

EMTAS Deceleration Guidance

Deceleration for learners of English as an additional language (EAL)

Deceleration is the decision to educate a child in a cohort below that of their chronological peers.

Deceleration has been described “...as one of the few areas in education where it is difficult to find any studies with a positive effect...” (Hattie 2008, p98). Studies cite negative impact on long-term achievement, self-esteem and risks of dropping out of school early with the Education Endowment Foundation noting “negative impact for very high cost based on extensive evidence” (EEF 2016).

The local authority has a clear position on deceleration:

“Deceleration is not recommended for pupils for whom English is an additional language and has been found to impact negatively on pupils’ self-esteem” HCC, 2017.

Characteristics of EAL progression

A synthesis of research has indicated that it can take between 5 and 10 years for EAL learners to catch up with their non-EAL peers (Rosamund, Bhatti, Sharieff and Wilson, 2003). There is a range of factors which can affect the rate at which EAL learners will catch up with peers including

- age on entering UK educational system
- previous educational background
- level of literacy in first language (L1)
- the degree to which pupils are educationally supported at home
- quality of school provision
- wider cognitive ability/presence of an additional Special Educational Need or Disability (SEND)

As already stated, EAL learners who are in the earlier stages of acquiring English are likely to be working below age-related expectations across the curriculum in terms of their application of language and their literacy levels in English for a significant part of their education. Typically, EAL learners have



spikey profiles of achievement, performing better in some subjects than others with variation also evident in their use of English in different curriculum subjects. Establishing a baseline and tracking progress in a pupil's acquisition of English should be done using an EAL-specific scale such as the [EAL Assessment Framework](#) developed by the Bell Foundation.

Learning EAL is not in itself a reason for pupils failing to make progress at an acceptable rate and there should be the expectation that these pupils must make more than average rates of progress if they are ever to catch up with their peers, unless there are additional SENDs. Depending on their point of entry into the school system, most EAL learners are unlikely to be working at an appropriate level for statutory tests for a significant period of time. Decelerating children because they are not ready for statutory tests is not recommended and schools should refer to DfE guidance on test administration for detailed information about what to do in such cases.

When an EAL learner fails to make satisfactory progress or plateaus in their learning it is essential to first consider whether the teaching and learning environment is meeting their needs as a learner of English as an additional language. It may also be relevant to investigate external factors for example their home circumstances or things going on within the local community. Whatever the reasons for lack of progress, decelerating EAL learners is unlikely to be successful as the root cause(s) of the problem will not have been addressed.

EAL learners with an additional SEND

The definitive identification of EAL pupils with an additional SEND can be problematic, though indisputably some children and young people do have both sets of needs.

The situation for EAL learners with additional SENDs is more complicated in terms of expectations about rates of progress. However, mirroring advice for EAL learners, the local authority has a clear position on decelerating pupils with a SEND:

“Special educational needs cannot, alone, be justification for deceleration/acceleration...deceleration will not have the effect of providing an environment where the child’s special needs will be any less.” HCC, 2017.



Catering for children and young people who have both sets of needs can be extremely challenging. However, effective practice and provision requires that schools cater for both sets of needs which involves understanding and effectively implementing a different set of pedagogies for each.

Decelerating pupils with both sets of needs is not regarded as good practice.

Some observations about good practice for EAL learners and the potential negative effects of deceleration

1. Social issues and self-esteem

Decelerating EAL learners is likely to have a negative impact on their self-esteem as they will be aware that they have been placed with learners younger than themselves. EAL learners are already at risk of marginalisation because they may look, sound and/or behave differently from their peers. Making friendships can be disproportionately hard for EAL learners because of linguistic and cultural barriers and decelerating children so they have to repeat a year may mean that they lose existing friends and have to make new ones. They may also be subject to subtle and/or overt bullying by peers on the basis that they are deemed to be 'stupid'.

2. Peer support

Using peers to support EAL learners both in and out of the classroom is a well understood strategy. A recent report highlighted how

"...peers came across as playing a central role in offering language support, be it by sitting next to a newly-arrived child, working as a young interpreter or relying on resources such as 'communication cards' to help the child access words in English. Such peer support played an important role in both EAL pupils' language development and sense of integration within the classroom and the school community." (Arnot et al, 2014, p. 92)

However, peers who are significantly younger than a target EAL learner will be less equipped to provide effective support e.g. peers

- modelling use of oral English in different contexts
- translating/interpreting using first language (L1)
- having less life experience and therefore a reduced set of life skills to draw upon
- knowing how to provide appropriate social and emotional support

3. The learning environment

It is well understood that teaching and learning for EAL learners must “keep cognitive challenge appropriately high by providing a supportive context for learning” (PNS, 2006).

When a child is educated with peers who are substantially younger, it becomes more problematic to provide a suitable learning environment.

Examples include

- ensuring that the curriculum challenge meets the cognitive and academic potential of the child
- avoiding repetition of curricula for those who are asked to repeat a year
- creating suitable opportunities for peers to model age-appropriate oral language (both English and L1)
- providing learning materials that are age-appropriate.

Involving parents/carers

“It is the view and policy of the Children’s Services Department of Hampshire County Council that acceleration/deceleration should only occur in exceptional circumstances and only after detailed discussions with parents/carers and relevant professionals.” HCC, 2017.

Brophy (2006) observes that in developed countries “repetition decisions are almost always initiated by the school rather than the parents, although they may be communicated as recommendations rather than requirements (in which case, the final decision is left up to the parents).”

There is evidence that certain groups of parents are less likely to access educational services than others, including those from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background. A number of potential barriers has also been identified, for example staff misconceptions around different cultural attitudes towards child-rearing and parents’ inability to communicate well in English. In some cases, families “originate from cultures where parents are not expected to take an active role in child education” and conversely there are situations “where parents put complete trust in the school and rarely question its authority and the decisions it makes” (Katz, La Placa & Hunter 2007).

Experience also supports the notion that parents/carers from BME backgrounds will be disproportionately vulnerable to fully understanding complex decisions taken by schools and other educational providers around practice and provision



for their children. The research reinforces this key message with the finding that “...negative effects are disproportionately greater for disadvantaged pupils [and] for pupils from ethnic minorities” (EEF, 2016). For these reasons it is imperative that where a deceleration is being considered, every effort is made to ensure that linguistic and cultural barriers are addressed in any discussions with parents/carers.

Recommendations

Schools should

- take account of the English language support needs of the parents/carers and make a judgement about whether or not an interpreter would be needed for meetings. They should bear in mind that surface control of social and conversational English may not fully equip parents/carers in terms of appreciating the complexities that may arise in a deceleration case;
- ensure that any disadvantages of deceleration are effectively communicated so that parents/carers can make a fair judgement that ensures any decision to decelerate would make “a clear difference to their child’s future education and life chances”;
- encourage parents/carers to fully engage with the school, preferably through a face-to-face meeting (supported by an interpreter if necessary);
- be confident that whilst parents/carers have the right to disagree with the school’s decision and the right to have their views heard, any decision to decelerate must be made in the best interests of the child

In some cases, parents/carers of EAL learners may request that their child be decelerated. There may be a number of reasons for this but often it is because the family has lived in a country where deceleration is a relatively common occurrence. Whilst schools must give this type of request due consideration, they should bear in mind the overwhelming drawbacks of deceleration and ultimately, in consultation with Education and Inclusion Advisers and EMTAS EAL Specialists, it should be the school’s final decision, not the parents’.





Involving EAL specialists

Hampshire Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service (EMTAS) employs interpreters and specialist teachers who are available to facilitate parent conferencing and offer advice about pedagogy, practice and provision for EAL learners. It is recommended that schools involve EAL specialists before any final decision is taken, even if the principal reason for decelerating a child is not because the child is an EAL learner.

Involving pupils

Involving pupils who are of an appropriate age in decisions around deceleration is important because “school-imposed grade repetition is stressful to students and associated with reduced self-esteem, impaired peer relationships, alienation from school, and sharply increased likelihood of eventual dropout” (Brophy, 2006, p.16).

Hampshire County Council promotes a Rights Respecting agenda amongst its schools and EMTAS is a Rights Respecting service. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998) states

“Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

It is recommended that schools automatically involve secondary aged EAL learners in decisions around deceleration and think carefully about seeking the views of older primary aged pupils.





Appendix 1: Supporting Literature

Arnot, M., Schneider, C., Evans, M., Liu, Y., Welply, O., & Davies-Tutt, D. (2014). *School approaches to the education of EAL students*. University of Cambridge: Bell Foundation.

Bell Foundation (2016). [EAL Assessment Framework](#)

Brophy, J. (2006). [Grade repetition](#). *Education policy series*, 6, 420-437.

Education and Endowment Fund Teaching and Learning Toolkit (2016), *Repeating a Year*

Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.

HCC (2016). [Guidance on good practice relating to the admission, induction, support and provision for newly-arrived learners of English as an additional language joining Key Stage 4](#) (Late Arrivals)

HCC (2017). *The placement of children outside their chronological year group*. <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/HIAS/placementofchildrenoutsidetheirchronologicalyeargroup.pdf>

Katz, I., La Placa, V., & Hunter, S. (2007). *Barriers to inclusion and successful engagement of parents in mainstream services*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

PNS (2006) Excellence and Enjoyment: *learning and teaching for bilingual children in the primary years*. PDM 2 EAL principles, pedagogy and practice: first language as a tool for learning.

Rosamund, S., Bhatti, I., Sharieff, M. and Wilson, K. (2003). *Distinguishing the difference: SEN or EAL?* Birmingham: Birmingham Advisory and Support Service

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1998) http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Publication-pdfs/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf

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