



## Pupils with an additional language

Language in all its diversity is a wonderful and positive thing. Children and young people with an additional language are at equal, though no greater risk, of having additional needs in speech, language and communication than are children who are monolingual. It is important to note that bilingualism does not cause speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Research<sup>1</sup> has highlighted that it can take around two years for a child to develop an additional language adequate for communication and social interaction and even longer (up to six years) to fully master the more formal 'academic' language needed for school learning.

It is often difficult to identify the precise language learning needs of a child with an additional language. It can be uncertain as to whether difficulty with English is reflective of:

- Bilingualism in progress (see [www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk](http://www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk) for more information).
- A delay in the child's home language – and therefore also in English. Children may have developed their primary language within normal limits; however the second language being acquired may be limited. This is due to limited exposure to language and is not due to an underlying SLCN.
- An impairment in the child's home language – and therefore also in English. A child having difficulties with both languages may be experiencing an underlying SLCN – either a cognitive impairment or a linguistic impairment for example hearing loss, learning difficulties or a limited exposure to English.

The most up to date information from the London SIG Bilingualism outlines how supporting the development of the home language will enhance the learning of English. In fact, it says: 'There is considerable evidence that learning to speak and use more than one language can benefit children's overall academic and intellectual progress.'

The advice recommends / highlights that:

- Parents continue to use all languages introduced to their children at home and not to be concerned about mixing languages within a sentence.
- Parents speak in their chosen language/s to their child even if he or she responds in a different language. If the child responds this shows that the message has been understood.
- Parents continue to use the language they feel most comfortable with and do not change their natural patterns of language, even if their child is identified as having a speech and language difficulty.
- That at school, children benefit from being immersed in a language-rich environment that provides plenty of opportunities for speaking and listening.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cummins, J. (2001) *Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual pupils in the Crossfire*. Clevedon, Avon

- It is OK for children to speak in their home language and mix languages in one sentence.
- Children learning an additional language commonly go through a stage referred to as a 'silent period' where they may say nothing for several months in a new environment. This is a natural process and should not be mistaken for selective mutism.

## Useful websites

- Aimed at Speech and Language therapists, this website would also be of use to parents and a range of professionals. There is information on bilingual language development theory, culture, language development, assessment and intervention.  
[www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk](http://www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk)
- The website of the National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum  
[www.naldic.org.uk/docs/resources/index.cfm](http://www.naldic.org.uk/docs/resources/index.cfm)
- Talk to your Baby – has top tips related to bilingualism in 14 languages:  
[www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk\\_to\\_your\\_baby/resources/418\\_q#bilingual](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk_to_your_baby/resources/418_q#bilingual)
- Southwark PCT NHS Speech and Language Therapy Service also have a page dedicated to their topic of 'Keeping your language Alive' and is in a range of languages:  
[www.southwarkpct.nhs.uk/a/398](http://www.southwarkpct.nhs.uk/a/398)
- The following have useful resources to use in class/at home:  
[www.collaborativelearning.org](http://www.collaborativelearning.org)  
[www.eslprintables.com](http://www.eslprintables.com)  
[www.eslflashcards.com](http://www.eslflashcards.com)  
<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/en/>

With thanks to the London SIG Bilingualism for their input.

This November, the theme for the *Hello* campaign is 'celebrating communication' where more information and signposting to advice and resources will be available for parents and professionals  
[www.hello.org.uk](http://www.hello.org.uk)