AN EXAMINATION OF HOW A SCHOOL IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS MEETING THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL NEEDS OF NEWCOMER PUPILS

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AN EXAMINATION OF HOW A SCHOOL IN NORTHERN IRELAND IS MEETING THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL NEEDS OF NEWCOMER PUPILS

Abstract

A recent study found that Northern Ireland is the best performing education system in Europe for maths and ranked 5th for its pupils’ reading abilities (Mullis et al, 2011). These are impressive statistics, unfortunately there is a gap between those succeeding and those who pupils who are being failed. One group identified as being at risk from inequality in education are newcomer pupils. The influx of pupils arriving from other countries is a relatively recent phenomenon. It has occurred in a period of substantial change. The curriculum in Northern Ireland has undergone major alterations, including a committed focus to the inclusion of all its pupils. This project carried out interviews with a principal and an EAL coordinator in a case study school and collected secondary data in the form of assessment policies and an inspection report, in order to examine how a school in Northern Ireland is meeting the academic and social needs of newcomer pupils. The information collected suggests that the school involved is meeting and surpassing areas for development identified by previous studies. It is also demonstrating adherence to school guidelines for effective newcomer support produced by the Department of Education Northern Ireland (2009). Finally, some areas for development are identified on school level and a board level to further improve integration of newcomer pupils.
Literature review

The pupil demographics within schools in Northern Ireland have been changing considerably over the last decade. Since May 2004 the EU expanded from 15 to 25 countries with the accession of eight central and eastern European (A8) countries including Poland. Almost 122,000 international migrants arrived in Northern Ireland between 2000 and 2010 (Russell, 2012). Table 1.1 shows over a 200% increase in newcomer pupils entering Northern Ireland schools between 2004 and 2008. Children arriving from different countries now constitute a considerable proportion of the pupil population. The 2010 census shows that just under 7,500 school children in primary and post primary school had a language other than English as their first (Russell, 2012). Entering a new school and learning in a new language presents challenges for both the children concerned and an education system tasked with helping these young people “experience success in learning and achieving as high a standard as possible” (CCEA, 2007, p.3).

Table 1.1 (DENI, 2009, p.3)

The Northern Ireland education system

In the last decade the Northern Ireland curriculum has undergone substantial change. A new ‘revised’ curriculum was implemented into schools in 2007 after a number of years of planning and preparation (NFER, 2007). Since 2007 schools in Northern Ireland have been changing to meet the requirements now expected of them (NFER, 2007). Traditionally, children in Northern Ireland were streamed into grammar or non grammar schools on the basis of their educational attainment at age 11. This practice has resulted in a large educational gap. At GCSE and at A Level pupils from Northern Ireland regularly outperform their counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales. Recent statistics rank Northern Ireland first in numeracy and fifth in literacy on a European level (Mullis et al, 2011). However, within the same group of young people over a third are not leaving school with 5 GCSEs at A*- C. A clear relationship has been identified in those disadvantaged backgrounds and greater risk of failure (DENI, 2009). Work is being carried out to address this issue. The 11-plus exam that pupils take at age 11 for school selection has been removed in an attempt to equalise educational opportunities. However, this has generated considerable opposition and is representative of some of the difficulties that can arise when established infrastructure undergoes change (Kerr, K & West, M, 2010). Focus is now on inclusion, removing barriers to learning and addressing issues that “relate to all individuals who are vulnerable to exclusion from education” (CCEA, 2007). In 1991 the UK government signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This ensured that children and young people, as human beings, are entitled to the full range of human rights protections by law. The right to an education is a
key aspect of this legislation. “Education must develop every child’s personality, talents and abilities to the full. It must encourage the child’s respect for human rights, as well as respect for their parents, their own and other cultures, and the environment” (UNICEF, 2012).

Academic barriers facing those from minority ethnic backgrounds

Findings show that the academic achievement from minority ethnic backgrounds crosses the spectrum, but highlighted that a greater proportion of these students leave the education system with no GCSEs in comparison to the main population. Lower attendance levels have also been recorded amongst some groups of minority pupils (Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards NI, 2012). Similar trends have been identified in the US system where English language learners in American schools were at a high risk of failure. Latino/ Latina pupils were almost twice as likely to drop out of school as the national average (Jansen, 2008). Research on immigration in Canada suggests that pupils taught only in their second language can take on average 5-7 years to develop the cognitive academic language that is essential to meet normal educational standards Cummins (1981). Many pupils entering the Northern Ireland school system with English as an additional language clearly face an academic barrier. Is there sufficient support available to pupils with English as additional language so that they can experience success in learning and achieve as high a standard as possible as outlined by the curriculum (CCEA, 2007)? It is important to investigate the history of the definitions attached to these children and the policies created to support their inclusion to fully understand progress being made.

Newcomer pupils

The current definition of newcomer is “a child or young person who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher” (DENI, 2008, p.3). Children referred to as being newcomer pupils were previously known as pupils with English as an additional language or EAL (DENI, 2008). “Pupils will be designated as having English as an Additional Language (EAL) if:

a. They were born in a non-English speaking country, have significant difficulties with English and have lived in the north of Ireland for less than two years; or

b. They were born in a non-English speaking country and have lived in the north of Ireland for more than two years but continue to have significant difficulties with English; or

c. They were born in an English speaking country but have significant difficulties with English because their parents do not speak English.”

Northern Ireland Assembly (2005, p.24)
The Department of Education (DENI, 2008) recognised that the term EAL is too constricted as a pupil’s experience of school goes far beyond language acquisition. “Apart from the curricular and linguistic needs of the pupil, pastoral care and intercultural barriers are also major aspects that need attention to ensure the pupil feels welcome within the school and is encouraged to fully participate in the life of the school” (DENI, 2008). The effect of social inclusion as an aspect of pupil development must be considered and the term newcomer has now replaced ‘English as an Additional Language’ to fully encompass the experiences of the child (DENI, 2008).

Social barriers

The National Children’s Bureau reported that 9 out of 10 young people who are not from an ethnic minority said that most or all of their friends are from the same background as them. 31% of young people with ethnic minority backgrounds have been victims of racist bullying in school. It should also be noted that 60% of young people agreed that there is a lot to be learned from people of other cultures (Geraghty, McStravick & Mitchell, 2010). However, without a doubt many children with English as additional language will find it difficult to integrate into a new school community. This factor is likely to have a knock on effect on the pupil’s academic progress. Krashen and Terrell (1988) suggest that the learner has to be open to the input in order to acquire it. An important factor that can help encourage a “low affective filter” included educators having a positive orientation towards speakers of different languages. Are newcomer pupil’s being enabled to effectively integrate into the school community?

Measures in place to promote inclusion

Education and Library Boards [ELBs] in Northern Ireland formed the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS), aiming to provide support to schools within the five education boards to meet the needs of their newcomer pupils (DENI, 2009). The IDS is managed by a “regional Adviser and is staffed by a regional support team, who have expertise in supporting newcomer pupils” (DENI, 2009, p.11). Funding is available to schools enrolling recognised newcomer pupils over a three year period and reviewed thereafter (DENI, 2009). The Inclusion and Diversity Service introduced a toolkit for principals and teachers to use as a guide to inclusion from a newcomer’s arrival to the intercultural, linguistic and pastoral challenges that can arise (Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards, 2012). The service also provides on-going professional development for educators. Translators are provided and multilingual websites are available for parents to access information. It should be noted that the availability of these support services is heavily reliant on the distribution and availability of funding within a school (appendix 4).
Related studies

The Education and Training Inspectorate carried out an assessment on “The Quality of Learning and Teaching: Standards and Outcomes Achieved by Learners in Relation to the Provision of English as an Additional Language” (ETI, 2005, p.1). The Inspectorate identified many strengths of the provision of EAL including induction arrangements for EAL students and effective communication with parents. Teachers were found to be committed to effective practice in classrooms with changing diversity. Schools demonstrated whole school provision for EAL (ETI, 2005). The report also highlighted areas for development including: effectiveness of assessment of understanding and progression, the need to strengthen links between EAL co-ordinators, SENCOs, class teachers and withdrawal teachers and the promotion of the home languages of EAL students (appendix 1). Thomas and Collier (1997) identified that academic instruction through the first language for as long as possible with academic instruction in English for the rest of the teaching day was the first predicator of educational success. In general those taught in bilingual classes outperform those in monolingual classes. Bilingual education for all nationalities is a considerable challenge for any education system. However, schools in Northern Ireland can provide first language dictionaries and languages assistants if funding allows (DENI, 2008).

Between 2005 and 2006 the Department of Education carried out principal and teacher interviews on provision for EAL students (DENI, 2006). Educators required new EAL policy to include ideas for best practice and guidance across all education boards. This has since been provided in the form of New Curriculum and newcomer toolkit made available to schools. Assessment procedures were identified as being inadequate and inconsistent. Schools had successfully implemented ‘buddy’ systems and family members, acquaintances and colleagues acted as translators to aid inclusion. Both reports identified cultural awareness in schools, but highlighted that these students’ needs were not being fully met.

More recently, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE, 2010) carried out a study on Hazelwood Integrated College to gain insight into the experiences of newcomer and ethnic minority children in the Northern Ireland education system. This study drew its results from opinions expressed by students on a Citizen’s Panel. Students identified a need for their school to work with others to share good practice. A need for celebration of more festivals and cultural events was identified. Students also felt that a greater variation of after school clubs was needed to encourage participation among many other findings (NICIE, 2010).

Aspects of all three of these studies will be considered for the purpose of this investigation. The findings produced from each of the three related studies reviewed and current documentation on supporting newcomer pupils (DENI, 2009) will guide data collection and will allow for comparisons of results in its analysis. Seven common educational themes are identified in findings produced by these reports and are
also evident in current guidelines produced by the Department of Education (2009). These include student welfare and pastoral care, induction and translation, first language promotion, teaching and learning, allocation of resources and continual professional development. The effective integration of newcomer pupils could be investigated in any number of ways. However, this report aims to carry out a general overview of the approach taken by one case study school by investigating the opinions of educators within it.

This project aims to examine how a school in Northern Ireland is meeting the academic and social needs of newcomer pupils.
Methodology

The case study approach

The research question asked considers two variables, the academic and the social needs of the newcomer child. Quantitative data associated with statistical analysis such as examination results would allow us to compare newcomer performance against the rest of the population. However, it might also give an exaggerated impression of the value of research findings and would put focus solely on academic performance (Layder, 2013). It would not necessarily give a full picture of a newcomer pupil’s experience. “A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 289). They work well when an issue is being investigated in depth and can provide an explanation that can cope with the complexity of social truths or real life situations (Denscombe, 2007, p38., Cohen, Manion & Morrisson, 2011, p 292). This project takes a qualitative approach by focusing on one school and asking the opinions of the principal and EAL who work within it (Cohen, Manion & Morrisson, 2011). It aims to give an insight of educational practice within a situational context.

The school

The features of a case should be significant to the problems being investigated (Denscombe, 2007). The school in question enrolls children from the Belfast city area and wider surrounding area (ETI, 2012). 169 children were attending this school in the 2011/2012 academic year with an average class size of 24.14 pupils (ETI, 2012). It has a newcomer population of 50% with a strong representation of the Roma Travellers community. In total, there are twenty two nationalities represented in its student population. This makes it the most multicultural school in Northern Ireland (appendix 4). The school’s EAL co-ordinator was the first to be appointed this title in Northern Ireland. It provides training and advice to other schools accommodating a newcomer population and is the subject of many investigations surrounding newcomer students and ethnic minorities in education (appendix 4). This case was not randomly selected; it is an extreme instance of a newcomer student population within a school (Denscombe, 2007). These features make it more that suitable for a small scale project.

The school was contacted by letter (appendix 2) and informed of the research aims of this project as well the commitments required from its staff. The letter was followed up by a phone call, consent was given and a date and time for interviews was arranged.
Interview technique

A case study can be made up of a number of methods depending on what is necessary for understanding (Thomas, 2009). Past studies can be useful in advising methodology. Reports produced by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI, 2005) and the Department of Education (DENI, 2006) (highlighted in the literature review) used discussions with principals, teachers, classroom assistants, teachers and pupils, as well as lesson observations and school documents to draw conclusions. This project collected its data from interviews with the school principal and the EAL co-ordinator (appendix 4). Interview questions were constructed employing the summary of findings in both governmental reports (appendix 1). For example, a strength identified by the ETI (2005) report was “induction arrangements for pupils with EAL and their families, and the efforts to ensure effective communication with parents” (ETI, 2005, p.15). A solid induction procedure is a key aspect for supporting newcomer inclusion in guidance for schools (DENI, 2009). To identify if this approach was still being taken and developed the interview subjects were asked “How are newcomer pupils welcomed into a new classroom?” This question was developed by asking “Do you have induction policies including translation services in place for newcomer children and their families (appendix 3)?” Educational themes (interpreted by the author of this paper) ran through findings produced by DENI (2006) and ETI (2005) including, student welfare and pastoral care, induction and translation provision, first language promotion, collaboration, allocation of resources and continuing professional development. These are reflected in the interview questions and the analysis of the results produced (appendix 3).

The interview was semi structured; combining a structured list of issues to be discussed and the freedom to elaborate or follow up points (Thomas, 2009) (appendix 3). The school in question is an influential institution with regard to effective practice concerning newcomer students. The professionals interviewed had a wealth of information that might not have been accessed by a structured interview. Likewise there is so much information surrounding this issue that the main focus of this investigation could have been lost in an unstructured interview. Interviews with both the principal and the EAL co-ordinator were recorded on a video camera and the resulting information was transcribed at a later date. Permission was granted before the camera was turned on.

Secondary data

Many variables can arise within a single case study and to catch the implications of these variables more than one tool for data collection is required or ‘triangulation’ of methods (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.289). This approach can increase the validity of a research project (Layder, 2013). Both these professionals worked for the case study school and may be open to bias (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.292). To follow up information recorded during interview the school kindly provided its
assessment policies for newcomer students. The school’s most recent inspection report (ETI, 2012) was also considered during analysis. The general performance of the school was reviewed as well as its newcomer provision.

**Ethics**

The researcher in any project has a responsibility to the participants. According to the BERA guidelines on ethical research “Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and to who it will be reported” (BERA, 2011, p.5). Before data collection occurred the school was contacted by a letter (appendix 2) outlining the aims of the project and the commitments required from the school. This letter was followed by a phone call and the school gave its decision on participation. This process met requirements on ‘voluntary consent’ outlined by BERA (2011, p.5): “participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway.” The participants were given a copy of the literature review and the research questions identified. A copy of the interview questions were also provided prior to questioning. The school and the participants involved remain confidential.
Findings and Analysis

This chapter will review the results produced from interviews. It will be analysed in reference to the reports discussed in the literature review (ETI, 2005, DENI, 2006, NICIE, 2010) and newcomer guidance for schools produced by the Department of Education (DENI, 2009). Each section will also be related to findings from the school’s most recent inspection report (ETI, 2012) (appendix 6).

Student welfare and pastoral care

Both professionals recognised an increasing number of newcomer pupils entering the school. In particular, the numbers of pupils from the Roma travelling community entering the school had risen considerably in the last number of years (appendix 4). Structures are in place to meet the pastoral and welfare needs of newcomer pupils. Social services and the elected child protection officer work together to meet the welfare needs of all of the pupils. The needs of newcomer children were met alongside those of the main student population with some issues being investigated in “greater depth”. The principal reported that the education welfare officer (EWO) has a key involvement with the welfare of Roma pupils, especially concerning attendance issues and communicating with parents. Educational psychologists also work with the newcomer pupils when required.

There is a “systematic approach” when welcoming newcomer students into the classroom. The school has a “buddy system” and the classroom is organised in a way that welcomes the child and “meets their holistic needs” (appendix 4). Students withdrawn from mainstream classroom take part in shared activities such as swimming and art with their peer group to promote inclusion. “Buddy scheme”, “activity based learning” and becoming “involved in classes on a gradual basis” have been found to encourage integration and participation (DENI, 2009, p.9). The quality of pastoral care in the school was assessed to be ‘outstanding’ by ETI (2012, p.2) with a commitment to encouraging pupils in expressing their cultural identity.

Induction and translation services

Provision of ‘sound induction procedures’ with the possible use of interpreters are key guidelines advised by the Department of Education (2009, p.8). An induction system is established in the school. Children are “met at the door and welcomed” (appendix 4) and the school system is explained to both them and their guardians. On this occasion the EAL coordinator carries out baseline assessments on the language capability of children and their parents. This is also an opportunity to gain as much educational history as possible.
The principal reported that the Department of Education pays for translators to come in for initial interviews with newcomer children in line with guidelines (DENI, 2009), but felt that a second was appropriate later on in the year, which the school paid for. When it was essential to speak to a parent further translation services were enlisted. The Roma community have special times during the year when they can come in and meet with the EAL co-ordinator and there are three open mornings when all nationalities can come visit the school (appendix 4). Finally, in the reception area there is a multilingual kiosk where key information is provided in all 23 languages are represented (ETI, 2012). A commitment to effective communication between the school and parents is evident.

Translation of written communication to parents was inconsistent. There are 23 different first languages in the school and the principal felt it was impossible to consistently translate parent-teacher communication. The exception was the within the Chinese community were some children could translate for the school. The school does provide a “home liaison booklet, providing key words in English and in the guardians’ first language. In general written communication is as made as simple and as visual as possible when sent to homes with limited English.

“Some are possible, but we find especially with the Roma that they are all different- some can’t read themselves, and they don’t all recognise the same language” (appendix 4).

First language promotion

A key area for development identified by ETI (2005, p.16) was the “promotion and celebration of home languages.” DENI (2009) also encourage the employment of bilingual assistants if the school can afford it. The pupils in the case study school were free to use their “mother tongue” in the playground or when they were working together in groups. However, the principal felt that it was important to encourage as much spoken English as possible. Pupils from the same foreign countries generally were not seated together to encourage them to hear and speak as much English as possible (appendix 4). The school does not provide bilingual assistants. However, the EAL co-ordinator in the school is multilingual and works alongside a classroom assistant who happens to be bilingual. There are specialist support clubs for children who have no English from P5 upwards. In this particular school this only concerns the Roma community. The principal reported that classroom assistants help support newcomer children in the classroom and this is where much of the funding goes toward.
Collaboration

The school does not work in a cluster. Instead, both participants report that the school provides training and advice for other schools in the area. The Inclusion and Diversity Service provides training for classroom assistants. The principal felt that collaboration between the school and this agency could be better. Working in “cluster groups with the support of the IDS” is a key suggestion for good practice (DENI, 2009, p.7) and perhaps one that could further incorporated into this school’s practice. The school has links with the Chinese Welfare Association particularly around cultural events, but does not communicate with any other ethnic or minority agencies or groups. It does have strong community links in general as reported by ETI (2012).

Teaching and learning

Both professionals felt that the teachers in the school were well prepared to meet the learning needs of students. The European Common Framework provides the basis for assessment and evaluation. During induction the EAL coordinator uses this document to assess newcomer baseline language capability. The school has modified this document to include those children who had no English whatsoever (appendix 5). Pupils who require support beyond what is available in the mainstream classroom are placed in an “Intensive Support Class” (ISC) and taught by the EAL coordinator and a classroom assistant. From P1 to P3 all newcomer children go to this class for 40 min per day. Children are given time to adjust in and make friends before they begin learning. The ISC provides respite for these children who can be overcome by new experiences.

“Some children go through a silent period. When we think the child has settled (appears happy and has made friends) we set out a plan for their immediate needs and then their long term needs” (appendix 4).

The European Common Framework guides subsequent newcomer support allocation. When student have reached certain level they are integrated into mainstream teaching. This framework also contributes to special educational needs assessment. Links between “classroom teachers, withdrawal teachers, and the EAL and SENCOs were an area of concern identified by ETI (2005, p.15). Within this school there is regular communication between the class teacher, the EAL coordinator and the Special Educational needs coordinator when identifying newcomer children with additional special educational needs. When newcomer pupils have a recorded special educational need they are allocated their own individual educational plan and the learning support they require. The school uses the toolkit provided by the Inclusion and Diversity Service to help build programs of work and develop strategies. Principals interviewed by DENI (2006, p.12) felt that “there was a need for more qualified teaching staff, who can act as advisers.” The school in question demonstrates specialist teaching and support and a direct source
of support in the form of the EAL coordinator. The school’s inspection report deemed their English language support as ‘well linked to the children’s learning in class, contributing effectively to raising the children’s confidence and self-esteem and developing their learning’ (ETI, 2012, p.5). Newcomer pupils’ progress was recorded as being ‘good’ across all areas of the curriculum (ETI, 2012, p.5).

Allocation of resources

The majority of funding is put into staffing hours. “Money therefore is directed into the Intensive Support Class” (appendix 4). The Intensive support class has its own classroom assistant and class numbers are kept low. Children with identified special needs are allocated extra support as required. Both participants report a wide range of teaching resources for newcomer children and their parents such as jigsaws, games and dual language books. When children can cope with mainstream learning they are integrated into the mainstream classroom.

Continual professional development

All teachers and principals interviewed by DENI (2006, p.14) felt that teachers required more “EAL training”. The EAL coordinator in this school provides training sessions for teaching staff and classroom assistants regularly. He is a specialist in this area and also takes classes at Queen’s University, Belfast. Management, coordinators and peers observe classes and monitor effective integration of newcomer pupils. Every six weeks teachers meet to discuss strengths and areas identified. The final conclusions recorded by ETI (2012, p.6) state that “in the areas inspected, the quality of education provided by this school is very good. The school is meeting very effectively the educational and pastoral needs of the learners; and has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.” The case study school is evidently motivated in maintaining standards and progressing.

Areas for development

Both participants felt that the Inclusion and Diversity Service could offer further support. The principal of the school felt that the school required further funding, particularly for staff training and to increase staffing levels to allow for smaller group teaching.
Conclusion

This research project aimed to examine how a school in Northern Ireland is meeting the academic and social needs of its newcomer pupils. It reviewed past studies on the inclusion of EAL or newcomer pupils as well as current guidelines produced for schools. This information guided data collection, but also acted as a mean of assessment of the information received by the two participants involved. The results would suggest that this school is meeting and surpassing many of the requirements outlined by the Department of Education (2009) for supporting newcomer pupils. They are fully utilizing the funding given to them for the support and inclusion of newcomer pupils and are also attempting to fill gaps in their provision by independently paying for extra translation services.

Their EAL department is headed by a specialist who demonstrates a commitment to effective communication with staff and parents. Unambiguous assessment guidelines are in place that are utilized to measure progression, but that also contribute to special educational needs assessment. The school has created a system to identify areas for development in its own practice through observed classes and review sessions and is committed to continual professional development in this field. All the information in this report was supported by an inspection report that deemed over half the classes observed as ‘very good and outstanding’ as well as reporting an ‘outstanding’ pastoral care program and a commitment to the importance of individual cultural identity.

Limitations

This project did not set out to make generalisation about effective EAL practice in Northern Ireland schools. Using such a small sample size can open a project to bias. There is less balance between the size of the sample and the size of the overall population (Denscombe, 2007). However, the case study allows the researcher to “deal with the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations” (Denscombe, 2007, p45). It aimed to gain an insight on how one school can effectively meet the academic and social needs of its pupils with the guidance and support that is available. It is a snapshot of the educational practices occurring in a multicultural learning environment; possibly offering an insight into the approach of other schools.

Both educators involved were in management positions. It may have been useful to interview other class teachers across all the key stages to be better informed of opinions across the school. Classroom assistants appear to have a pivotal role in supporting newcomer pupils and further investigation into their role would have been useful.
Implications for further study

Both participants identified a lack of support from the Inclusion and Diversity service. The focus of this project was the approach taken by the school itself. However, the Inclusion and Diversity Service was created to provide support to schools in dealing with a diverse population. This issue is worth further investigation.

This was an extremely informative project that provided an in-depth insight into the history of understanding newcomer pupils and the provision made for their educational needs. It demonstrates how a school can fully include pupils arriving from other countries by maintaining a welcoming atmosphere whilst applying effective teaching and learning strategies. It will inform and guide this author’s future educational practice.
References


Appendices

   Available in hard copy

2. Letter to the school

3. Interview questions

4. Interview transcript

5. Modified Common European Framework
   Available in hard copy

6. Inspection report
   Available in hard copy
9th April, 2013

Dear Mr ****,

My name is Catherine Fitzpatrick. I am a final year student at St Mary’s University, Belfast. I am conducting research on how Northern Ireland schools are enabling newcomer pupils to fulfil their potential within our education system. If possible, I would like to do a case study on ******** Primary School. Your school has been recommended as an environment that successfully integrates the needs of its English language learners. My research will involve an interview with one class teacher from each key stage. I would also be grateful if I could have time to conduct an interview with you. I fully appreciate that primary schools are very busy places and I will work around your schedule. I will also ensure that each interview will be no more than 15 minutes long. If possible, I would like to start from Monday 15th April. Information collected from this research will remain confidential and will only be viewed by my supervising lecturer Dr Martin Hagan (02890 327678). If it is not a problem I will call your school on Friday afternoon to receive any feedback. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Any help at all would be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

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Interview with the principal

1. Have you seen a change in numbers of ‘newcomer’ pupils entering the school in recent years?
2. Has your school established procedures to ensure the WELFARE and PASTORAL care of newcomer pupils?
3. Are key documents available in different languages?
4. Are there structures in place to organise and develop provision for newcomer pupils? Can you describe how these structures meet different and changing needs of pupils?
5. Is there fair allocation of resources? What factors influence this?
6. Do you have induction policies including translation services in place for newcomer children and their families?
7. Do you have policies in place to help aid integration of newcomer pupils into a mainstream classroom?
8. Do you work in clusters with other schools regarding newcomer pupils?
9. Can you describe your relationship with the Inclusion and Diversity Service for Northern Ireland?
10. Can you describe any relationships you have with any outside agencies relevant to newcomer pupils?
11. Are children with an additional language facilitated and encouraged to develop their skills in their own language?
12. Do you employ any bilingual assistants?
13. Do you feel the teachers in each key stage are prepared to meet the learning needs of newcomer pupils in the classroom?
14. Do your staff members have EAL or newcomer training opportunities made available to them?
15. Do you employ external EAL teachers? If so, how often would take sessions with newcomer students?
16. How do you monitor their practice?
17. Are there assessment procedures in place to identify newcomer children with behavioural and learning difficulties?
18. Can you briefly explain how these children’s needs are being met?
Interview with the EAL co-ordinator

1. How are newcomer pupils welcomed into a new classroom?
2. Are ‘newcomer’ pupils encouraged and facilitated to develop their first language skills?
3. Can you describe the ratio of in class teaching and withdrawal teaching for newcomer pupils?
4. Do you feel confident and prepared to meet the needs of newcomer pupils?
5. Can you briefly describe how you assess the progress of newcomer students?
6. Are there assessment procedures in place to identify newcomer children with behavioural and learning difficulties?
7. Can you describe how you move forward with the learning and development of these children?
8. Is there anything you could suggest that would further enable newcomer students to meet their full potential?
9. Have you seen a change in numbers of ‘newcomer’ pupils entering the school in recent years?
10. Can you tell me about the other people you work with when meeting the needs of newcomer pupils (bilingual assistants, EAL teachers, social workers)?
11. Can you briefly describe how the welfare and pastoral needs of newcomer pupils are met?
12. Do you provide advice (homework, information) for parents in first languages (if required)?
13. Can you describe how good ‘newcomer’ parent-teacher relationships are fostered?
14. Does provision for newcomer students vary? What factors influence this?
Interview transcript with the principal

Have you seen a change in the number of newcomer students enrolling in this school in recent years?

I am coming to the end of my third year and we have had a steady influx of newcomers in the school. That is the history of the school, it has gone up slightly- we are now at 50%. It would always have been at least 40%

Has your school established procedures to ensure the welfare and pastoral care of newcomer pupils?

Absolutely, they are just treated like any other child except they might need some things looked into in greater depth. We have a child protection officer; they are always on board with all of the children as well as EAL. We have great links with the IDS and they would come, but not as often as we would like unfortunately, to support us and new teachers with new ideas and training. Social service would also be very close to us and the EWO and they have a Romanian EWO officer who would be able to go out and encourage the children to come to school more often and to keep an eye on their attendance.

Do you have a problem with attendance?

Yes, attendance wouldn’t be good, especially with Roma students, so we would work with the EWO officer coming in every month. We have to know why they were off and if there is no reason, and the EWO officer sees there is no reason that they haven’t been attending, that he will go to the house and visit to find out what the reason is.

Do you have induction procedures including translation services for newcomer children and their families?

All through the year we would have different things going on for newcomers. Next week we have a morning- and it is just for the Romanians; that they would have a special time in the morning for parents to come in to see Mr ******, who is our EAL specialist. We would have other things in the year where we would have events translated including children’s interviews. We pay translator’s to come in. Now unfortunately the department of education will pay for only one interview in a year. We feel that you need two interviews in a year and then there are instances where you might need to talk to a parent.

Are key documents available in different languages (notes going home and upcoming events)?

Some are possible, but we find, especially with the Roma that they all different- some can’t read themselves, and they don’t all recognise the same language (people from the same country). Some children can write in Chinese. At the moment we have 22 different first languages- we can’t do it for everybody, but we try to make things as accessible as possible. We use visuals and break things down into simple information.
Are children with English as an additional language encouraged and facilitated to develop skills in their first language?

To a certain extent we do let them use their mother tongue; in the playground or maybe if they are working together in groups, but we have to encourage them to use English as well. We don’t put children from the same country in one group because they won’t speak English. So the policy is that you let them off a little bit, but whenever they are working they hear the English language and that’s good practice.

Do you employ any bilingual assistants?

Yes, we have a specialist Mr ******. He is with us five mornings to at least one o’clock and then he goes to other schools. We also have specialist support clubs upstairs that have been running from January 2012 and it is only for children with no English from P5 upwards. At the moment it is only Roma children. As well as that we would have lots of extra support as in classroom assistants. We would extra classroom assistants who would come into classes, maybe during literacy or numeracy time where lots of hands on are needed. Lots of money is put into extra help.

Would any parents be involved?

Not so much in the primary. In the nursery end parents are invited to come in and help with the children, to read a story or prepare the break. It is not so easy with P1 to P7 with child protection. We encourage parents to come to PTA events and on school trips to help with the ratio, which most do not. One of our parents is a classroom assistant and she is an Indian lady, it is good for children to see there is a mix of staff as well.

Are there structures in place to organise and develop provision for newcomer students? Can you describe how these structures meet different and changing needs? Explanation: how do you fairly allocate the resource that you have?

The resources we have are mainly put into staffing hours. From P1 to P3 the children would all go to Mr ****** all most every day for a session of 40 min of intensive support. Money therefore would be directed into this ISC or Intensive Support Class. Teaching resources such as games, jigsaws, different computer programs are put into this class and this has a classroom assistant with it as well.

Do you feel the teachers in each key stage are prepared to meet the learning needs of newcomer pupils in the main classroom?

Yes, it is very difficult, but a teacher is supposed to differentiate for all levels in the classroom anyway. You might have a range of learning needs in the classroom; it is matter of finding the right level resources. The teachers are very good in that they do recognise the levels. It does take a lot of time especially for someone new coming into the school, to be able to level the children without leaving too many gaps. Teachers also have to consider that some EAL students have special needs.

Are there assessment procedures to identify newcomer students with behavioural and learning difficulties?
That would start with our European Common Framework. We go through the first steps of it. Mr ***** would baseline students to see what level they are coming in at. Normally when they have reached a certain stage will they not be EAL or they would not be in our support class anymore and go into the main stream class. With regards to behaviour they are treated like any other child. There may be behaviour issues as they might not have been in a classroom before, so you have to expect a certain amount of negative behaviour to start off with. As the children are phased in and understand us better they behave better. It is the same as child from Belfast.

**How do facilitate children moving from the support class into the mainstream?**

Once they reach a certain stage in the European Common Framework and they have shown they are working at a good level they can go back into their peer group. The first year the ISC was set up we worked it so that if their year group are taking part in an activity such as swimming or art they would go with them and return to the ISC after. Unfortunately we are not being funded, we are hoping to get funding from a charity this year, therefore Romanian children stay in that ISC class and only go into the mainstream classroom when they have reached a certain standard. Having said that the ISC have their own swimming and other activities.

**Do you employ external EAL teacher and if so how often do they teach students?**

We have our own EAL teacher so we do not need to employ externals.

**How do you monitor practice?**

We are a great school for observation. Management, coordinators and their peers up to ten times a year will observe you, so they are in and out of your room. From all aspects of good practice and senior management know what is going on in the classrooms. Also every six weeks there is a review of learning and these are assessed as well.

**Do you work in clusters with other schools regarding newcomer pupils? Would you get advice or support from others schools?**

No, they would come to us. We are seen as the experts.

**Can you describe your relationship with IDS?**

We do have a lot of support this year. We have some training sessions with classroom assistants, but that is. I am sorry to say that we have not seen much of them.

**Can you describe your relationship with outside agencies concerned with newcomer pupils?**

We have very strong links with the Chinese community and we have been nominated for a Belfast Telegraph award. We would have international events in the year. Different groups come to see us during special events.
occurring in their countries. Although apart from the Chinese community we do not have much communication with other groups.

*Does provision for newcomer children vary?*

If children are hearing English at home, they tend not to need as much support. Some students are very high level and have learning support from A level students from Methody. We assess every child individually. We could have 40 children leave or come in a year and at different times, but if the child needs support they will get it.

*Is there anything you can think of that would help newcomer children reach their full potential?*

More money and more training for all levels of staff. It would be useful to increase staffing levels so children can be taught in smaller groups and one to one.
Interview transcript with EAL co-ordinator

Can you briefly describe how the welfare and pastoral needs of newcomer pupils are met?

In this particular school there is an induction procedure for newcomer children. They are met at the door and welcomed and then I go through a series of questions, so that they understand the system in this school. I look at the history and previous education so I can ascertain the difference and what the education system will mean for them. I am also baseline assessing the children and ascertaining the language capability of their parents.

How are ‘newcomer’ pupils welcomed into a new classroom?

It is a systematic approach. We have a buddy system. The classroom is organised that it welcomes the child and meets their holistic needs. No learning will take place until that child is settled in.

Are newcomer pupils encouraged and facilitated to develop their first language skills?

It is a softly softly approach-we do not have structured plan instead we wait until the child is settled. When we think that has happened we set out a plan for their immediate needs and then their long term needs. We check to see if the child appears happy and has made friends. Some children go through a silent period. Their body language and their interaction with other students informs teachers to whether the child is ready to learn.

Can you describe the ratio of in class teaching and withdrawal teaching for newcomer pupils?

It’s all about the child. What suits that particular child? My work is mainly with withdrawal. I am using that time in a group situation to meet the needs of the child. In a classroom situation there is too much going on. It can be a very long day for these children. In the ISC they have a nice, warm, quiet classroom environment away from their peers- they learn much quicker.

Do you provide advice (homework, information) for parents in first languages (if required)?

Yes we do. We have a home liaison booklet that goes home. Key words are in the first language and English. Most parents enjoy doing that with their children.

Can you describe how good newcomer parent- teacher relationships are fostered?

The key word is inclusion. We welcome parent from the outset through induction. We usually have a translator. We have a case on the front door with all languages included. We have three open mornings for all nationalities. I also allow parents to come and see me in the morning for 10min. There are dual language books that can be taken home.
Does provision for newcomer students vary? What factors influence this?

We are blessed with resources in this school. I am the head of the EAL department and myself and a classroom assistant support learning every day. This room has resources for teachers, parents and visiting teachers.

Do you feel confident and prepared to meet the needs of newcomer pupils?

I have been doing this long enough. I was the first teacher in Northern to become an EAL teacher and have a lot of experience.

Is there relevant training available?

I usually take training and lecture at Stranmillis.

Can you briefly describe how you assess the progress of ‘newcomer’ students?

The baseline assessment ascertains the basic needs of the child and the four skills of the English language. We use the CEFR to monitor progress across the four skills. We have our expanded CEFR to assess students with no English language at all. First stage learners target can be met also. The CEFR comes from the IDS. Categories can range from speaks no English to more advanced describers. We meet once a month with teachers of different key stage, prepare targets and reviews them. I will try to link to what is being taught in the mainstream classroom.

Are there assessment procedures in place to identify newcomer children with behavioural and learning difficulties?

There is usually a silent period where the child cannot be rushed. They have to become familiar with the new environment. We have criteria, but generally speaking after that you can tell if a child is not coping for example Dyslexia.

Can you describe how you move forward with the learning and development of these children?

There will IEPs for these children together with support that is necessary. The SENCO teacher will make provisions.

Can you tell me about the other people you work with when meeting the needs of newcomer pupils (bilingual assistants, EAL teachers, social workers)?

My colleague works mainly with Roma children. She has been trained by myself as with other classroom assistants. Outside agencies regularly come such as social workers, educational welfare people and educational psychologists
Is there anything you could suggest that would further enable newcomer students to meet their full potential?

There needs to be a degree of sensitivity when new children arrive on their doorstep. It is up the teacher to provide provision for any children in need. We have toolkit that helps the school with strategies and programs of work. It is effective and builds confidence. Unfortunately the IDS do not teach the children, which I feel would be beneficial.