-school policy; in post-primary schools the importance of agreed subject department planning was also emphasised by inspectors.

4.3 Teaching and learning in mainstream settings

Best practice approaches in the teaching and learning of EAL involve mainstream teachers supporting children and young people to develop two particular forms of language: language for everyday social interactions (BICS) and the specific language required to access the curriculum (CALP). The former is best achieved by ensuring that children and young people have well-planned opportunities to interact with fluent speakers of English. Teachers can develop the latter by explicitly teaching the language of the subject, such as the key words required in each lesson and the skills of language learning. Mainstream teachers can also work co-operatively and effectively with the EAL support teacher through practices such as team teaching.

²³ [2023 School Library Home Languages Funding Scheme - PPLI](#)

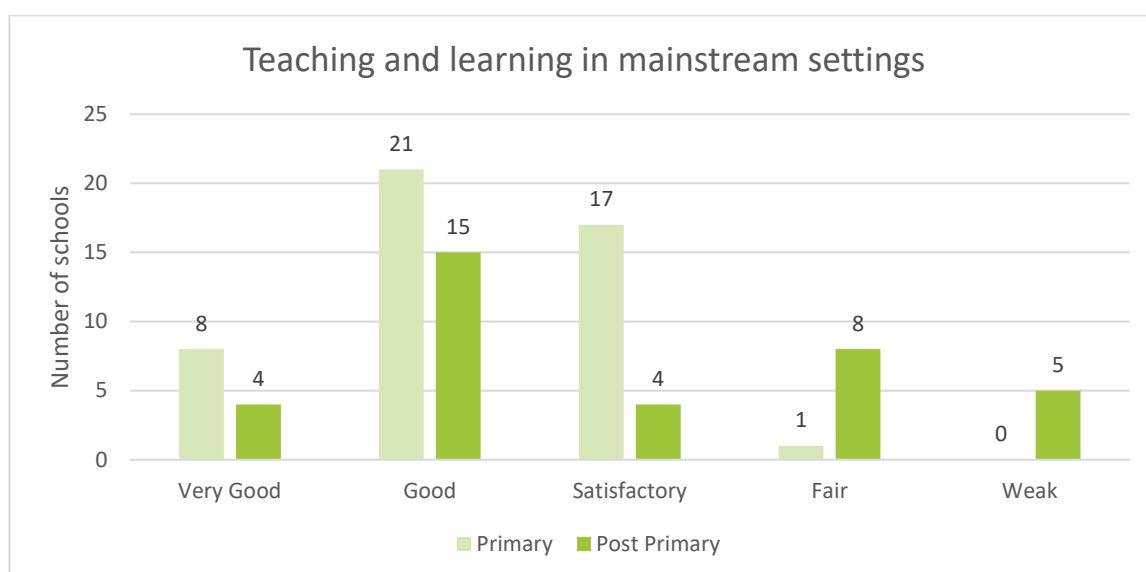


Table 4.3 Quality of teaching and learning for children and young people with EAL needs in mainstream settings

	Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Fair		Weak	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	8	17.0	21	44.7	17	36.2	1	2.1	0	0
Post-Primary	4	11.1	15	41.7	4	11.1	8	22.2	5	13.9
Total	12	14.5	36	43.4	21	25.3	9	10.8	5	6.0

The quality of teaching and learning of children and young people with EAL in mainstream settings was good or very good in almost 58% of schools. It was satisfactory in 25% of schools, comprising 36% of primary schools and 11% of post-primary schools. Teaching and learning in mainstream settings was less than satisfactory in fourteen schools or almost 17% of schools.

Quality of teaching and learning for children and young people with EAL needs in mainstream settings - Strengths in practice

The quality of teaching and learning in mainstream settings was good or very good in twenty-nine of the forty-seven primary schools and in nineteen of the thirty-six post-primary schools. Teachers in these schools used very appropriate teaching approaches, which were responsive to the needs of the children and young people. These approaches included providing clear instructions, effective repetition and rephrasing of concepts, the use of visual supports and digital technologies to scaffold learning and effective recap and revision at the end of lessons. In many of the lessons, teachers placed a strong emphasis on pair work and group activities. In these lessons, the teachers carefully considered the composition of the groups and pairs to allow for maximum participation by all children and young people.

In a number of schools teachers had taken time to learn about the children's cultural identity and the context in which they lived, and they used this information to inform learning activities, project work and cultural displays. Where practice was excellent in both primary and post-primary schools, teachers had ensured that all children and young people in their classes were appropriately challenged by the learning activity; this ensured meaningful inclusion of all during lessons.

Quality of teaching and learning in mainstream settings - Shortcomings in a small number of schools

The quality of teaching and learning in mainstream settings was fair or weak in fourteen of the eighty-three schools; almost all of which were post-primary schools. In these schools, there were some aspects of provision that were satisfactory or better. However, these aspects were limited to individual teachers and were not implemented consistently in the school. Among the issues identified in these schools included the inappropriate seating together of all young people with EAL in classes. This seating arrangement removed valuable opportunities for the young people to interact with and acquire language from peers who were mother-tongue speakers of English. In some schools, subject and mainstream teachers were not aware of the language proficiency levels of the young people in their class and these young people did not engage in appropriately challenging learning activities during lessons.

There was a limited use, and in some cases no use, of digital technologies or other important resources to scaffold learning. In a few of the schools, support for young people with EAL was provided exclusively by support teachers outside of the mainstream setting, and there was very limited collaboration between support teachers and mainstream teachers. A key recommendation in all schools where practice was less than satisfactory was that schools needed to ensure that all children and young people should be supported effectively to participate purposefully in all lessons at an appropriately challenging level. In order to ensure this happens, inspectors advised schools to implement an agreed whole-school approach to teaching children and young people throughout the school and to monitor the success of this approach carefully. In some schools, where practice was weak, leaders were also advised to access support from *Oide* to enable them to bring about the required improvement.

4.4 Teaching and learning in support settings

Support settings are settings where children and young people engage in learning activities outside of the mainstream class, either individually with a teacher or in small groups with other children and a teacher. Effective teaching in support lessons involves careful consideration of the assessed priority learning needs and the targets identified for the children and young people. Teachers in support settings have important opportunities to reinforce the development of the two distinct aspects of language; the language for everyday social interactions (BICS) and the specific language required to access the curriculum (CALP).

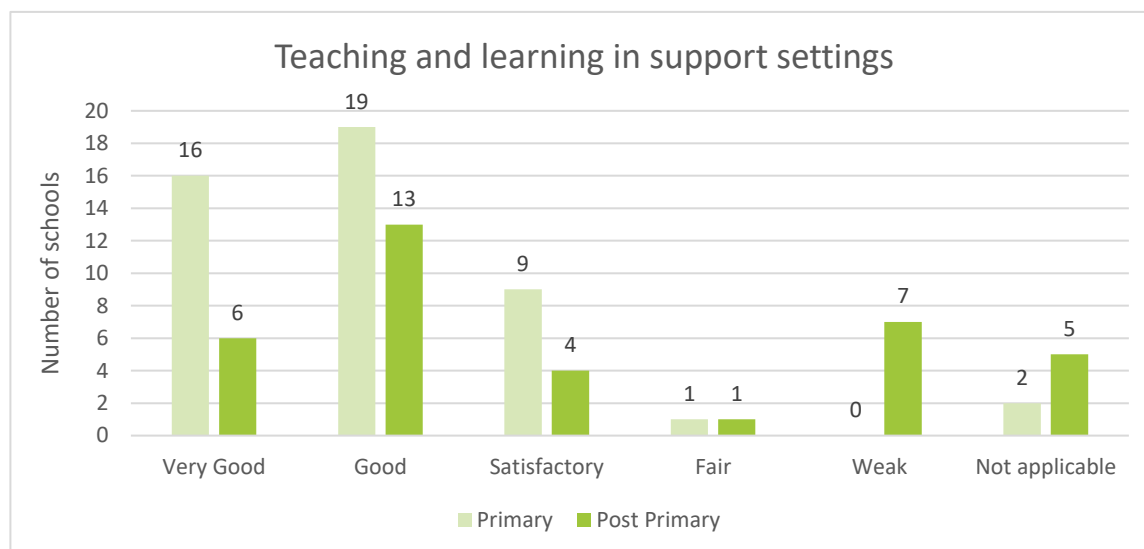


Table 4.4 Quality of teaching and learning for children and young people with EAL needs in support settings

(Support settings were not visited in two primary schools and in five post-primary schools)

	Very Good		Good		Satisfactory		Fair		Weak		N/A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	16	34.0	19	40.4	9	19.1	1	2.1	0	0	2	4.4
Post-Primary	6	16.7	13	36.1	4	11.1	1	2.8	7	19.4	5	13.9
Overall	22	26.5	32	38.6	13	15.7	2	2.4	7	8.4	7	8.4

The quality of teaching and learning for EAL in support settings was good or very good in over 65% of the eighty-three schools inspected. It was satisfactory in almost 16% of schools. Teaching and learning for EAL in support settings was less than satisfactory in almost 11% of schools. Support teaching was good or very good in over 74% of primary schools compared to almost 53% of post-primary schools. Teaching and learning for EAL in support settings was less than satisfactory in 2% of primary schools compared to 22% of post-primary schools.

Quality of provision for teaching and learning for children and young people with EAL needs in support settings - Strengths

Provision for teaching and learning in support settings was either good or very good in thirty-five of the forty-seven primary schools inspected and in nineteen of the thirty-six post-primary schools inspected. Across both primary and post-primary schools where teaching was highly effective, inspectors noted how children and young people in the support settings were engaged and motivated by their achievements and were willing to take chances with their learning.

An important feature of very good practice in support settings was ensuring that teaching was responsive to the needs of the children and young people. In schools where this was achieved, learning activities were based on language-learning targets that were informed by assessment and were regularly reviewed and adapted in light of progress made. It was also achieved through teachers creating an environment where the children and young people felt supported, affirmed, and praised. Teachers in such schools were very familiar with the young people, their backgrounds and needs and they used this information skilfully to support the learning. Language teachers used a flexible approach to respond to the changing needs of the young people and provided this support either in-class or on a withdrawal basis, depending on the lesson content.

A second key feature of very good practice in these schools was the close collaboration between language teachers and class teachers. For example, in one primary school the class teacher identified aspects of language learning that were challenging for children, such as prepositions. The language teachers then designed learning activities to improve this aspect of the children's language. Similarly, in a post-primary school, the language teacher linked online into the mainstream classroom of the young people, via Google Classroom, so that their language lesson was linked to the content of the mainstream classes.

Another feature of very good practice was the use of effective teaching methodologies by support teachers. For example, in both primary and post-primary schools the use of group-based teaching and collaborative learning tasks provided important opportunities for children to develop their confidence in speaking to peers. Other suitable teaching methodologies included the use of drama to develop language through 'children in role' in primary schools and, in post-primary schools, the use of repeating, reframing, and rephrasing to embed new language, and having young people discuss their learning at the end of lessons.

Resources were used very effectively in support lessons where teaching was good or very good. These resources included visual supports, language placemats, language dictionaries and matching games to support understanding and learning. Digital resources were also used to support learning in support settings. Importantly, teachers in these lessons demonstrated an awareness of the danger of children becoming over-dependent on digital translation devices and complemented the use of digital resources with other strategies, such as the use of visual displays.

Quality of provision for teaching and learning for children and young people with EAL needs in support settings - Challenges in some schools

Teaching and learning in support settings was less than satisfactory in nine of the eighty-three schools visited. In three of these schools, children and young people with EAL needs were not in receipt of additional support outside of mainstream classes. This was due to the EAL teacher devoting time exclusively to assessment or to addressing other needs, usually special educational needs. Where this happened, teachers were advised that assessment should not significantly erode support time for young people and to ensure that EAL resources are used to meet EAL needs within the school.

In the other six schools, support teaching was not sufficiently informed by assessment of needs and there was limited preparation for the lessons. Resources used during the lessons were not suited to the needs of the children and young people, and language was not taught in context. Learning activities during these lessons were typically teacher-led with few opportunities for young people to work with their peers and limited opportunities for them to use the language. In a number of post-primary schools, the young people were not grouped according to age or language proficiency levels. In one case, a language teacher was used to teach international students rather than providing support for young people with EAL needs. Inspectors recommended that these schools should undertake a comprehensive assessment of the language needs of children and young people. The inspectors advised the schools to implement appropriate teaching approaches that facilitate the children and young people to acquire both the language required for social interaction and the language required to access the curriculum. The need for an agreed whole-school approach was emphasised in these schools and inspectors advised a number of school leaders to access support from *Oide*.

4.5 Schools' engagement with *Oide* and NCCA

Table 4.5 Schools' engagement with *Oide* and NCCA

	Has the school received support from <i>Oide</i> for EAL?				To what extent has the school engaged with IILT and NCCA materials on EAL?					
	Yes		No		A large extent		Some extent		No extent	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary	11	23.4	36	76.6	10	21.3	24	51.1	13	27.7
Post-Primary	20	55.6	16	44.4	8	22.2	18	50.0	10	27.8
Total	31	37.3	52	62.7	18	21.7	42	50.6	23	27.7

A little over 37%, or thirty-one of the eighty-three schools, reported that they had accessed support from *Oide* for EAL. Almost 63%, or fifty-two schools, had not applied for support from the services under *Oide*. Thirty-six of these schools were primary and sixteen were post-primary. In schools that had sought and received support from *Oide*, inspectors noted some very effective use of resources to support learning including the cultural and linguistic supports from Scoilnet, as well as some engagement with professional learning leaders from *Oide*.

Over 72% of the schools had engaged with IILT and NCCA material on EAL and the numbers of primary and post-primary schools that had engaged were broadly similar. Overall, thirteen of the forty-six primary schools and ten of the thirty-six post-primary schools had not engaged at all with the EAL-specific materials. This represents almost 28% of the schools.

5. Other relevant issues highlighted during the inspections

Following the inspection visits to the EAL contexts, inspectors noted other findings and issues that arose during their engagements with school leaders, teachers, children and young people. These themes are highlighted for consideration below and are in addition to the findings that have been identified in earlier sections of this report.

5.1 Assessment instruments

A number of issues relating to assessment arose in both the primary and the post-primary schools. In primary schools the issues centred on the Primary Schools Assessment Kit (PSAK). Teachers reported that it took too much time to administer and it was cumbersome to use. Also, the results did not sufficiently inform priority areas for teaching and learning. In discussions with inspectors, teachers suggested that assessments more closely aligned with the Primary Language Curriculum would be useful.

A number of post-primary schools were using the Cambridge English Language Assessment test. While this test is aligned to the CEFR, it is designed for young people and adults learning English as a foreign language; for example, some adults travelling to an English-speaking country for work or young people coming to Ireland to improve their English. This test is not suitable for young people in post-primary schools for whom English is an additional language and whose priority need is to access the curriculum.

5.2 Allocation of EAL teachers

Under current guidelines²⁴ schools may use some additional SET teaching resources for children and young people with EAL needs. However, the greater recognition of special educational needs and increased diagnosis and prevalence rates in the education system since the introduction of the SET model presents challenges to schools in using SET resources effectively to address EAL needs.

One of the primary schools visited had an EAL post under the New Entrant Allocation (NEA) scheme, despite not having children enrolled who were new entrants to the country. The application was made on the basis of assessing the language needs of all the children in the school, none of whom were new entrants. Following this inspection, the EAL post was suppressed by the Department.

In two post-primary schools the EAL teacher was deployed to teach English to young people from European countries who were in the country with the expressed purpose of improving their English. These young people were in the country on a temporary basis, often without their families, as part of a private arrangement specifically designed to improve their English

²⁴ Guidelines for Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (2017)
Guidelines for Post-Primary Schools: Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools (2017)

language proficiency. While technically this is not in breach of current Department guidelines, it is not the intended purpose of the supports provided by the Department. It is suggested that guidance for schools should be updated to provide specific advice on the permissible usage of the EAL teaching resource.

Just under a half of the EAL legacy posts in the schools were being used exclusively to meet EAL needs. EAL legacy posts that were not used exclusively for EAL were used either as part of the schools' special education team or, in a small number of schools, they were subsumed into the overall teaching allocation.

5.3 Teacher supply

Difficulties in recruiting EAL teachers were mentioned by two post-primary principals and by seven primary principals. These schools had made significant efforts throughout 2023 to recruit teachers, but were experiencing challenges appointing qualified staff.

5.4 Irish-medium schools

Thirty-five Irish-medium schools have additional teaching allocations to support children and young people with EAL needs. This comprises thirty-two primary schools and three post-primary schools. Six of these schools were inspected for the purposes of this EAL evaluation: five primary and one post-primary school. Five of the six schools were located in the Gaeltacht, the other was located in Dublin. Additional language support in Irish-medium schools should normally be provided through the medium of Irish, as this enables the children to acquire both the language required for social interaction (BICS) and the language required to access the curriculum in school (CALP). The findings of these inspections indicate that this is not always the case.

Irish was the language of instruction in mainstream classes in four of the five primary schools and in the post-primary school. In the remaining primary school, the language of instruction was English mainly. The language of instruction in support settings in Irish-medium schools varied considerably across the six schools. In three of the six schools, teaching in support settings was through English only and, in a further school, it was mainly in English with some Irish. In one primary school, teaching in support settings was mainly through Irish and instruction was solely through Irish in the remaining primary school. This misalignment between the language of instruction in mainstream classes and support settings, in the majority of Irish-medium schools inspected, does not facilitate children and young people to acquire the language competency necessary to access the curriculum.

During the visits to Irish-medium schools, inspectors noted that none of the Irish-medium schools visited had accessed support in EAL from *Oide*.

In discussions with inspectors, teachers in Irish-medium schools raised the need to provide English-language support to children and young people whose parents had not chosen Irish-medium education, but who were attending the school by necessity. Teachers in Irish-medium schools also noted challenges with providing social and emotional support to children and young people who had very little English or Irish through the medium of Irish.

5.5 Welcoming and support measures

There were many examples of schools implementing measures to welcome children and young people and their families to the school community. An example from one school included the provision of homework packs for parents, regular HSCL support and the supportive involvement of parents in the oral language plan. Additionally, some schools organised social events such as yoga, art, baking, and cookery demonstrations in the home languages of parents. Some schools also supported parents to fill out official forms and complete paperwork to enable access to social services. Many of these measures were also found in the schools visited by inspectors during recent evaluations that focused on the quality of education for children and young people from Ukraine.²⁵

While many schools had a range of effective measures to help children and young people settle into the community, teachers generally expressed the need for additional support in assisting those experiencing trauma and separation anxiety. This was particularly relevant in the case of children and young people in families where a parent had joined them for a period of leave from the army and subsequently had to return to their home country.

²⁵ The Quality of Education for Children and Young People from Ukraine (Department of Education, 2024)

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Effective provision for children and young people with EAL is central to ensuring equity of opportunity in education and supporting every child and young person to achieve to their fullest potential. The Department of Education has provided significant teaching resources to schools to enable them to support children and young people who are learning English as an additional language. The Inspectorate of the Department of Education evaluated the provision for EAL through conducting Incidental Inspections, with a specific focus on EAL, in a sample of eighty-three primary and post-primary schools in September and October 2023. This thematic inspection report is based on the findings that emerged from those evaluations.

Many of the findings in this report reflect those in *The Quality of Education for Children and Young People from Ukraine*, a report published by the Inspectorate on 15 February 2024, which is available [here](#). That report contains examples of effective practice in promoting the engagement and participation of children and young people from Ukraine in school life. The examples are relevant to all children and young people who are learning EAL.

Critical capacity for Assessment

The inspections undertaken to inform this report show that while the **quality of assessment** was good or very good in just over half of the eighty-three primary and post-primary schools evaluated, it was less than satisfactory in almost a quarter of the schools. This is an important finding because effective assessment is the critical first step in deciding on the most appropriate interventions to support children and young people in progressing to the next stage of language acquisition. Without good assessment processes, teachers cannot properly identify individual language-learning needs and cannot tailor their teaching approaches or facilitate learning strategies to meet those needs.

The findings also indicate that 41% of the schools inspected had good or very good **target-setting processes**; however, target-setting was less than satisfactory in 30% of the schools. Effective target setting provides teachers, children and young people, and their parents with goals for improving language skills. Equally, ineffective targets may impede progress in language acquisition. The inspections found that almost 60% of the schools had good or very **good whole-school structures** to support EAL. These structures were less than satisfactory in almost 20% of schools. The quality of maintaining and supporting home languages was also good or very good in approximately half of the schools; however, it was fair or weak in 30% of schools. **Support for home languages** leads to better educational outcomes for children and young people and it impacts positively on their wellbeing. It is, therefore, fundamental to effective provision for children and young people learning EAL.

Supports for effective EAL provision

The Inspectorate's programme of EAL inspection visits provides compelling evidence that the education system needs to promote the development of the structures, curriculum and

assessment supports, **higher-order teaching competencies**, and innovative and inclusive whole-school policies and classroom practices that are necessary to promote effective progression for children and young people learning EAL. The findings also highlight the link between teachers' collaborative and collective practice and the quality of learning experiences for children and young people.

Almost all schools where teaching and learning was very good had systems in place to facilitate teachers working together to plan and facilitate learning experiences for children and young people with EAL needs. Inspection outcomes indicate that while the quality of teaching and learning in mainstream settings was very good in 14% of the schools, it was fair or weak in almost 17% of schools. The quality of teaching and learning in support settings was slightly better with 26% of schools in the very good category. There were, however, 10% of schools where teaching in support settings was not satisfactory. Some of these schools were not using their EAL teaching resources to provide additional support to children and young people with EAL needs, and in other schools, the additional support provided was very limited.

Leadership to embed EAL provision within School Self-Evaluation

The learning experience for children and young people who require support with EAL in both mainstream and support settings is of critical importance in determining successful outcomes both in language acquisition and across the whole curriculum.²⁶ The Inspectorate's findings point towards a need to situate EAL provision at the heart of the individual school self-evaluation process. Internal school agency and leadership competence are at a premium in this context. The **school self-evaluation (SSE) process** offers a ready set of tools and reflective procedures and should be exploited more fully in schools where children and young people have EAL learning and wellbeing requirements. The expertise of the school principal and other staff in leadership positions is critical in ensuring that SSE is used to transform the care and educational experiences of all children and young people.

Building capacity for Assessment and Target Setting

There was limited engagement by the eighty-three schools with non-teaching supports available to support learning EAL. Just 37% of the schools had accessed *Oide* support and eighteen of the eighty-three schools had engaged 'to a large extent' with the support materials provided by the NCCA. Importantly, inspectors saw very effective use of resources in those schools that had engaged with *Oide* or that had availed of NCCA materials. Accessing available resources enables teachers to build capacity in the areas of assessment, target setting and teaching and learning. It also supports schools to develop appropriate and culturally-responsive environments that support ethical approaches in school decision-making.

²⁶ Dutro, S. and Moran, C. 2003. 'Rethinking English Language Instruction: An Architectural Approach'. *English learners: Reaching the highest level of English literacy*, 227

Teacher Professional Learning and Cosán Action Plan

The conclusions of this report are relevant for the Department of Education, the Department of Further and Higher Education and for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers in the context of supporting continuing development of courses and programmes across ITE providers. Strategic dialogue should focus on the best ways to equip beginning teachers with the competencies and skills they will need to provide for the learning needs of the diverse school communities that now make up our school system.

Further engagement between the Department of Education, Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), the Teaching Council, the ITE providers, other education partners and *Oide*, which incorporates the professional support services for teachers and schools, will need to ensure a strong focus on the commitment towards the system-wide implementation of *Cosán*²⁷ by 2027. Achieving clarity and coherence in the professional learning framework for teachers will go a long way towards ensuring that every classroom and school has teachers who are equipped with the professional knowledge, skills, competencies and vision to support all learners, including children and young people with EAL learning needs. The *Cosán* Action Plan provides the strategic backdrop to enable this to happen.

Well-planned support tailored to meet individual learning needs

Overall, the findings of these inspections suggest that there are important areas for development and improvement in aspects of provision for children and young people learning EAL. These include assessment practices, target-setting processes and teaching and learning in mainstream and support classes. Children and young people learning EAL require well-planned support that is tailored to meet their individual language needs in order to participate fully in school life and to derive maximum benefit from their education.

EAL Policy for schools that educate through the medium of Irish

The Department of Education will need to engage with the NCCA and with An Chomhairle um Oideachas Gaeltachta agus Gaelscolaíochta (COGG) to work with schools that educate through the medium of Irish on implementing the most effective teaching approaches to meet the language and socio-emotional needs of children and young people learning EAL. This will be particularly important for children and young people, and their families, who are currently attending Irish-medium education and whose parents did not choose this model of education for them. As a first step in this, both NCCA and COGG, in collaboration with *Oide*, could consider how they can facilitate the collection and sharing of effective EAL practice in Irish-medium schools. Effective EAL provision in Irish-medium schools should also be included in the policy on Irish-medium education in non-Gaeltacht schools that is being developed currently by the Department.

²⁷ The national framework that guides and supports teachers' professional learning following their induction

6.2 Towards improvement in teaching, assessment, and target-setting for inclusive language learning

While the inspections focused on provision for children and young people for whom English is an additional language, the evaluation findings provide important insights into assessment, teaching and learning in our primary and post-primary schools. In essence, effective practice for children and young people with EAL involves creating an environment where they feel welcome and valued for who they are, assessing their needs using valid assessment approaches, identifying clear targets for improvement and then implementing effective teaching approaches in an inclusive environment, complemented by support, as required. This approach contains the key to our schools moving towards becoming truly inclusive school communities that can deal successfully with the emerging challenges of today's world.

These findings challenge policy-makers to reflect on how EAL provision should be resourced. If we are to move to a truly inclusive system, our approach to resourcing and supporting schools must be inclusive and integrated.

Finally, the findings challenge us to ensure that those in our system with the greatest level of need receive the greatest level of support. At system level, we have a duty to ensure that our schools have access to valid and appropriate assessment instruments. The recommendations below flow from the findings in this report; they are framed in an enabling way, anticipating the co-operation and collaboration of many education partners to achieve the purposes of system improvement for the benefit of all children and young people.

A INCLUSIVE, WELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

The findings and conclusions of this report reflect the importance for school communities and for the education system of providing inclusive and welcoming environments and ensuring effective communications for children and young people with EAL needs.

Recommendations

- A-1 A positive and inclusive school culture that promotes the wellbeing of all its members depends on the involvement and inclusion of the whole school community and relies on insightful leadership and a shared purpose throughout the school community. School communities should continue to work to create and maintain inclusive and welcoming environments, which openly respect, celebrate and value diversity. Choosing wellbeing as a focus for their SSE, using the Wellbeing in Education Framework for Practice, can support schools in this work.
- A-2 Effective communication through multiple channels, that reflect the wider intercultural context of the school, should be a priority for every school community. Specific actions are required to build on very good school communications and to foster whole-staff awareness of diversity and of the wider cultural context of the school.
- A-3 Schools should establish strong lines of communication with parents that will facilitate parents' understanding of the school's curriculum and opportunities for

learning, and provide information and advice relevant to their child’s education and progression.

- A-4 Effective provision for children and young people with EAL requires a strong vision and mission committed to ensuring equity of opportunity in education and supporting every child and young person to achieve to their fullest potential. System and school leaders should take the opportunity to reinforce messages that convey the importance of equality, fairness, and ethical decision-making.
- A-5 The inspections found that almost 60% of the schools had good or very good whole-school structures to support EAL. These structures were less than satisfactory in almost 20% of schools. This finding should prompt everyone in school management and system oversight roles to work to identify and address the barriers that impede the respectful inclusion of children and young people in our schools and across the education system.
- A-6 Support for children and young people learning EAL should be embedded within the Department’s Continuum of Support framework. The Continuum of Support is a problem-solving model of assessment and intervention, which enables schools to gather and analyse data as well as plan and review the progress of all children and young people and respond to their needs. The use of the Continuum of Support framework will enable schools to view and support children and young people with EAL needs holistically. It will also provide a means through which teachers can ensure that interventions are incremental, moving from mainstream, class-based interventions for children and young people with mild or transient needs, to more intensive and individualised supports at school support and school support plus levels.

B SYSTEMS AND SUPPORTS FOR LANGUAGE AND SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES

The report highlights the value of many interventions and supports that have been provided by Government and by Departments and agencies in response to the needs of children and young people who require EAL supports across the education system. The recommendations below should support school and system leaders in addressing the gaps that remain.

Recommendations

- B-1 Mainstream and subject teachers should use a greater variety of teaching approaches to reinforce key subject-specific language. Teachers in support roles should plan interventions directly linked to the curriculum. These interventions should align with the child or young person’s language targets.
- B-2 Support for home languages leads to better educational outcomes for children and young people and affects wellbeing positively. Schools should implement whole-school approaches to supporting the home languages of children and young people; and classroom or subject teachers should implement teaching strategies that

contribute to this. Best practice in relation to using home languages should be collated by *Oide* support services and by the Inspectorate and disseminated across all schools.

- B-3 The European Commission promotes the CEFR as a credible and coherent framework for describing language competence levels. This supports language mobility and provides a sound basis for effective delivery of interventions and assessments for additional language learning. Departments and agencies should support early learning and care settings and schools in exploring how best to use assessments aligned to the CEFR to complement assessments that are aligned to the curricula.
- B-4 Clarification should be provided for Irish-medium schools regarding how best to meet the language and socio-emotional needs of children and young people who require EAL support.
- B-5 The leadership expertise of the board of management and the school principal, supported by staff in management positions, is critical in ensuring that SSE can transform the care and educational experiences of all children and young people. Effective leadership is required to embed EAL provision within school self-review and development procedures. School leaders should utilise all available SSE supports to lead improvements in the school experience of children and young people learning EAL.
- B-6 In essence, SSE is an evidence-based approach that can effectively lead to improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people and support policy enactment at school level. School leaders, teachers, other school personnel, and members of the school community could therefore deploy the six-step SSE process usefully to support improvement in outcomes for children and young people with EAL needs. This should encompass specific actions to assess the key skills of language acquisition, analysis of assessment data, target-setting, selecting improvement-focused interventions and monitoring and review of improvement in response to interventions.
- B-7 The Inspectorate's EAL inspections suggest that improvements are required in assessment practices including target-setting processes and teaching and learning approaches for EAL in mainstream and support classes. Children and young people learning EAL require well-planned support tailored to meet their individual language needs in order to participate fully in school life and to derive maximum benefit from their education.

C EVIDENCE-BASED TEACHING PROCESSES AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

The learning contexts for children and young people learning EAL encompass classroom learning experiences and opportunities for complementary individual and small group support teaching.

Recommendations

- C-1 The weaker practices identified in a few schools in this review of EAL provision are a cause for concern. School leaders and teachers should ensure that research-informed teaching approaches are employed to provide an effective educational programme and learning environment to support children and young people learning EAL.
- C-2 The inspection findings suggest that effective collaboration between support teachers and mainstream teachers in meeting EAL needs is an important feature of very good practice in schools. School leaders should put systems in place to facilitate teachers working together effectively to plan for meaningful learning experiences for children and young people with EAL needs. Level three supports for SSE, as set out in *School Self-Evaluation: Next Steps September 2022 – June 2026*, provide the ideal framework for building on teachers' collective practice and for fostering collaboration between schools to ensure effective provision for EAL.
- C-3 Mainstream and subject teachers should use teaching approaches that provide regular opportunities for children and young people with EAL needs to speak English in lessons and to engage in peer work with native English speakers in their class groups.

D BUILDING ASSESSMENT CAPACITY TO SUPPORT EAL OUTCOMES

Effective assessment is the critical first step in deciding on the most appropriate interventions to support children and young people to progress to the next stages of language acquisition.

Recommendations

- D-1 Relevant stakeholders, including the NCCA, the Education Research Centre (ERC), *Oide*, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and school and system leaders should continue to build greater system capacity in the area of assessment. Without a shared understanding of good assessment processes, teachers cannot properly identify individual language-learning needs and cannot tailor their teaching approaches or facilitate learning strategies to meet those needs. Specific capacity-building actions should be incorporated in an action plan to support improvement in the area of assessment.
- D-2 The Primary Schools Assessment Kit and the Integrate Ireland Language and Training assessment toolkit for post-primary schools should be updated and aligned

more closely with the curriculum. Availing of the assistance of the NCCA, the ERC and the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) in this work should be considered.

- D-3 School leaders should ensure that teachers who are responsible for children and young people with EAL needs receive clear guidance in the assessment of language skills and competencies and in the design of lessons and targeted interventions to enable children and young people with EAL needs to access the school curriculum. This should be a professional development priority for any schools serving the needs of children and young people.

E TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND COSÁN ACTION PLAN

The provision for EAL in ELC settings and schools requires significant planning, co-ordination of resources, commitment to teacher professional development and effective monitoring systems at school and system levels. The *Cosán* Action Plan provides an excellent framework for resourcing teacher professional learning and building the capacity of teachers to lead classroom learning and to take on new approaches to support children and young people's learning.

Recommendations

- E-1 In some EAL settings there was limited engagement with the *Oide* professional development service and low take-up of support materials provided by the NCCA. It was notable that schools that had engaged with *Oide*, or that had availed of NCCA materials, were making very effective use of the resources and professional development experience. All schools are encouraged to avail of the significant professional supports that are available for EAL, including supports provided by *Oide*, NEPS and the NCSE.
- E-2 Under the Teaching Council's *Cosán* Action Plan, significant support will be required to facilitate the continuing development of courses and programmes across ITE providers. Strategic dialogue should focus on the best ways to equip beginning teachers with the competencies and skills they will need to meet the learning needs of the very diverse school communities that now make up our school system.
- E-3 All education partners should promote the system-wide implementation of the *Cosán* Action Plan by 2027. Achieving clarity and coherence in the professional learning frameworks and opportunities for teachers will go a long way towards ensuring that every classroom and school has teachers who are equipped with the professional knowledge, skills, competencies, and vision to support all learners, including children and young people who are learning EAL. The *Cosán* Action Plan provides the strategic backdrop to enable this to happen.