

English as an Additional Language Policy (EAL)



SUTTON VALENCE SCHOOL

Relevant to ISI regulatory requirements, Part 6, §24 (3) (6)

Introduction

Sutton Valence School always has a proportion – between 5-10% – of pupils whose native tongue is not English. We value cultural diversity and regard overseas pupils as an enrichment of our School life and community. Their presence can help to open the eyes of our British pupils to other languages, ethnicities, cultures and countries. We aim to provide them with the best education we can offer to enable them to study at a British university if they so wish.

Why does the School provide EAL lessons?

A principal reason – perhaps the main reason – for overseas parents sending their children here is to build up their English to a high level of competence. Their language improves partly just by being in the school environment and taking part in the curriculum and other activities, but it also greatly benefits from lessons that target their weaknesses and play to their strengths. Most overseas students have a standard of English that in one or more respects is below that of their native English-speaking peers. In particular, many of them have pronunciation problems, all make non-native grammar mistakes, many have a limited vocabulary and most struggle with writing academic English. They can also benefit emotionally by being, just for an hour or two a week, in a group with others who face similar challenges.

Who are the pupils?

The majority of overseas pupils are Germans and Chinese, with the remainder being made up of small numbers from a variety of other nations, including Spanish, Swiss and Austrian pupils as well as HMC scholars from Eastern Europe.

In order to take full advantage of the educational experience and to improve their English language skills to as close to fluency as possible, the School encourages overseas pupils to stay for as long as their native education system, or personal circumstances allow.

In addition, we have some students who speak English as their first language but whose parents speak a different language at home. These students do not receive lessons as part of the EAL department but are monitored by their form tutors who keep a watching brief.

Groups and timetabling

Group sizes are low (rarely more than six and often one-to-one). The Third, Fourth Form and Fifth Form students have four lessons per week and pupils in the First to Second Form have two lessons per week. In the Sixth Form, EAL lessons have to be fitted in around other subjects. Pupils normally have two lessons per week (and we try to fit in individual lessons for speaking practice) In the lead up to the IELTS or GCSE examinations, additional examination practice may take place on a Saturday afternoon.

Challenges faced by EAL pupils, which all teaching staff must bear in mind:

- Sub-standard English is a problem for *all* non-native speaking pupils. This can take various forms. Some are equally weak in all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), while others are good, or seemingly good at listening and speaking, while writing rather poorly. Language learners invariably pretend to understand more than they do. Vocabulary and idioms are problems for almost all. They become adept at managing with a limited stock of words and structures and find it hard to learn more. Some keep quiet for fear of making mistakes and utter only a tiny fraction of what they

would be saying in their native tongue. We may entirely misjudge their character, and even their abilities, as a result (e.g. we may think they are incapable of a task, which they would be able to do easily if it were set in their own language);

- Our classroom interaction may be very different from their expectations. For example, in China pupils mainly sit silently in large classes for up to ten hours a day, being lectured from the front. They may not be used to asking questions or requesting individual help. Our teaching and learning styles may be difficult for them. For example, they may not be used to discussion, to open-ended questions and individual research. They may expect to conform to ‘correct’ answers. Discussion is also difficult for foreign learners for linguistic reasons. Listening to native speakers talk amongst themselves is a hard skill – much harder than one-to-one communication between themselves and a native. (See below for advice on helping them in lessons.)
- Some homework tasks may pose similar problems. They may be unused to creative, free writing, for example – perhaps even in their own language;
- They (or their parents) may not value creative subjects;
- Those who were high achievers at home may feel humiliated if they do less well here because of language, cultural or curriculum difficulties;
- They may have difficulty interpreting our grades. For some parents – and thus for their children too – grade B (or a grade 7) may seem like abject failure. There may also be misunderstanding about effort grades. A 3.5, for example, may seem poor as parents believe it is out of 10.

Recommended strategies for subject teachers

- Overseas pupils with weak English should sit with a native English-speaking neighbour. This will not only make them speak English, but will also help them to understand instructions, and it will encourage integration. New pupils might benefit from a kind of semi-official ‘buddy’, entrusted with making sure that the overseas pupil knows what is going on and what the prep is;
- It is necessary to repeat things a lot, even more than with native speaker pupils. It is often harder to retain information that is heard in a foreign language (e.g. numbers). Things should be written down as much as possible and lessons should aim to be multi-sensory;
- Where possible, pupils should answer questions in pairs before class feedback. This gives all of them the chance to think about the questions and gives overseas pupils more confidence to speak;
- When speaking to overseas pupils, staff should aim for ‘one to one’ as much as possible, as they understand better with direct eye contact and speech aimed personally at them;
- They should be allowed, within reason, to look words up in the dictionaries (paper or electronic) that they usually have with them;
- If an overseas pupil clearly does not understand some key word or point, and there is another pupil there with the same mother tongue, they should be allowed to help each other – briefly – in their own language;
- “Do you understand?” is not always a helpful question, as they will generally say that they do, even if they don’t. Pupils should instead be asked, for example, “So, X, tell me again, *what’s* the word for the main character in a story?” or say things like “X, tell me again what the prep is”. You can also ask them to clarify points with their neighbour, e.g. “Amy, will you check with Mengxi that you both know exactly what to do for prep tonight?”;

- All prep should be set as an Assignment on Teams so that it is easy to refer back to and to act as a reminder;
- We should ensure that key words are seen in written form as well as spoken. When we can, we should check if they can pronounce the new terms intelligibly;
- When marking their written work, there is usually no need for non-EAL staff to try to correct every single grammar error;
- They should be asked to give presentations in class. They will benefit from the chance to prepare carefully in advance and may surprise you with the quality of the result.

Help for subject staff from the EAL department

- Staff should send pupils to the EAL department with pieces of work that need a lot of linguistic correction, so that they can be corrected and explained;
- The same goes for times when a pupil has not understood a piece of prep and needs help in re-doing it, or if there is a difficult text that needs line by line explanation;
- The EAL department should encourage pupils to bring difficult pieces of work for help and look at the work they are producing in other subjects.

Tasks of the School as a whole

The School can help by acknowledging and celebrating these pupils wherever possible. We need to show that we value them and their home cultures and take an interest in both. (Marking Chinese New Year is an example of this.) We must not give the impression that English is the only language of value or that the Anglosphere is the only world that counts.

Furthermore, in recent years, some overseas students have presented facts and information about their country to the Juniors at the weekly Junior Assembly. This has been a success for all.

The School can help by making sure that paperwork and forms are written in plain English. Some paperwork might need to be translated.

The EAL department and the boarding houses have special roles in helping and caring for overseas pupils. The boarding staff are on the front line in helping them to settle in and feel at home, and they have a lot of experience in doing this very successfully.

The following details are based on material in the EAL department handbook:

Aims of the EAL department

- to equip non-native English speakers with the language skills they need to enrich their current and future lives, especially as they study and work in English-speaking environments;
- to provide a flexible teaching programme tailored to individual needs;
- to encourage students to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning;
- to provide support, encouragement and affirmation;
- to help students to understand and adapt to British culture;
- to help them to integrate into the School community;
- to help them to enjoy and make the most of their time in the UK;

- to help them, as required, with the language demands of their work in the various subjects they study at Sutton Valence School;
- to prepare them for the Cambridge English IGCSE in ESL (usually taken in the Fifth Form or Lower Sixth), and as required, for other EAL examinations;
- to prepare them, as required, to meet the English language requirements of British universities. This typically involves preparation for the IELTS examination;
- pupils who study with us for one, two or three terms often study towards a Cambridge English examination, such Preliminary (PET), First Certificate (FCE) or Advanced Certificate (ACE).

Needs-based teaching

Since EAL has to be tailored individually and continually adapted to students' needs, including work that 'comes up' in other subjects, it is clear that the courses and lessons have to be very flexible. Plans sometimes have to be overturned on the fly. Detailed schemes of work are neither feasible nor helpful. There are however outline schemes, largely based on grammar and topics.

The main day-to-day tasks of the EAL department

- to provide ample practice in all the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, incorporating a variety of accents, registers and styles;
- to employ a wide range of stimulating language activities and materials;
- to assist students, as requested by themselves or their subject teachers, with the English language aspects of their academic work;
- to prepare pupils for IGCSE, IELTS examinations and other Cambridge English exams, such as PET and Advanced Certificate;
- to help students with applications and other form-filling;
- to provide a caring atmosphere, a comfortable environment, and an 'open door';
- to demonstrate and teach cultural awareness and appropriate behaviour;
- to show interest in, and respect for, their cultures and homelands;
- to liaise, as appropriate, with subject teachers, tutors, heads of year and boarding-house staff;
- to help them with their work in other subjects, as required, for example by teaching specialist vocabulary, helping them to 'decode' questions and discussing set books.

Preparing pupils for IGCSE and IELTS

IGCSE

The Cambridge (CIE) IGCSE in EAL is a valuable qualification for the students to take away with them. Leavers of 16 or over who are present the summer term are entered for it, unless they already have a good grade in it. The syllabus aims to develop students' communication skills, provide a good basis for future studies or work, develop their awareness of language and language-learning skills and promote students' personal development.

IELTS

In the academic variant taken here, IELTS is a crucial qualification for most Sutton Valence School students who plan to attend British universities. It is also recognised for many courses around the world. The candidates are graded in 'bands', of which number nine is the highest and equivalent to native speaker level. Universities typically demand IELTS bands of around seven

(‘good user’). Such results can be difficult to achieve, particularly for those with non-European mother tongues. The examination can be taken at any time and any number of times. It is offered almost weekly each year. Note that the qualification is intended only for university entry and expires after two years.

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