

# Exploring the experiences of the WOTH ethnic group in Basingstoke & Deane

By Astrid Dinneen, Hampshire EMTAS

Research into the 'Any other White background' ethnic group in Basingstoke & Deane painted a fascinating picture of the experiences of Polish learners, especially those of their families, at school. This report reveals research findings with a particular focus on parental liaison and engagement.

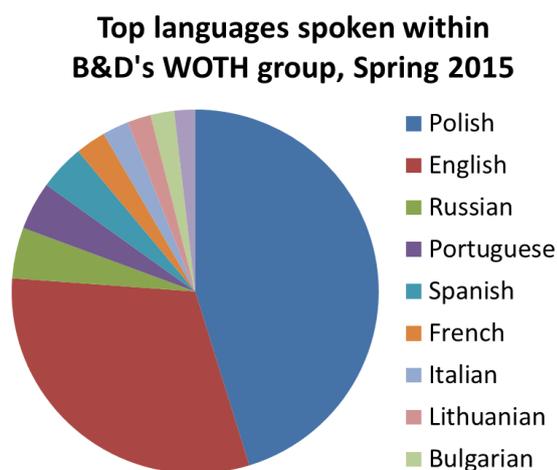


Figure 1: Languages within WOTH, Spring Census 2015

According to Census data 'Any other White background' (or WOTH) is the largest ethnic group in Basingstoke & Deane after 'White British' (WBRI). [Hampshire EMTAS data](#) show this trend has been apparent across the last three years at least. Data analysis conducted after the Spring Census 2015 showed that within this group Polish was the top language, spoken by 370 pupils in the district. Remarkably, English was also spoken by a significant number of children and young people within the WOTH group – 253 pupils to be precise.

There are several implications for this. First and foremost, this indicates that achievement data for whole ethnic groups do not reflect accurately how learners with EAL are performing because outcomes for English speakers within those groups are skewing the overall results. Specifically, this means that underachievement for particular language groups may be overlooked. [Strand et al. \(2015\)](#) suggest that nationally, particular first language groups within the White Other ethnic group are associated with much higher risks of low attainment for EAL pupils. They suggest Polish speakers are about 4 NC months behind the White Other English speakers. It is worth bearing in mind when considering these data that first language groups will consist of learners at various points in their journey to developing English – some very new and some more advanced. Still, there are implications for practitioners who should explore the achievement of learners within particular language groups as well as within their ethnic groups.

Locally, numbers of Polish-speaking pupils within the WOTH group were too low to analyse end of Key Stage benchmarks meaningfully hence it was difficult to draw any conclusion relating to their achievement. In order to learn more about the experience of Polish speakers in Basingstoke & Deane, a small scale piece of research was conducted in the district. In addition to exploring what school was like for Polish pupils and their families, the study aimed to consider successful teaching

strategies and ways of working with Polish pupils and their families, to identify any barriers hindering pupils' achievement and how these can be overcome and finally to ascertain what good practice could be usefully shared with other schools locally.

A case study was conducted in a Basingstoke Junior School where during an initial interview with the school's SENCo an overview of pupil data with a particular focus on Polish speakers was discussed. Training needs were identified and a whole-staff training session focussing on the needs of more advanced learners of EAL was delivered. Following this training, an observation was carried out in class and a conversation with Polish-speaking children took place. The case study concluded with a Polish parent coffee event supported by two EMTAS Polish-speaking Bilingual Assistants who later fed back their thoughts and own experiences of working with Polish pupils and their families. Eventually, findings were shared at a [network meeting](#) in the Summer term 2017.

## Findings

Most Polish-speaking children at the school were meeting age-related expectations or were above age-related expectations during the study. Four main factors contributing to this achievement emerged and correlated with best EAL practice: ethos, teaching and learning, peer support and parental engagement.

The ethos of the school was inclusive. Bilingualism was valued and the [Young Interpreter Scheme](#) had been running for a number of years. Children felt safe to speak in their languages around the school, including in class where first language was seen as a tool for learning. For instance, learners with EAL were encouraged to write or discuss ideas in the language of their choice. When observed in the context of a Maths lesson, children relied on Polish to work out operations and other cognitively demanding tasks. When children were not paired up with a speaker of the same language, they worked with good English language role-models. Similarly, when transition activities took place in the summer term, Year 2 children from a neighbouring infant school were paired up with Junior pupils with whom they shared a language – to share stories for instance. Training was welcomed and taken on board by practitioners who not only took a very active part during their session but also implemented principles into their own practice. For example, when browsing exercise books during the class observation, there was evidence of teachers trialling a Dictagloss activity (Figure 2: Modelling how to write a newspaper article using Dictagloss).

# Peaceful Man Meets Violent End

January 31<sup>st</sup> 1948 Issue 31

Yesterday at 5:17pm, the iconic figure Mahatma Gandhi was tragically assassinated and killed. It was witnessed by many of his followers, as they were attending a prayer meeting at Birla House. Gandhi was outside on the steps when he was shot three times in the chest at close range.

The perpetrator was found to be Nathuram Godse, a militant Hindu nationalist known to the authorities as having extreme views. It is suggested that Godse disagreed with Gandhi's peaceful protesting. He wanted him to act more violently towards other Muslims in India, which was his primary motive behind his actions. Despite hundreds of people at the scene, this did not prevent Godse from performing this unforgivable act.

As Godse drew his semi-automatic pistol, an onlooker extremely near him reported, "I could see his hands trembling with fear. The sweat dripped from his brow...he closed his eyes and BANG! The trigger was pulled."

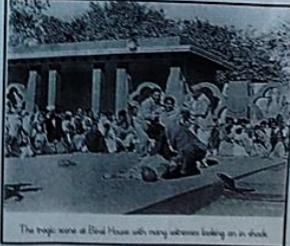
Afterwards, many observers were shaken up by the terrible events they had seen unfold before them. When interviewed, Jashina (a follower of Gandhi) described

the sudden shock of his death as a great loss for India and the world in fighting for peace and freedom of speech.

Before this, there had been several other unsuccessful attempts at assassinating him. Furthermore, a reliable source told us that Gandhi was aware of a growing number of people who disagreed with his beliefs and moral stances. Despite this, he still continued to fight for what he believed in and was unwilling to shy away from his duty.

It is likely that the police will continue to investigate the murder further, before his body will be released for his funeral and burial.

By reporter LHill



The tragic scene at Birla House with many witnesses looking on in shock.

Conjunctions	Formal language	Formal phrases/Sentence openers
Which ✓	Iconic figure ✓	It was witnessed by ✓
Despite ✓	Assassinated ✓	It is suggested that ✓
Furthermore ✓	Perpetrator ✓	An onlooker extremely near ✓
However	Nationalist ✓	Afterwards
Even though	unfild ✓	Many observers
	Prevent ✓	When interviewed
	Great loss ✓	Before this
	Unforgivable act ✓	It is likely that ✓
	Unsuccessful ✓	
	Reliable source ✓	
	Moral stances ✓	
	Unwilling	

Total = 20

Most important information - 5 us

This happened at 5:17pm and Gandhi died because he was shot 3 times, this happened 30.1.1948. January Gandhi died on steps Birla house Godse Nathuram kill Gandhi.

Additional facts and quotes

Godse hand was trembling with fear, Godse's perpetrator, Godse disagreed with Gandhi's peaceful protesting, all followers was shocked when hear that Godse shot Gandhi dead, Gandhi death some hours later.

Background information/ alternative views

Godse use to kill Gandhi semi-automatic pistol, Godse went to kill one of Gandhi's workers, his people was scared and lot of people running away.

Lead important information

Godse shocked, "BANG" and handed himself, Godse was go to jail.

According to many witnesses afterwards all observers suddenly However many witnesses perpetrator many followers said unsuccessful.

Figure 2: Modelling how to write a newspaper article using Dictagloss

Communicating and engaging with EAL parents emerged as a significant issue – significant in terms of its importance as well as in terms of its difficulty. In fact, this was seen as tricky by both the school and the parents themselves. Delegates at the network meeting identified with this issue and learnt about what parents found difficult before finding out what they found helpful.

### What did parents find difficult at school?

Induction was seen as a delicate time. Parents struggled to get to grips with school systems, such as uniforms, understanding how to pay for school dinners, learning about the purpose of different virtual learning environments – all of this whilst having to complete forms in an unfamiliar language. Sometimes, support came in the form of an EMTAS Bilingual Assistant who was able to interpret for school systems and routines. Parents found this supportive although this often happened by chance (when bilingual staff were in school to support another child, for example).

Keeping up to speed with the school calendar was another difficulty mentioned by parents. Specifically, parents of EAL learners struggled to understand long and wordy letters concerning events such as parent evenings, trips, data collection, and other special occasions such as sports days and INSET days. The very use of acronyms such as INSET was another difficulty which at times caused embarrassment. This was illustrated by a call received by EMTAS bilingual staff

operating the Polish [phoneline](#) from a parent concerned that their son's school was closing due to 'insects'. Evidently, the use of the term 'INSET' is not so straightforward and schools must take action to communicate with parents in a clear and meaningful way.

Understanding timetables was another issue for a lot of EAL parents, especially in Secondary school. Specifically, parents struggled to recognise names of subjects, teachers and timings from the information supplied and were therefore not always able to support their child with their new routine on point of arrival.

	<b>MonB</b>	<b>TueB</b>	<b>WedB</b>	<b>ThuB</b>	<b>FriB</b>
<b>1</b>	En VST F11	Fr ESD G14	Pe HTL	Sc MRS F03	Dr KCO F10
<b>2</b>	Pe HTL	Hi RCS G09	Sc MRS F03	Sc MRS F03	En VST F11
<b>3</b>	Dt RTR G04	It SCR F16	Dt RTR G04	It SCR F16	Cz VST F11
<b>4</b>	En VST F11	Ma RFR F06	Ma RFR F06	Ma RFR F06	Hi RCS G09
<b>5</b>	Sc MRS F03	En VST F11	Ge RCS G09	Re ARN G06	Ma SSN F07

Figure 3: Example of timetable at a Secondary School

Parents were very keen to support their children with homework and whilst subject knowledge did not normally cause concern, instructions were seen as more problematic due to the more academic nature of the language used. Likewise, supporting their children with lists of keywords was tricky and parents had to first spend time learning the meaning of the vocabulary before being able to help their children understand the words through first language.

### What did parents find helpful?

Parents spoke about how useful it was to receive text messages reinforcing the content of letters received from the school. This was especially true when letters were forgotten by children at the bottom of their bags or when they contained a lot of information to process. In contrast, text messages offered condensed details highlighting the most important facts e.g. dates and times of meetings, things to bring to school, reminders, etc. and helped parents to keep track of what was happening and when.

Other parents were another important resource for families. When unsure about any aspect of school life, EAL parents looked to other parents – EAL as well as English-only - to make sure they had understood what they had to do, to check what was happening, etc. Other parents were a source of reassurance for some, however it is

worth noting that those who were not confident with their English to approach British parents continued to feel lost and isolated at pick up and drop off times.

Receiving feedback from their child's teacher at the end of the day was another way for parents to feel reassured. EAL parents appreciated school practitioners initiating a conversation about how the children had coped during the day, what they had achieved and what they needed to work on. This was even more appreciated when parents were not confident to take the first step to approach staff themselves. In some cases, EAL parents felt they were only approached by classroom staff when their child had done something wrong.

EAL parents spoke about the advantages of knowing what was coming up in class from one week to the next because this gave them opportunities to discuss topics in advance at home and in first language. One parent in particular spoke fondly of the time when she was able to do some research with her daughter about a geography topic ahead of the lesson. She recalled how her child had come home buzzing from having been able to contribute to classroom discussions thanks to the pre-reading she had done in preparation for the lesson. Parents found general information shared on the school website about what the children were to learn over the half-term less useful because this information contained less detail and did not focus on the particular language needs of their child.

## Next steps

A network meeting was held in Basingstoke in the Summer term 2017 to share findings from the research with local infant, junior and secondary EAL practitioners. Delegates were particularly interested in EAL parents' perspectives and discussed specific aspects of home-school liaison they wanted to improve at their school. Participants collaborated on a checklist which was shared across the working party.

- First day for child – buddy/Young Interpreter to tour the school showing key places e.g. toilet, playground, where lunch is etc.
- Leaflets in different languages about school and expectations – policies, ethos etc.
- Story book with photos of the school, staff etc.
- Before arriving in class or first day, children and parents have leaflet with photos of key adults e.g. Head, Deputy, Class Teacher, TA etc.
- Show parents where to pick up children and how to get there
- How to pay for trips etc.
- Visual timetable
- Dinner information, pack lunch rules - healthy food
- Help setting up parent login for online homework
- Being present at the initial meeting to meet parents
- Increase personal liaison with parents
- Letters need to be simple and explained
- Attend transition visits

Figure 4: Checklist created by delegates at Basingstoke EAL network meeting

To follow up on the practice discussed at the network meeting, practitioners at The Vyne School organised a coffee morning event for parents of EAL learners joining Year 7 in the Autumn term. The event was attended by key staff along with the

school's Young Interpreters who spoke to the children and families and gave tours of the school. The event was well-attended by pupils from a range of feeder Primary schools who felt supported in their transition to Secondary education. With effective home-school liaison being such a significant finding in this case study, it is hoped practitioners will continue to think of effective ways of communicating and engaging with their EAL families throughout the academic year.

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