

Feels Like Home: Exploring the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools in Northern Ireland

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**Believe in
children**



Barnardo's
Northern Ireland





Contents

Tables and Figures	2
Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Policy Overview	11
Chapter 2: Methodology	28
Chapter 3: Results	32
■ Section 1: Newcomer pupils in school	32
■ Section 2: Newcomer pupils in the classroom	41
■ Section 3: Newcomer parents and the schools	54
■ Section 4: Good practice	57
Chapter 4: Discussion and Recommendations	61
References	65



Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1: Number of newcomer pupils by ELB (2013/14)	16
Table 2: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)	18
Table 3: Comparison for compulsory school starting age	21
Table 4: Comparison between AQE and GL assessments	23
Table 5: Teachers participating in study by Key Stage group	29
Table 6: Summary of good practice at school and classroom level	58

Figures

Figure 1: Non – English languages in NI	13
Figure 2: Increase in newcomer pupils in NI primary schools	15
Figure 3: Primary schools included in the sample by ELB	28



Introduction

Northern Ireland (NI) has undergone a rapid demographic change in the past decade as a consequence of migration. Census 2011 data revealed that the number of those born outside of the United Kingdom (UK) and Republic of Ireland (ROI) living in NI increased almost threefold from 27,266 residents in 2001 to 81,314 in 2011. This accounts for 4.5% of the total resident population of Northern Ireland in 2011 compared to 1.6% in 2001. This unprecedented shift has increased the ethnic and cultural diversity of the population and seen a significant rise in the number of languages spoken here.

As a result, schools in NI have also seen a rise in admissions of children with little or no English language. The Department of Education (DE) has identified these pupils as ‘newcomer’ which has been defined as *“a pupil who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher. It does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish medium school”* (Supporting Newcomer Pupils, 2009). Data provided by DE has shown an exponential growth in newcomer pupils at all stages of education since 2006/07 when 3,911 pupils were registered until 2014 when 10,698 newcomer pupils were attending school in Northern Ireland. In the most recent School Census figures (2013/14), newcomer pupils now account for 3.2% of the total school population with the

largest growth in the primary school sector accounting for 4.3% of primary school children.

Although the black and minority ethnic (BME) population has been steadily growing, minimal research has been conducted in NI about the educational needs and policy implications for children with English as an Additional Language (EAL). This is also an area of particular interest for Barnardo’s NI as we increasingly work with newcomer families and children across our service base and work in schools. In order to explore the issues faced by both school staff and newcomer pupils, Barnardo’s NI has funded and conducted research into experiences of school staff and newcomer pupils in primary schools to address this gap. As this is a qualitative study, the rich data collected provided evidence of different experiences and perceptions of the impact of newcomer pupils. This study was particularly important in providing children with an opportunity to talk about their own experiences as newcomer pupils in NI.

Purpose of this research

The overall purpose of this research was to investigate both the experiences of newcomer pupils and staff in primary schools in Northern Ireland. Specifically, the main objectives were to:

- gain an understanding of the arrangements primary schools made for newcomer pupils and the support available to schools;



- investigate the challenges faced by both newcomer pupils and teachers in primary schools;
- explore the relationship between newcomer pupils' parents and school;
- identify best practice in this area.

Findings from the research will be used to inform policymakers, educators and practitioners.

Methodology

The research was qualitative in nature with all interviews and focus groups conducted between December 2013 and June 2014. Four primary schools with a high number of newcomer pupils were invited to participate in the study in each of the five Education and Library Boards (ELB) which resulted in a total of 13 schools participating in the study. The research was conducted over three phases:

Phase 1: Interviews with principals

The principal or vice principal of each of the 13 selected schools was interviewed. The aim of this phase was to understand the effect of newcomer pupils from a whole schools' perspective. Principals were asked questions related to the process of admission for newcomer pupils, support available to schools, pastoral care and integration. Challenges and benefits of newcomer pupils and examples of good practice were also explored.

Phase 2: Interviews and focus groups with teachers

A total of 39 teachers drawn from across different stages of primary school

participated in the study including Foundation Stage (n = 17), Key Stage 1 (n = 12) and Key Stage 2 (n = 10) teachers. In this phase, nine 1-to-1 interviews and nine focus groups with teachers were conducted. Teachers were asked about the ways they managed and integrated newcomer pupils in the classroom, pastoral care issues and relationships with newcomer pupils' parents. They were also asked about the resources, support and training available to teachers for newcomer pupils.

Phase 3: Focus groups with newcomer pupils

It was important that children were provided with an opportunity to talk about their experiences as newcomer pupils. Ten focus groups and one 1-to-1 interview were conducted in 11 primary schools. This resulted in a total of 47 children from 14 different countries of origin participating in the research. Due to the children being newcomer pupils, we anticipated that pupils would have varying abilities to communicate in English and that our research methods should not be heavily dependent on the pupils' linguistic competency. To counteract this, all participating schools were made aware that Barnardo's NI would provide an interpreter to ensure that language was not a barrier to any pupils' participation. In addition, we adapted an arts related method 'the jigsaw approach' that has been used with young children to enable them to share their lived experiences in a relevant and meaningful way whilst capturing their voice with authenticity (Stephenson,



2011). Children were asked to write one word on a jigsaw piece on topics such as how they felt when they started school. The researcher then used the pupils' words as prompts to gain a deeper understanding about their experiences. In this way, all the children were able to participate and communicate their views and perceptions about their school experiences in a fun and relaxed way.

All the interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded with permission and transcribed. Once transcribed, the audio files were deleted. Qualitative analysis has been conducted using qualitative data analysis software NVivo.

Key findings

Whole school Level

- All schools had a range of multilingual signage and visual displays to welcome visitors and pupils.
- Most principals were generally satisfied with the admission system for newcomer pupils.
- Schools usually took a holistic approach with newcomer pupils and families. Support offered to newcomer families from schools in this study included:
 - Helping parents complete official paperwork;

- Holding evening classes to support parents with English language learning;
- Running parenting classes for parents;
- Extended school hours through breakfast and afterschool clubs to facilitate shift work;
- Providing information about purchasing uniforms at a lower cost.

- Concerns were raised by school management and teaching staff about poor attendance by some newcomer pupils. The two main areas of concern were: (i) attendance at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and; (ii) extended periods of time off during term time.

- Teachers found bullying amongst newcomer pupils with a mutual language or between two newcomer groups particularly problematic to identify as they were unable to understand name calling and nasty comments in different languages.

- School principals generally considered the amount of funding for newcomer pupils appropriate and the majority reported that this funding is used for additional teaching staff and classroom assistants.



- Concerns about the potential of newcomer funding to be ring-fenced centred on the reduction of flexibility for schools and the disproportionate impact ring-fencing may have on schools with small numbers of newcomer pupils.
- School staff expressed mixed views on the Inclusion and Diversity Service. They felt the service was most useful when providing schools with tools to introduce and settle newcomers initially. However, they found it was of limited support in terms of providing advice for classroom practice particularly for more complex issues of special educational needs and age appropriate resources.
- Teachers felt that younger children with little or no English were easier to manage as the Foundation Stage curriculum allows more interaction and all children are learning new things at the same time compared with older children who had little English and had no experience of school.
- Three main challenges for teachers in the classroom were identified as:
 - **Language barrier:** This was problematic in terms of being able to communicate with newcomer pupils to understand their needs, assess their progress and ensuring that they could access the NI Curriculum.
 - **Differentiation:** The breadth of home languages, different levels of understanding of English and school readiness and a range of academic ability within the classroom was highlighted as a challenge for teachers in terms of preparation and classroom management and teaching at the appropriate level.
 - **Special Educational Needs:** Teachers reported difficulty in being able to discern between the language barrier and a potential learning problem or special educational need for newcomer pupils.

In the classroom

- Two thirds of newcomer pupils felt scared starting primary school in NI. Pupils' main concerns centred on not knowing any other children and not being able to make friends or interact with others because of the language difference.
- Low school readiness manifested itself in the classroom as children from other countries may not have had any previous experience of being away from their parents, school routines or understanding of appropriate behaviour in the classroom.



- Teachers identified that while many newcomer pupils were able to develop conversational English and recognised basic vocabulary quite quickly after an initial silent period, there were concerns raised about the depth of newcomer pupils' English language comprehension.
- Some children felt frustrated at misunderstandings caused by the language barrier. Teachers highlighted that the lack of age appropriate materials for older newcomer pupils in Key Stage 2 often adds to pupils' frustration.
- Most of the pupils considered their English to be better than their parents' English language.
- Schools typically communicate with parents of newcomer pupils through interpreters supplied by the Inclusion and Diversity Service and translated letters sent home.
- Schools found it particularly problematic to deal with parents with a complete lack of English and low levels of literacy in their own language.
- Teachers recognised that homework could often be challenging for newcomer pupils as some parents are unable to provide support due to their own lack of English.

At home

- Teachers identified that support from parents and access to learning materials in English at home were key factors in how well newcomer pupils developed their English language. However, they were concerned that many newcomer pupils had limited access to materials in English outside school.
- Nearly half of newcomer pupils reported that a parent could help with homework at least sometimes.
- Many of the children were bilingual and some pupils indicated that their parents wanted them to maintain their first language. Children reported this was encouraged by all conversation at home being conducted in their parents' first language in addition to watching television programmes and reading books in their first language.

Good practice

- Much of the good practice evident across participating schools has been achieved on a school to school basis with little standardisation across the education sector.
- Good practice regarding newcomer pupils at a school level was identified as:
 - After school clubs for newcomer pupils



- Celebrating different cultures eg multicultural events and workshops and English language classes for parents
- Inclusive ethos
- School reports translated
- Sharing good practice with other schools
- Weekly translated newsletters/ notes
- Growing use of technology to communicate with parents

■ Good practice regarding newcomer pupils at a classroom level was identified as:

- Bilingual teaching assistants
- Buddy System
- Development of home-school journals
- NI children learning a second language
- Strategic seating plans to integrate newcomer pupils
- Visual aids and displays in classroom in multiple languages

Recommendations

Drawing on this research study, and to usefully inform newcomer policy and practice in primary schools, the following recommendations are suggested for consideration:

1. Data collected in the Annual School Census should record 'Country of Origin' and 'First Language' in addition to ethnicity to provide greater demographic detail of newcomer pupils and the range of language needs schools may face on a year to year basis.

2. In order to reflect the growth in the newcomer pupils in NI schools, the Department of Education should commission the Education and Training Inspectorate to conduct an evaluation of the current provision available to support newcomer pupils in NI schools which would inform an updated version of the Department's Guidance on Supporting Newcomer Pupils.

3. The current formal training provision related to English as an Additional Language should be reviewed for: (i) pre-service teachers; (ii) in-service teachers; and (iii) classroom assistants to ensure the workforce are equipped with knowledge and specific strategies to support newcomer pupils' development and comprehension of the English language.

4. The Inclusion and Diversity Service should be reviewed to ensure it is appropriate to support the changing needs of the newcomer population in schools. Specific focus on reconfiguring elements of the service should aim to support schools who have established newcomer populations with consideration to:

- providing teachers with model lessons;
- providing updated and age appropriate resources;

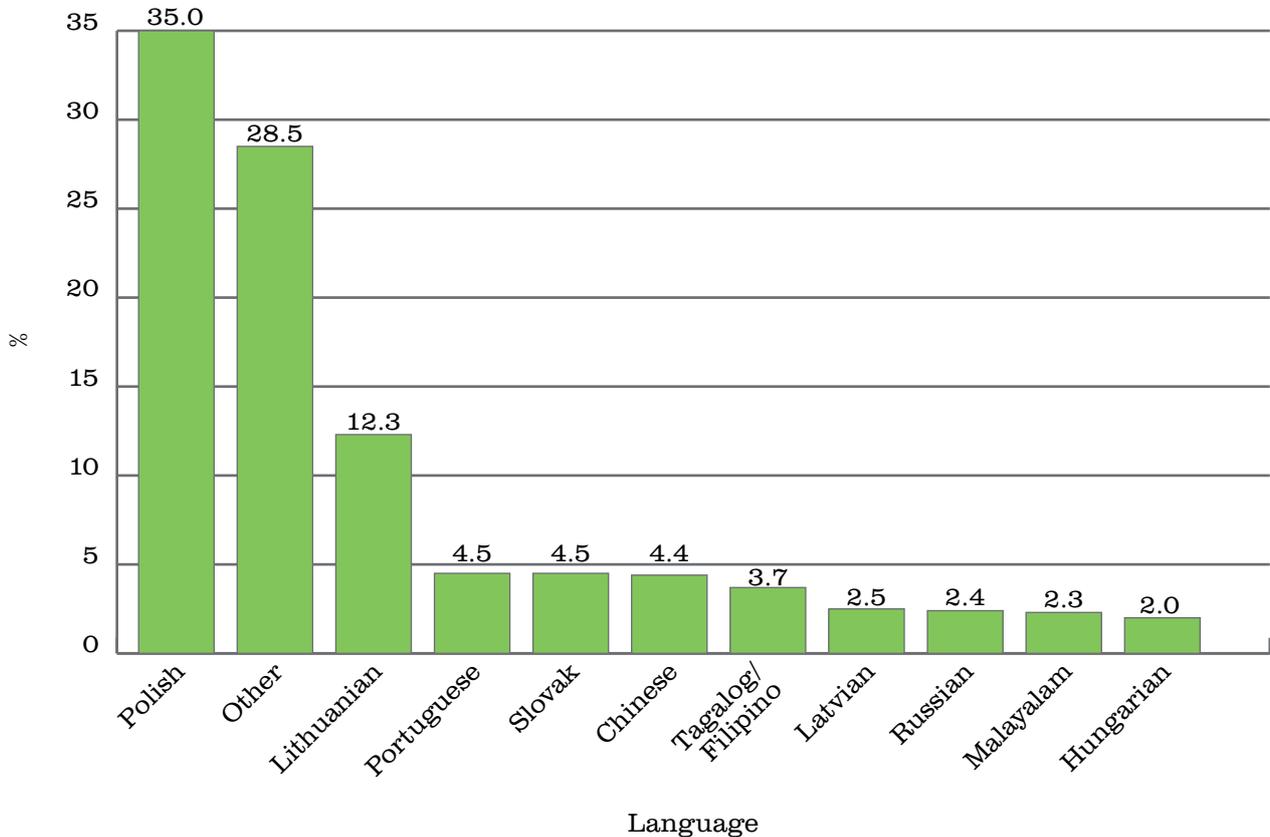


- working directly with newcomer pupils;
 - developing and coordinating formal links between schools to share their experiences and good practice relating to newcomer pupils.
5. Consideration should be given to the specific development and pilot of an intensive learning programme which addresses newcomer pupils specific learning needs to aid language development and comprehension and prepares newcomer pupils with little English language for entry into the classroom.
 6. Support for newcomer pupils including teaching resources and the length of current funding should be reassessed to ensure that newcomer pupils are receiving the support needed to acquire academic English proficiency.
 7. Increasing schools' awareness of funding opportunities through OFMDFM, District Councils Good Relations Programme and Community Relations Council that could support ethnic minority parents having greater parental involvement in schools, access to English classes and greater integration into the wider community.





Figure 1: Non-English languages in NI



Source: NI 2011 Census

While public authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that services are accessible to those with little or no English, research has suggested that this has been problematic due to a shortage of interpreters for particular languages in the public sector and differences in translations between the written and spoken word in some languages (McWilliams and Yarnell, 2013; Johnston, 2011). This can be especially difficult for parents with little or no English to communicate their needs and to access information relevant for their children (Kernaghan, 2014; McGovern et al, 2011). The lack of

English language has also been found to be a factor in some parents' reluctance to be involved in school activities. (McGovern et al, 2011).

Unfamiliar health and education systems: People born outside the UK may have different experiences and expectations of the health, social care and education system. Research by Barnardo's NI found low levels of awareness amongst ethnic minority parents related to financial assistance linked to children including 43.7% of parents being unaware of free school part time places for three to four



year olds (Kernaghan, 2014). Lack of awareness may result in families not receiving support they are entitled to or not gaining access to services they require.

Racism: The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey found that 79% of participants stated that racism against black and ethnic minority (BME) groups existed in NI with 41% believing there was more racial prejudice compared to five years ago (McDermott, 2014). Racism in NI has widely been associated with the legacy of the sectarian conflict in which educational, religious, social and residential segregation remain a defining feature (Knox, 2011; Connolly, 2009). For people new to NI these types of ‘social markers’ can be difficult to understand and navigate (McAreavey, 2014). Furthermore, studies have suggested an institutional racism exists which is a particular barrier for non-English speakers in terms of accessing information and services (Connolly, 2002; McWilliams and Yarnell, 2013).

While recognising these barriers may exist for the ethnic minority community, many migrant workers have established roots and started a family here. By way of illustration, in 2013 ten percent of births in NI were to mothers born outside the UK¹ which is the highest figure on record. Changing demographics naturally impact on schools as there is more cultural diversity, different languages and in some areas more pupils to enroll than

schools can cope with. The following section will explore the background and policy context for ethnic minorities with specific relation to education.

Newcomer pupils in Northern Ireland

All children in NI have the right² to basic education regardless of their ethnic, religious or socio-economic background. The Department of Education (DE) replaced the term ‘English as an Additional Language’ (EAL) in 2009 to ‘newcomer’ to describe pupils whose first language is not English.

DE defines a ‘newcomer’ as, “*a pupil who has enrolled in a school but who does not have satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum and does not have a language in common with the teacher. It does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish medium school*” (Supporting Newcomer Pupils, 2009).

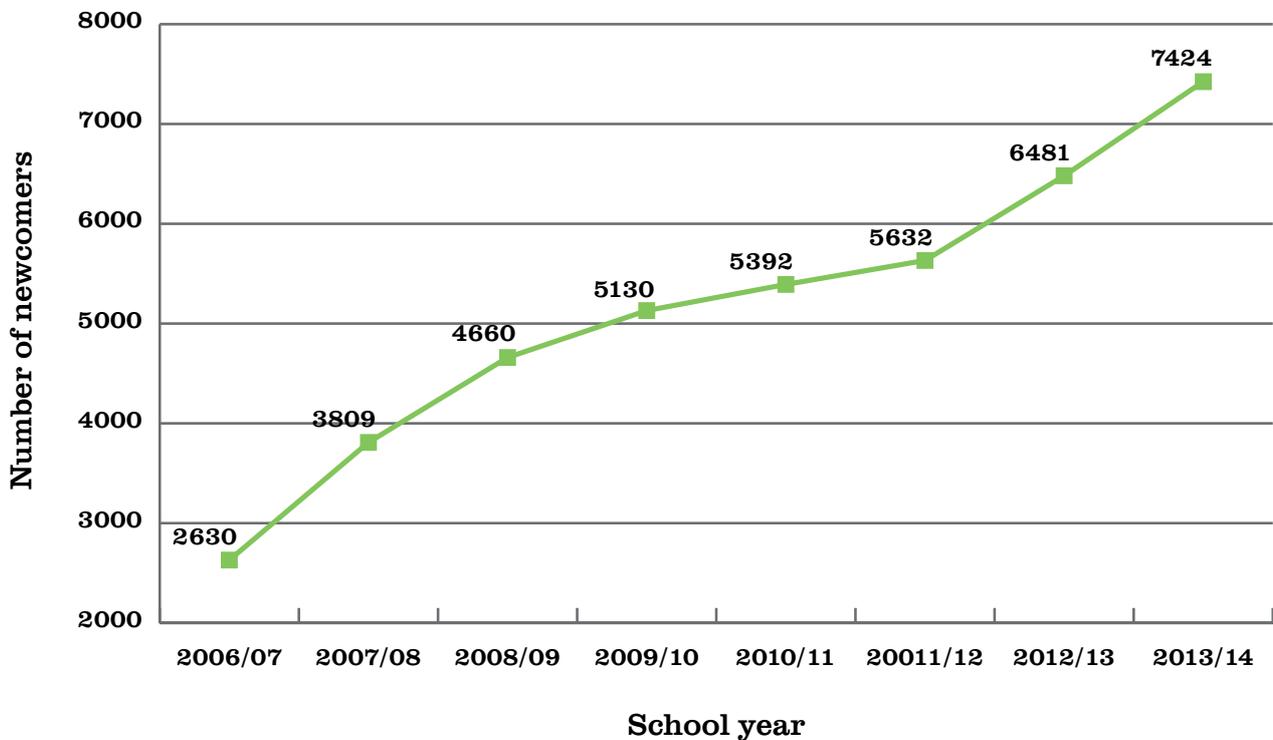
Data provided by DE has shown an exponential growth in newcomer pupils at all stages of education from 2006/07 when 3,911 pupils were registered until 2014 when 10,698 newcomer pupils were attending school in Northern Ireland. While newcomer pupils in post-primary schools have more than doubled from 1,148 in 2006/07 to 2,501 in 2013/14, the largest growth areas for newcomer pupils has been in primary schools. As shown in Figure 2, newcomer pupils in primary schools have nearly trebled from 2,630 in 2006/07 to 7,424 in 2013/14.

1 NISRA (2014) Births in Northern Ireland 2013 Statistical Bulletin http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Births_2013.pdf

2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 28



Figure 2: Increase in newcomer pupils in NI primary schools



Source: DE School Census 2013/14

Although in fewer numbers, an increase of newcomer pupils in nursery schools and special schools is also evident. In 2006/07, DE recorded 112 newcomers enrolled in nursery schools and 21 newcomer pupils in special schools compared to 330 newcomer pupils attending nursery schools and 101 pupils in special schools in 2013/14.

In terms of the spread of newcomer pupils, over forty percent of the total number of newcomer pupils attended schools in the Southern Education and Library Board (ELB) (n = 4542), while twenty percent of newcomer pupils joined schools in the Belfast ELB (n = 2139). A further 1867 newcomers attended schools in the North Eastern

ELB while over one thousand attended schools with the South Eastern ELB (n = 1182) and Western ELB respectively (n = 967) as shown in Table 1.





Table 1: Number of newcomer pupils by ELB (2013/14)

	SELB	BELB	NEELB	SEELB	WELB	TOTAL
Primary School	3129	1520	1247	833	695	7424
Post-Primary School	1152	460	443	234	212	2501
Pre-School	128	53	79	#	#	341
Nursery	103	83	72	39	33	330
Special	30	23	26	#	*	101
Total	4542	2139	1867	1182	967	10697

* denotes fewer than 5 pupils

denotes figure >=5 suppressed due to potential identification of individual pupils

Source: DE School Census 2013/14

In the most recent School Census figures newcomer pupils now account for 3.2% of the total school population (DE, 2013/14). The majority of newcomer pupils attend primary school (69.4%) in comparison to post primary schools (23.4%). Fewer numbers of newcomer pupils attended pre-school (3.2%), nursery (3.1%) or a special school (0.9%).

A number of policies have been produced to provide support to newcomer pupils:

Supporting newcomer pupils

As part of the 'Every School a Good School' initiative, *Supporting Newcomer Pupils*³ was developed to enable newcomer pupils to feel welcome within and participate fully in the curriculum and life of the school. This document

outlined the steps taken by DE to support the inclusion of newcomer pupils into the school system. This included funding of a regional support service, the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS), with the intention of improving support to newcomer pupils by providing a consistent level of support and specialist advice to schools. The IDS key services include:

- Multi – lingual website for parents and teachers⁴
- Interpreting and translation services;
- Toolkits for Diversity for pre-school, primary, post primary and SEN pupils;
- Continuous Professional Development for teachers.

³ *Supporting Newcomer Pupils* http://www.deni.gov.uk/newcomer_policy_english.pdf

⁴ *IDS Website* <http://www.education-support.org.uk/teachers/ids/>



Table 2: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

Basic User	A1	Breakthrough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.
	A2	Waystage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
Independent User	B1	Threshold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
	B2	Vantage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.



Table 2: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) continued

Proficient User	C1	Effective Operational Proficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. ■ Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. ■ Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. ■ Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
	C2	Mastery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. ■ Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. ■ Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.

DE guidelines for schools⁷ states that when a pupil has reached all the benchmarks on the ‘Independent User: B1 level’, they are no longer designated a ‘Newcomer’ pupil and the ‘end date’ must be included on School Information Management System (SIMS). A number of issues have been raised as problematic in this system. It has been well documented that newcomer funding being allocated once a year after the School Census has limitations if further newcomer pupils arrive after this time (NISMP⁸, 2014; Rooney and Fitzpatrick, 2011; Geraghty, McStravick and Mitchell, 2010). Research would also suggest that assessment using CEFR assumes literacy in a pupil’s first language and has little relevance for assessment of children with little or no

formal academic attainment such as asylum seekers and refugees (NISMP, 2014).

Currently, additional funding for newcomer pupils is not ring fenced or monitored by DE although there is a stated expectation that schools use funding to build and maintain the expertise of their teaching staff and provide specific support to pupils identified as newcomers. The Independent Review of the Common Funding Scheme (2013) has recommended that the use of earmarked funding by schools should be effectively monitored with appropriate interventions should expectations not be met. The Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities suggested that a

⁷ Every School A Good School – Newcomer – Guidelines for Schools (2010) http://www.deni.gov.uk/guidelines_-_faq.pdf
⁸ Northern Ireland Strategic Migrant Partnership



4. **Behaviour:** Teachers may experience some specific behavioural problems with newcomer children predominantly on pupils' frustration and boredom as well as attention-seeking behaviour and emotional outbursts (Purdy and Ferguson, 2012).

Special Educational Needs

Research studies show that teachers may find it challenging to diagnose special educational needs among newcomer children (Sales, Ryan, Lopez Rodriguez and D'Angelo, 2008). This could be difficult as dyslexia or emotional or behavioural difficulties could be mistaken as going through a 'silent period'. Skinner (2010) found that teachers could understand or misunderstand their pupils' silence in various ways such as the pupils not wanting to communicate, not being bothered to communicate, or being unable to communicate because of language or learning difficulties. The language barrier may delay diagnosis as it is more difficult to carry out an accurate assessment of the child's abilities in a language he or she can understand (Ryan et al, 2010). It may be the case that the process for getting appropriate SEN support for a pupil with little or no English language may be long (Ryan et al, 2010). However, it is also apparent that some communities may have particular stigmas around SENs and may be reluctant to have their child 'labelled' as having special educational needs (Ryan et al, 2010).

Lack of training

English as an Additional Language is not a subject specialism in initial teacher education in the UK. Studies suggest teachers feel that pre-service teacher training and continuous professional development regarding children with English as an Additional Language have not kept pace with the changing demographics in Northern Ireland (Purdy and Ferguson, 2012; Murtagh and Francis, 2012; Skinner, 2010; Bracken, Hagan, O'Toole, Quinn, and Ryan, 2009). Teachers report a general sense of learning to deal with newcomer pupils 'on the job' against a background of limited time and knowledge (Wardman, 2012; Skinner, 2010). This may limit any real understanding of how language develops and the best ways to support the English language acquisition of newcomer pupils. Research suggests that the area of both pre-service and in-service teacher training on English as an Additional Language requires review in order to increase teacher confidence and meet the needs of newcomer pupils (Purdy and Ferguson, 2012; Bracken et al, 2009; DENI, 2006).

Communication with newcomer pupils' parents

Communication difficulties have been identified as a barrier to developing closer parent-teacher connections (Skinner, 2010; Purdy and Ferguson, 2012). Research studies on ethnic minority groups in the UK have found that the lack of English may be a source of frustration for parents when communicating with school as they are unable to talk directly to teachers and at



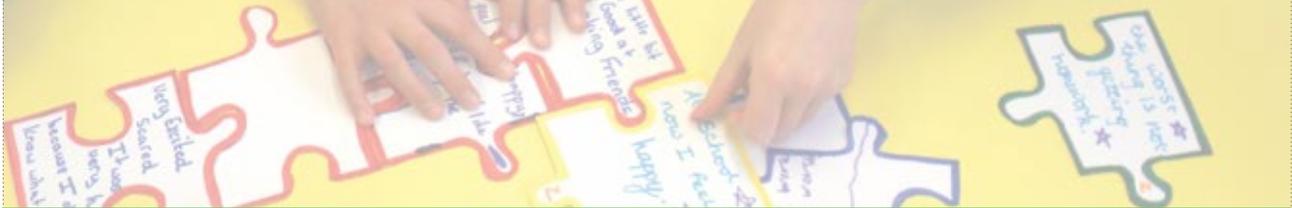
times may feel that their concerns were not listened to (D'Angelo, Paniagua and Ozdemir, 2011; Sales et al, 2008). This may also be problematic for teachers in terms of explaining about a child's progress and emphasising the importance of helping children with their school work at home (Irwin et al, 2014; NISMP, 2014; D'Angelo et al, 2011; McGovern et al, 2011; Biggart, O'Hare and Connolly, 2009). In particular, a study investigating the integration of newcomer pupils from an asylum seeker and refugee background reported that school staff found it difficult to communicate with parents who had little experience of formal schooling and low levels of literary and numeracy in their own languages (NISMP 2014).

Newcomer pupils' perspective

As is often the case with children and young people, their experiences are habitually overlooked by researchers and policy makers. As a result, the body of opinion which is regrettably missing is that of the voice of the newcomer children themselves (Purdy and Ferguson, 2012). One area that has been highlighted in the research conducted with newcomer children and young people to date is the importance of friendships (Geraghty et al, 2010; Biggart et al, 2009). Research has shown that friendship is significant for children of all ages and backgrounds (Children's Society, 2014). However, for newcomer pupils, the language barrier may make children feel inhibited which limits their ability to establish friendships (McGovern et al, 2011; Ryan et al, 2010). Younger children may find it easier to make friends with others

as their focus is on play partners who share similar activity preferences while older children's friendships take on a more psychological dimension (Killen, Mulvey, and Hitti, 2013). Children with low numbers of friends may experience social isolation which may impact on their sense of belonging, enjoyment of school and participation in after school activities (Biggart et al, 2009; Geraghty et al, 2010). The language barrier may also cause children with the same language to socialise together rather than make friends with local children (Biggart et al, 2009; Ryan et al, 2010). Evidence would also suggest that an increase in the number of friends from different ethnic backgrounds was related to higher levels of psychological wellbeing and resilience of newcomer pupils (Bagci, Rutland, Kumashiro, Smith and Blumberg, 2014).

Bullying is also an issue that has been raised by newcomer pupils. Biggart et al (2009) using a ten item Olweus Bullying Questionnaire, found that there were no statistically significant differences between indigenous white children and children from a BME background in their overall experiences of bullying. However, on further analysis some BME children did experience a higher rate of particular types of bullying. BME children from a European background were more likely to feel excluded (45%) compared to local children (38%) or those from an Asian background (20%). European BME children were also more likely to experience name calling of a racist nature (31%) compared to those with an Asian background (26%) or local



children (20%). Evidence suggests that 'cross-ethnic' friendships are beneficial as they may offer a protective buffer for the newcomer against prejudice and bullying (Bagci et al, 2014). This suggests that greater integration of children from different ethnic minority backgrounds could reduce bullying of a racist nature.

In addition to establishing social ties, newcomer children may need time to adjust to the NI educational system as it may differ from their

previous school experiences in terms of workload, discipline and relationship with teachers (Geraghty et al, 2010). Particularly in the case of children of asylum seekers and refugees, pupils may have experienced trauma, loss and displacement before starting school and therefore have additional needs to settle into school (McGovern et al, 2011).

The next chapter will outline the methodology of the research project with Chapter 3 presenting the findings.





Chapter 2: Methodology

This research was qualitative in nature and designed to explore the experiences of newcomer pupils in primary schools at three levels: (i) school; (ii) classroom and; (iii) pupil. To capture this data, research was conducted with three groups:

1. Principals Interviews
2. Teacher Interviews/Focus Groups
3. Children Focus Groups

Aims and objectives

The purpose of this research was to investigate both the experiences of newcomer pupils and school staff in primary schools in Northern Ireland. Specifically, the main objectives were to:

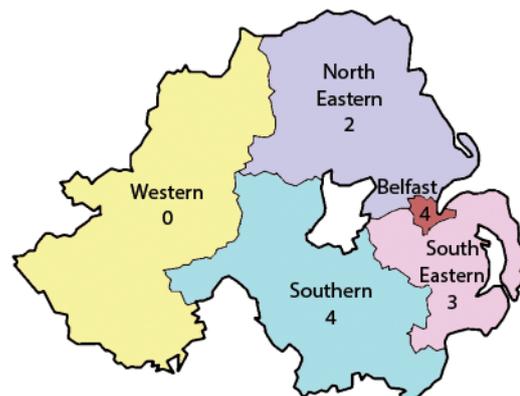
- gain an understanding of the arrangements primary schools made for newcomer pupils and the support available to schools;
- investigate the challenges faced by both newcomer pupils and teachers in primary schools;
- explore the relationship between newcomer pupils' parents and school;
- identify best practice in this area.

Respondents

Participants for this study were identified through primary schools with high numbers of newcomer pupils according to data supplied by the Department of Education for the academic year 2013/14. Initially, the research project was only concerned with four primary schools in the Belfast ELB area. However, after completion

of the interviews and focus groups in those schools, it was clear that there was merit in conducting the research on a Northern Ireland wide basis and the project was extended. Four primary schools with high numbers of newcomer pupils in each of the other Education and Library Boards areas were approached to participate in the project. This resulted in a total of 20 schools being contacted to take part with 13 agreeing to participate. Schools were drawn from every ELB apart from the Western ELB. Figure 3 shows the geographical distribution of the schools by ELB that agreed to take part.

Figure 3: Primary schools included in the sample by ELB



The percentage of newcomer pupils in participating primary schools ranged from 10 to over 50 percent. It is important to highlight that in addition to different amounts of newcomer pupils, schools also had different demographics. For example, one school could have pupils with over 20 home languages compared to a school that



Teachers were approached by school management about taking part and were given an information sheet created by Barnardo's NI outlining the aims and objectives of the research to ensure informed consent. Teachers were asked about the ways they managed and integrated newcomer pupils in the classroom, pastoral care issues and relationships with newcomer pupils' parents. Teachers were also asked about the resources, support and training available to teachers for newcomer pupils.

Phase 3: Newcomer pupils focus groups

Children's focus groups were an important aspect of the study in order to gain further insight into newcomer pupils' experiences and perceptions of attending primary school in Northern Ireland. It has been noted by others that newcomer pupils experiences are rarely considered (Purdy and Ferguson, 2012). The sample of newcomer pupils was selected by school staff with consent leaflets provided for parents. The focus groups with newcomer pupils were conducted in eleven out of the thirteen schools participating in the study. This resulted in a total of 47 children participating with 24 girls and 23 boys. Newcomer pupils were drawn from 14 different countries of birth with the majority identifying themselves as Polish (n = 22). Other countries of birth included: East Timor (n = 6), Lithuania (n = 3), Portugal (n = 2), Philippines (n = 2), Slovakia (n = 2), Somalia (n = 2), Romania (n = 2). One pupil was also drawn from other countries such as Latvia, Iran, Syria,

Switzerland, Italy and Indonesia. Each school identified newcomer children in Primary 6 and Primary 7 who could participate in a focus group. While not all children in the focus group could be defined as newcomer pupils within the Department of Education's three year stipulation, all had experience of being a newcomer pupil when they started school in Northern Ireland.

A total of 24 Primary 6 and 23 Primary 7 pupils participated in focus groups which were conducted at their school. The number of children in each focus group ranged from 2 to 6 pupils. In one case, a one-to-one interview was conducted with a newcomer pupil to facilitate participation. Due to the children being newcomer pupils, we anticipated that pupils would have varying abilities to communicate in English and that our research methods should not be heavily dependent on the pupils' linguistic competency. To counteract this, all participating schools were made aware that Barnardo's NI would provide an interpreter to ensure that language was not a barrier to any pupils' participation. One school requested the use of an interpreter for a children's focus group. In addition, we adapted an arts related method 'the jigsaw approach' that has been used with young children to enable them to share their lived experiences in a relevant and meaningful way whilst capturing their voice with authenticity (Stephenson, 2011). The 'jigsaw approach' was used by asking children to record one word on a jigsaw piece on topics such as how they felt when they started

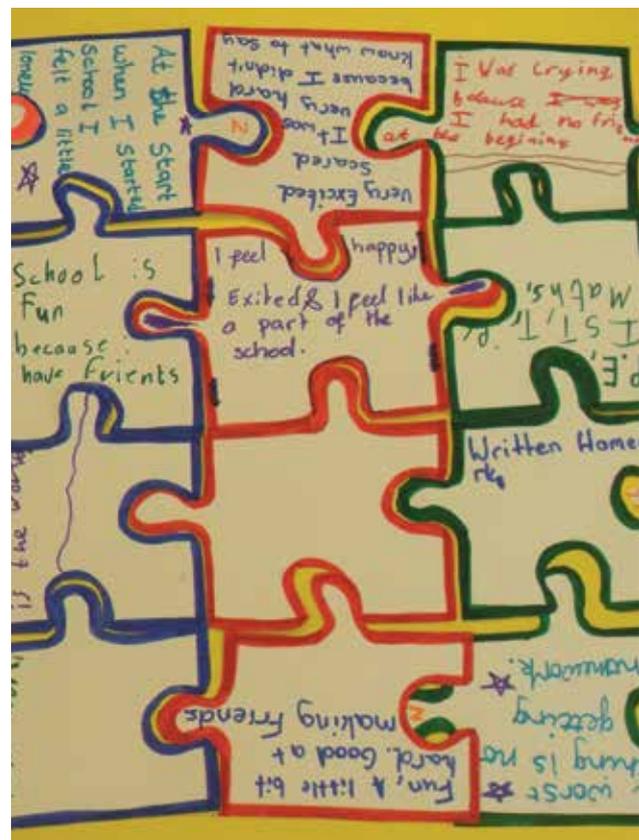
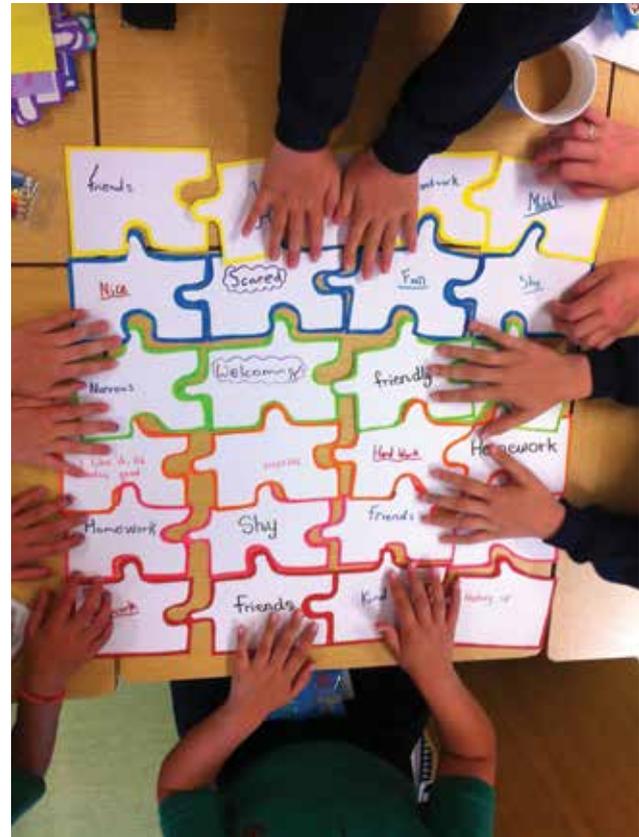


FEELS LIKE HOME: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF NEWCOMER PUPILS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

school and their favourite things about school. The researcher then used the children's words as prompts to explore their experiences further. This method was useful as it facilitated those less confident children or those with limited English to be able to participate and communicate their views and perceptions about their school experiences in a fun and relaxed way. At the end of the session, the children enjoyed putting the jigsaw pieces together as shown in the photographs.

Ethical considerations

The design of this study has been reviewed and approved by Barnardo's UK-wide Research Ethics Committee. This project has been overseen by a Research Advisory Group consisting of representatives from the Department of Education, teachers, parents of newcomer pupils and representatives from both NICEM and Barnardo's NI. All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded with prior consent. Consent for pupils' participation was sought from both parents and children to take part in the focus group. Parental consent forms were available in the range of languages required as advised by each school. As English was not the first language of the children, all schools were provided with the option of an interpreter which was used in one focus group in order to facilitate the children's participation in the study. All interviews and focus groups were transcribed and thematically coded using qualitative data analysis software NVivo to assist with the identification and organisation of themes.





Chapter 3: Results

As outlined in Chapter 1, migration has not been evenly spread across Northern Ireland resulting in some areas having large percentages of newcomer pupils while others have very little. Newcomer families are not a homogenous group as they may have differences in ethnic backgrounds, language and culture. Newcomer families may have different personal circumstances including those who are well settled in NI, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees. These diverse and complex factors impact on schools that strive to work with pupils with different levels of need. It is the experiences of how primary schools manage newcomer pupils and the pupils' experiences themselves that are the key focus for this study. The findings of the research are presented in four sections.

- **Section 1** relates to the whole school level including pupils admission, how schools supports newcomer pupils and how schools are supported through funding and the Inclusion and Diversity Service for newcomer pupils.
- **Section 2** explores the perspective of the teaching staff and the pupils at the classroom level.
- **Section 3** considers the relationships schools have with newcomer pupils' parents.
- **Section 4** outlines the good practice identified in the study and reports areas that newcomer pupils said would help them in school.

Section 1: Newcomer pupils in school

Schools are dealing with a diverse range of nationalities, languages and cultures. Some participating schools reported that they had over 20 different nationalities, while some schools had 5 or 6 main nationalities and other schools had two main groups. Observation of any of the participating schools showed a range of multilingual signage and displays to welcome visitors and pupils. Principals explained this was part of how at a school level newcomer pupils were made welcome at the outset. On the whole, school management and teaching staff reported that newcomer pupils were beneficial to the school in terms of diversity, and cultural issues and recognised that the school had a role in promoting integration and inclusion both within the school and to the wider community:

“It’s a whole school policy to have inclusion and to respect their different cultures, to really celebrate that. And I think that’s probably the best way to integrate them into the community as well as the school”

Principal, BELB



School staff also recognised that newcomer pupil attendance could suffer due to extended periods off during term time spent travelling or visiting relatives in other countries. Teachers described this as impacting on the individual child's learning as well as adding disruption to the class.

"I can understand why people go off maybe a week or ten days early at the end that's, you know, we have children who come in after the term has started. For example, I had somebody who came three weeks in to the term and I mean it shone out like a beacon that he had missed the whole beginning".

P2 teacher, SEELB

"The other pastoral issue regards attendance at school and that's affected in the first part by cheap flights home in the first part of the year. And you can imagine why that happens, you know, it's very expensive to go home at Christmas. You may go home two weeks before Christmas but you may not come back until the middle or the end of January, ok. So that affects their learning, obviously."

Principal, NEELB

It was also highlighted by several school staff that some newcomer pupils missed school for extended periods due to what they thought of as minor illnesses or to attend to family issues such as looking after younger children or helping their parents with translating English.

■ Bullying

A small number of principals recalled some instances of bullying related to skin colour or country of birth, although it was stressed that this was not a common occurrence. Staff highlighted that the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) aspect of the curriculum provided a useful space to discuss issues related to skin colour and ethnicity. Interestingly, three principals identified that bullying of newcomer pupils was often carried out by other newcomer pupils. Teachers found bullying amongst newcomer pupils with a mutual language or between two newcomer groups particularly problematic to identify as they were unable to understand name calling and nasty comments in different languages. As a result, staff reported parents of newcomer pupils have informed the school about bullying incidents once a child reported it at home.

"We did have one instance fairly recently where they were actually name calling the Indian children, using very derogatory racial language in Polish. It was only when one of the children went home, the Polish children went home and said to their parents, 'what do these words mean?' that we realised what was going on."

Principal, SEELB



“...it could have a huge impact on a small school because that say £4,000 or £5,000 in a small budget could end up saving a teacher’s job. Which has an impact on newcomer children. Because you are not able to amalgamate classes and make large class sizes. And the larger the classes are, the more difficult it is to address the newcomer issues.”

Principal, NEELB

While principals were generally satisfied with the current level of funding, they suggested a number of improvements could be made with additional funding including:

- Increase in after-school activities for newcomer pupils to help with homework and English language acquisition;
- English language support for newcomer pupils’ parents by providing English classes in school, and assistance accessing health and social care and parenting / family support;
- Counselling for pupils with traumatic backgrounds, with particular focus on asylum seeker and refugee children;
- Training for teachers to provide them with strategies to teach children who have English as an Additional Language.

One principal also suggested that there should be a staggered withdrawal of newcomer funding to allow schools to make transitional arrangements. To an extent, schools currently accessed funding from other sources

to supplement their additional work with newcomer pupils. This money was used in a range of ways such as running parenting programmes, pupil programmes, holding multicultural events and providing English classes for pupils after school.

Inclusion and Diversity Service

As outlined in Chapter 1, the Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) was set up in 2007 to support schools in relation to newcomer pupils. Findings indicated a mixed response from school staff regarding the IDS. Teachers were widely aware of the Primary Toolkit for Diversity and some reported using and adapting the materials provided. Participants were particularly positive about the support IDS can provide when schools first experience an influx of school newcomer pupils. This included guidance on creating the Welcome Book for newcomer pupils’ parents, multilingual signage and labels and translation and interpreting services for parents.

“The welcome book, they helped us put it together. I think they are quite good at doing the kind of settling period, they have signs around the school.”

P1 teacher, BELB



“Translated letters, obviously. When notes are going home now, as I say, we are fortunate in the aspect that we don’t have ... I don’t think we have any parents really who would not understand. But now, if you take it to the parent teacher interview scenario, we would have one or two parents who we would still feel the need to bring in a translator to help with that. And that works very successfully”.

Principal, SEELB

“When they arrive however we have a newcomer welcome book which has been prepared with staff pictures and pictures of the environment. We have worked very closely over the last number of years with our Inclusion and Diversity service to make this happen.”

Principal, NEELB

This academic year (2013/14) has seen the IDS support schools in transferring the CEFR paperwork from a paper based to a computerised system. Participants reported that this was useful and would reduce the time spent completing paperwork. Evidence suggested principals have a greater awareness about the support offered by the IDS compared to teachers. Many teachers were unaware of any resources or training provided by the IDS. Those teachers that had attended training reported that the purpose was to support staff in the completion of administrative tasks such as the CERF rather than training related to teaching newcomer pupils or cultural diversity.

Findings suggest there is scope for the IDS to extend the type of training offered to schools. In particular, teachers felt that the IDS should be able to offer more extensive training courses for staff with examples of a model lesson for classes with newcomer pupils and strategies to deal with the broad range of abilities and languages present in the classroom. Some teachers also suggested that the IDS should engage with newcomer pupils themselves to provide support.

“They are limited in what they can do, because it has to be capacity building, which means not teaching. What our teachers would love is someone coming in to model the ideal lesson. But I think we’ve come to realise now that it’s not going to happen, you just need to give up with that and do it.”

P1 teacher, BELB

“I would like someone who could come and train my newcomer teacher in strategies for dealing with children who are selective mute because they have no language at this point. You know, what would be the best way to teach those children to build their confidence?”

Principal, NEELB



“We have had the services of the Inclusion and Diversity Service, IDS. They are there, but their value as a service is extremely limited. There is a consultation type process. Whilst they are there and there’s individuals that work with them, they don’t work with children. They tell us what to do and give us strategies, like the European Framework, from which to baseline the children. And they help you with the record keeping. But beyond that what they offer is very, very limited.”

Principal, SEELB

“I would welcome training. I am an upper Key Stage 2 teacher and for a lot of these children I am trying to impart Key Stage 1 strategies, at a level that is age appropriate.”

P7 teacher, BELB

An important remit of the IDS is to provide interpreting and translation services for schools. As mentioned above, schools found the IDS useful as a way to interpret for parent-teacher meetings:

“Excellent. Any parent interviews we have had, they come across as very professional and it is very much, please speak to the parent, don’t speak to me. So in other words don’t use me as the go between. It is a professional service. They are always on time and I believe they interpret effectively what we are trying to communicate.”

Principal, SEELB

It should be noted that schools have also developed more regular ways of communicating with newcomer pupil parents since the inception of the IDS in 2007. This includes translated text messages and weekly newsletters, online translation tools on schools’ website and the ability to use bilingual members of staff to communicate with parents. As a consequence, a number of schools reported that they tended not to need the translation and interpreting services to the same extent as they once did.

“There is a translation service available, but these are things we don’t really have to avail of because obviously we have the staff members there to do it, but I do know that there is support there to do it.”

Vice-Principal, SELB

“...but less and less we’d be asked for translators. It’s interesting now, it’s probably reflective of the fact that the parents’ English themselves must have improved.”

Principal, SELB

Overall, participants reported that the IDS supplied a good service for schools in the early stages of providing for newcomer pupils. However, as schools have developed and established their newcomer provision, the IDS has been limited in assisting more complex needs. In many ways, participants felt that while they still had needs around



their newcomer pupil provision they had outgrown the support the IDS can currently offer.

Section 2: Newcomer pupils in the classroom

This section outlines how children felt when joining primary school as a newcomer and explores the issues around school readiness and the silent period. It also explores the challenges and benefits newcomer pupils bring to the classroom.

Early days in the classroom

A newcomer pupil's arrival to a NI primary school was often a transitional period in the child's life in which they may be adjusting to a new country, home and school. Newcomer pupils who arrived during the school year often joined a class with little prior notice and teachers only had information about the child's educational background from what parents were able to communicate to the principal. When the children were asked what they felt when they started primary school, the most common response was fear. Nearly two thirds of children reported that they felt sad, shy, worried and nervous and often cried when they began school. Primarily, concerns of newcomer pupils starting school centred on not knowing any other children and not being able to make friends or interact with others because of the language difference.

"I feel like when I am coming in a new country, you don't know anybody from here; the first time when are you coming here, you can't speak with anybody, like you don't have partners, you don't have friends."

Iranian male, 10 years old

"I was scared because, it's not that I cannot answer everyone, but I was only like three days in Northern Ireland and I started to go to school."

Polish female, 11 years old

Just over twenty percent of newcomer pupils had mixed feelings about starting school. Under ten percent of pupils reported that they were excited and happy to start school in Northern Ireland as they saw it as an opportunity to make new friends and have fun.

"I was also excited as well. I was like walking down with my dad I was so excited about meeting new people."

Lithuanian male, 10 years old

"I felt happy to make friends. Like, it's always nice to have one beside you, but at first when you were about to make your friends, it was, it was hard to kind of walk up to somebody you didn't know and just kind of talk with him"

Polish female, 11 years old



Pupils were also asked about how they felt about school now. From those children that reported feeling negative towards school, all but two reported that their attitude to school had changed to a more positive outlook.

“The first time when I came here I was like kind of scared, but now I’m like I was born here. I feel like I was born here”.

Romanian male, 10 years old

A number of factors influenced newcomers’ enjoyment of school. Pupils enjoyed a range of subjects including art, P.E, history and science. Mathematics was reported as a favourite subject by over one third of pupils while nearly thirty percent reporting English as their favourite subject. Nearly forty percent of pupils reported on the relationships they had with friends and teachers as one of their favourite things about school. A number of children commented on how welcoming and friendly other pupils were when they first started school:

“I wasn’t bored because everybody was trying to make friends with people. I didn’t know what they were saying”.

Polish female, 11 years old

“We go out at break time or lunch time they see that you that there’s no one to play with so they usually come over to you and ask you if do you want to play”.

Slovakian female, 10 years old

Most class teachers reported that some form of ‘buddy system’ operated in their classroom where one pupil was asked to show the newcomer pupil around the school and make sure that they were not alone in the playground. Teachers also used other ways to introduce newcomer pupils to the class in the first weeks including preparing the class for a new arrival and using sharing activities such as ‘circle time’ and the ‘hot seat’.

“And like a buddy system where you would maybe nominate a responsible child in the class to sort of look after them for the first week or so and show them the routine, you know”.

P4 teacher, SEELB

Social activities after school also provided newcomer pupils with the opportunity to integrate with others. Newcomer pupils participated in a range of activities with their peers both inside and outside of the school environment. Almost half of the children were involved in a team sport of some kind while one third participated in an after school activity such as art, cookery or ICT. Fewer numbers of children were taken part in music or drama clubs or youth clubs.



Teachers reported that they tended to mix newcomer pupils with other students as this aided integration and also helped language development. While teachers acknowledged that it was sometimes helpful to have children with common languages together in terms of being able to communicate, on the whole teachers reported that their seating arrangements were strategically arranged to integrate newcomers with other pupils. Teachers felt this was important in two main ways. Firstly, it aided integration within the classroom as children were working together with different children. Secondly, teachers found that integration reduced the possibility of a sub-language developing in class while also strengthening the English language acquisition of the newcomer pupil.

“I wouldn’t tend to put two newcomers together, although it’s difficult for them, what you would find then is that they use their language and they don’t integrate with the other children, so we do try as much as possible to keep them, you know, a responsible and sensible and caring child from here, therefore they’re more likely to use English”

P4 teacher, BELB

“I think if there’s a bigger number of them, there’s more of a tendency for them to talk to each other in their own language.”

P1 teacher, BELB

“I think certainly sitting them with all different children. And then what I like to do is every so often within my class -within any class that I had- is move their seats around. So they move around once a term, once half-term, they are sitting with all different people. So just insuring that they are mixing with the other children in the class. And then they can maybe have classroom buddies, so people who can maybe look after them or if they are going to bathroom and they are not sure, you’d send the classroom buddy with them”

P7 teacher, BELB

While the majority of teachers stressed the benefits of being bilingual and the importance of newcomer pupils retaining their first language in terms of their cultural identity, there was mixed views about whether children should be allowed to communicate in their first language in class. The main concern about children only working and socialising with others who shared a mutual language was that their English language acquisition would be harmed.





School readiness

As discussed in Chapter 1, Northern Ireland has the lowest compulsory school starting age in Europe at age 4 years old. Some schools identified a low uptake for some newcomer pupils in attending nursery or pre-school education. In addition to the early school starting age, there could be a number of reasons for low pre-school uptake including the children were not living in NI at the time, parents were unaware of provision, did not complete the paperwork required by the deadline or parents believed there was a cost attached.

“...obviously in the North here we have one of the earliest starting times. They start later which means that they maybe don’t see the value in having that pre-school year before they go, for a child who’s effectively only 3 years of age.”

Principal, NEELB

“for example the parents didn’t realise, and don’t always, realise, their deadline for application and a lot of our local nursery and the pre-school groups we have on site here, these are oversubscribed every year. If you don’t get your application form in on time, you miss out completely.”

Principal, NEELB

Principals from schools where ethnic minority groups were better established reported that patterns have changed in that large numbers of newcomer children are attending nursery and pre-school and enter P1 with at least some language and knowledge of school routine. However, of the pupils participating in the study only twenty percent had any pre-school or nursery experience with the majority who lived here at the appropriate age going straight into P1.

Teachers identified this lack of pre-school education as a reason why newcomer pupils often had low levels of school readiness in addition to a language barrier. Low school readiness manifested itself as children from other countries may not have any previous experience of being away from their parents, school routines or understand appropriate behaviour in the classroom.

“In P1 in general, their greatest needs would probably be understanding the routine and being able to follow instructions. They find that difficult because they don’t understand what I’m saying. Some of the children are quite bright and are able to look at what other children are doing, if they do speak English, and then they just follow.”

P1 teacher, BELB



“I feel like I’m running a crèche alongside the P1. That’s where they are. They have no preschool experience at all. I even put their jumpers or coats on, shoes, everything.”

P1 teacher, BELB

A number of teachers also highlighted that they have older pupils in Key Stage 2 who have had no previous school experience. This often related to children of asylum seekers and refugees. In addition, older pupils could have experienced schools in other cultures which differ from NI in terms of discipline, teaching styles and attitudes towards teaching staff in which they need to adjust to. This lack of school readiness of older pupils coupled with a language barrier added a further challenge to teachers’ classroom management.

Silent period

Children expressed a range of emotions when asked about how they felt during the silent period. On the whole, pupils described feeling confused and scared at this time. Some also felt embarrassed that they could not understand English and were acutely aware of being different within the classroom:

“It feels like you’re quite confused, and you’re in a place that you don’t actually know and don’t understand. You feel lost.”

Polish female, 11 years old

“I felt like I was the odd one in the class.”

Lithuanian male, 11 years old

“I was a wee bit frightened. I did know English because my mum learnt me some but I was scared in case I said the wrong thing and then everyone would start laughing at me.”

Polish female, 10 years old

“I was pretending ‘cause it was kind of embarrassing because I didn’t really know. So I said ‘yes’ to everything they said.”

Italian female, 11 years old

Teachers reported that initially they expected children with little or no English to have a silent period in which a newcomer pupil is acquiring English language through absorbing interactions in the classroom and learning on their own. During this time, teachers build up vocabulary by focussing on survival language and high frequency words. This was reinforced in a number of ways including gesturing by the teacher, inclusive games with the peer group, labels and visual signs around the classroom and picture cards:



“I think their basic needs: toilets and feeling sick. If you think about their own language, the very first words they learn are toilet, line up, put [on] your coat. So it’s basic classroom routine, just the survival language we would call it really. Water, milk, snack, language.”

P1 teacher, BELB

“...they are maybe silent for the first wee while, maybe just to try and comprehend what are all these words, if they haven’t heard English before. And then they will over time speak small, they might say “toilet please” and then it might progress to “can I go to the toilet?”, and then you can see the big smile on their face. They know what they want to say but you just need to give them that time to do it.”

P4 teacher, BELB

“And then when they come in in September then, everything is very much through pictures. Again everything that I would have, if I say, ‘Line up or sit down’, as well as me speaking it, there is a picture to show everybody lining up or sitting down, so that if they don’t understand what I am saying there is a picture there. Or on their desk if they need any help or they need to go to the toilet, little pictures to show, ‘I need to go to the toilet’, they can show so that they don’t feel, I don’t know how to say anything. So hopefully they can communicate through the pictures that we would have.”

P1 teacher, SELB

As is clear from the extracts above, the silent period can impede children’s feelings of belonging and make communication between pupils and teachers difficult at the beginning of their relationship. The following section outlines the main challenges teachers reported in relation to newcomer pupils.

Challenges in the classroom

One of the key areas teachers were asked about in the interviews and focus groups was how they managed a classroom with a number of children who were learning English as a second language. The following section looks at the challenges teachers face in three broad categories of: (i) language barrier, (ii) differentiation; and (iii) special education needs.

Language barrier

Unsurprisingly, both teachers and children identified the language barrier as a key issue for newcomer pupils in the classroom. This central theme ran through all participants’ interviews and focus groups.

Silent period: As discussed in the previous section, teachers anticipated a ‘silent period’ for newcomer pupils as a normal part of language acquisition. While teachers reported extensive use of visual aids to communicate with newcomer pupils, this was not always successful resulting in some participants using bilingual staff members or children with the same native language to communicate with the child through interpretation.



Accessing the NI Curriculum: Teachers were concerned that this impacted on how much of the curriculum newcomer pupils could access. The example of numeracy was often given by teachers of how poor English comprehension prevented some newcomer pupils from being able to understand mathematical problems despite having the ability to work at a high level. Staff indicated that this is more problematic as pupils enter Key Stage 2 as more literacy is required to understand questions and instructions.

Assessment: Understanding the language used in assessments can be difficult for newcomer pupils in terms of comprehending the meaning of the questions and what they should do. This is a challenge for teachers in assessing a pupil's ability and particularly with regard to the transfer tests.

Participation: Teachers also commented that the lack of understanding of English sometimes meant that newcomer pupils were unable to express their ideas clearly and this was evident again for older pupils:

“I actually think Key Stage 2 needs more support than Key Stage 1 and the need's more highlighted. The language support as the education becomes more challenging. With the children I think it becomes more and more apparent especially from Primary 4 up they need additional support”.

Teacher, SELB

“When you delve deeper and you start asking them, as you do further up the school, to discuss thoughts and books or to discuss stories or make predictions about what you think would happen, they just are not able to first of all understand totally what you are asking them, and then secondly they are not able to convey or to share”

P7 teacher, NEELB

Frustration: Evidence suggests that older children joining a primary school in Northern Ireland for the first time may become more frustrated with the language barrier particularly when they have the ability to complete the level of tasks set for the class. Teachers highlighted that the lack of age appropriate materials for older newcomer pupils in Key Stage 2 often adds to pupils' frustration.

“A lot of the children are frustrated. A lot of them have come from the top of their class in their own country to very much at the bottom. Especially the older ones, they realise that they have to go through a process of building, which is very basic for a lot of them, but at the same time it has to be done to help build up their vocabulary.”

Vice-Principal, SELB



“It’s difficult whenever you go up the school when they arrive. I think when they arrive and they’ve no English at all it’s very frustrating for them you know. They could be well able to work and do it back in their own country but obviously because they’re doing a different language it’s difficult and [they] are very frustrated by it and we get frustrated too obviously.”

P1 teacher, SELB

“The problem as you go up the school is that you have children coming in and even simple words where they have no English whatsoever and you’re trying to give them reinforced colours or numbers, you know they’re basically doing P1 worksheets. They know themselves that this is babyish work compared to what I should be doing, and you try as much as possible to incorporate them into your lessons but sometimes it’s just not possible.”

P6 teacher, SELB

This was corroborated by children themselves as they reported that terminology used in class was unfamiliar to them and they needed more time to think as they were translating words into a different language. Some children also felt frustrated at misunderstandings caused by the language barrier:

“I felt a little angry because when you had to do a little piece of work, I didn’t understand and then because I didn’t do it, I got in trouble but it wasn’t really my fault ‘cause I didn’t understand anything.”

Polish female, 11 years old

“Often like, sometimes a teacher said I like cannot, like, hear good because I like didn’t understand and I didn’t come to her when she was calling me and she says to my mum that she thinks I cannot like hear so much.”

Polish female, 11 years old

Frustration at being unable to communicate may manifest itself in a number of ways. School staff reported that this could include bad behaviour in class, anger and disruption in the playground:

“and even in the playground when they’re settling in to school they do go through different stages and they get to a frustration stage and you have to be aware of that where they might lash out or get angry, and it’s not the child’s fault. It’s because they can’t communicate with you what their needs are so you do have to make allowances for that child in the classroom.”

P2 teacher, SEELB



Management of differentiation:

Teachers recognised that this was at times a stretch to accommodate the needs of every child. They also reported the amount of differentiation required resulted in additional time to adapt teaching plans, resources and homework. Furthermore, this issue revealed the reliance teachers have on classroom assistants. A common strategy used to manage differentiation in the classroom was for classroom assistants to withdraw or work with small groups of newcomer pupils within the class. This provided the opportunity for newcomer pupils to receive additional language support to build up their English while other pupils received teaching by the teacher.

“In P5, P6 and P7 the classroom assistant would withdraw and back up the teacher’s topics and things in class and she also takes children who would be very new newcomers so she gets them their basic language and then the teacher would take them when they have a little bit more language and they are able to put things together and that sort of thing. It works very well for us, it really has worked quite well this year.”

Vice-Principal, BELB

“We have a number of classroom assistants with different languages so we use those at the point of contact with those communities and those parents. So we are very fortunate to have Portuguese speakers, we are very fortunate to have Lithuanian speakers, Polish speakers on our staff, so we don’t need to depend so much on the translation service, we have that in-house and it’s fantastic.”

Principal, SELB

“Well I would currently put them together when I’m teaching them, you know, or my classroom assistant would take them out and do specific work with them because there’s no way they’re of the same ability as the children that I have, and I have quite a range of ability in my class, so you have to put them together for academic stuff, but if it’s PE, if it’s art, if it’s music, if it’s assembly, you’re mixed in with everyone else.”

P4 teacher, BELB

As shown in the extracts above, a number of schools in the study employed multi-lingual classroom assistants who were reported to be a valuable support for newcomer pupils in aiding their understanding through translation into their first language if required.



Special Educational Needs

Identification of SEN: Closely related to differentiation was the issue of identifying newcomer pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Primarily, teachers reported difficulty in being able to discern between the language barrier and a potential learning problem for newcomer pupils. One indicator teachers used to identify special educational needs was the speed of progress a child makes in language acquisition. For example, a child slow to pick up English language may have underlying factors such as a learning difficulty. Some teachers in schools with large numbers of newcomer pupils reported that it is easier to identify a special educational need as they can compare relative progression with children from a similar background.

Assessment of SEN: While acknowledging that time is needed for newcomer pupils to become acquainted with English language, it is problematic when a child does not have enough English language to be assessed for a special educational need. This uncertainty about the root of the problem may result in a newcomer pupil waiting long periods before they receive SEN support. Teachers also reported that the pace of intervention from other experts such as speech and language therapist and educational psychologist can be slow which further delays newcomer pupils accessing the help they need.

Communicating SEN to parents: Teaching staff found that it could be challenging to work with parents of newcomers who potentially present

with a special educational need. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, some parents had poor English language themselves and could not understand the process of SEN assessment. This resulted in missed appointments and meetings as parents could not understand the information that was provided to them. Secondly, some parents from different cultures refused to acknowledge that their child could have a learning difficulty. As a consequence some parents did not want their child to receive extra support or be seen as being different from other children:

“And we find it very difficult to convince the parents they have a learning difficulty. There’s a P7 child and all along we’ve been trying to tell parents the difficulties that this child’s having. “No, no, no don’t want support. No, no, no. She mustn’t come out of her class. She must stay in the class, she learns in the class”. “No, but she would actually be better out doing English”, (teacher’s name) does English support and they “no”. And do you know when they realised it? It was when they came to transfer this year. And they came through those unregulated tests, as they are, sort of the grammar schools have, and they put her through the test and she scored so low. And they came in and it was so sad. But I said “I’ve told you, I’ve told you from P3 she was struggling. And we’ve helped her in so many ways but you wouldn’t allow her out, you wouldn’t allow her to take actual classes”. So it can be difficult.”

Principal, SEELB



“The special needs as well some cultures are not as accepting of people. There are also parents whose children we identified as in need of extra support, a lot of parents won’t sign that off. They don’t want to feel like their child is being labelled as having a certain need because it’s frowned upon in their culture.”

P6 teacher, SELB

As drawn from the evidence, teachers may find newcomer pupils challenging in the classroom through the language barrier, the breadth of differentiation within their class and regarding identifying special educational needs. The following section will explore the relationship between newcomer parents and the school.

Section 3: Newcomer parents and the school

Communication with Parents

As schools are often the first port of call for newcomer families, many schools have gained an in-depth understanding of how to support newcomer families needs when they first arrive. School staff reported supporting parents’ complete official paperwork, explaining to parents how to access NI health and social care systems and directing parents to cheaper uniforms. In terms of communicating to parents regularly, evidence indicated that schools use a variety of ways to ensure they are able to communicate with newcomer pupils’ parents effectively. The most common ways schools communicate with parents

of newcomer pupils are through interpreters supplied by the Inclusion and Diversity Service and translated letters sent home. Other methods that school staff used to communicate with parents include:

- Using bilingual staff to translate;
- Communicating through a person nominated by the parent (such as friend, child or other family member);
- Use of technology to translate including texting, email and school website;
- Translated school reports;
- Translated weekly school newsletter;
- Children used as translators for parents.

While in most instances schools were able to successfully communicate with newcomer pupils parents in some way, it was also apparent that schools found it particularly problematic to deal with parents with a complete lack of English and low levels of literacy in their own language. As discussed above, this can be difficult if a child requires support for a special educational need or if there is an emergency with no time to contact an interpreter. To try and counter this and build good relationships with parents of newcomer pupils, nearly half of the participating schools reported that they held English classes for newcomer parents to support them in improving their English language ability. A smaller number of schools also ran parenting courses which newcomer parents attended.



Newcomer pupils at home

Most of the pupils considered that their English language was better than that of their parents. Half of the children assessed that at least one of their parents could speak English well. The majority of the remaining participants reported that their parents had some grasp of English while a smaller number reported that their parents did not speak any English. This had implications on the language spoken at home and how much support children could have from parents on homework. Many of the children were bilingual and some pupils felt that their parents wanted their children to maintain their first language. This was emphasised to children in a number of ways at home by all conversation being conducted in the home language in addition to watching television programmes and reading books in their home language. In some cases, pupils reported that they attended a language school on a Saturday to be able to read and write in their first language.

"...I know what they mean but I, you know, the words just don't come out. So if I don't know the words in my country then I just say it in English but then they don't understand sometime."

Slovakian female, 10 years old

"My dad says, he doesn't like when I speak English at home 'cause I'm starting to forget few words in my language so if we're talking, I usually say like, if I don't know how to say "sand", I usually say it in my language. Sometimes if I don't know how to say it in my language, I say it in English"

Portuguese female, 10 years old

School staff recognised that a balance existed between newcomer pupils maintaining their home language and their acquisition of English as a second language:

"At the same time we don't want them to lose their different language, you know. You were saying earlier about speaking to their parents and grandparents at home and so on, and some of our parents actually take the children back sometimes to their native countries, so that they don't lose, maybe during the summer, to keep that. Because that's losing quite [a lot] of their heritage, traditions and even connections with their relatives."

Principal, SEELB





Over half of the children reported that homework was the worst thing about school. Some reported that they found particular subjects difficult while others described homework as 'boring'. There was a mixed response from participants when asked if a parent could help them with their homework. Nearly half reported that a parent could help with homework at least sometimes. Results indicated that parents were more able to help their children with numeracy homework than literacy based homework. Although some children reported that no one could help them with homework, other sources of support were available such as older siblings or another family member, friends of the family and the internet.

"In some subjects it is hard because if I don't know what to do, say in English, no-one could explain it to me because none of my parents are English and they wouldn't know that and they wouldn't understand what it says there and that is quite hard."

Polish female, 10 years old

Teachers identified that support from parents at home was a key factor in how well newcomer pupils developed in their English.

"Now that one pupil I was mentioning who started in September with no English, and I think they were sitting doing circle time, talking about Christmas and what did we do over the Christmas holidays, and he was able

to contribute to the conversation with a big smile on his face so it just shows how much he has come on. But again he has got good home support, his mummy is really looking him to speak English and will try her best to speak English to him at home as well. But you can see the confidence is just oozing out of him now. And from when he came here in September to now is fantastic."

Overall, schools recognised the challenges newcomer pupils could face in learning a different language from their parents and many schools sought to develop good relationships with parents in order to encourage parental involvement and educational support for pupils at home.

Section 4: Good practice

Results indicated that there are a number of good practices in the schools that participated in the research study. Findings suggest that newcomer pupils can experience difficulties when starting primary school in Northern Ireland. From the pupil's perspective, it can be frightening to be in an unfamiliar environment where they speak a different language and have no friends. Schools have developed strategies to welcome newcomer pupils, integrate them into the school and to communicate with their parents. Results showed that strategies are discernible at both a whole school level and a class level as shown on Table 6.



Table 6: Summary of good practice at school and classroom level

School Level	After school clubs for newcomer pupils
	Celebrating different cultures eg multicultural events and workshops
	English language classes for parents
	Inclusive ethos
	School reports translated
	Sharing good practice with other schools
	Weekly translated newsletters/notes
	Growing use of technology to communicate with parents
Classroom Level	Bilingual teaching assistants
	Buddy System
	Development of home-school journals
	NI children learning a second language
	Strategic seating plans to integrate newcomer pupils
Visual aids and displays in classroom in multiple languages	

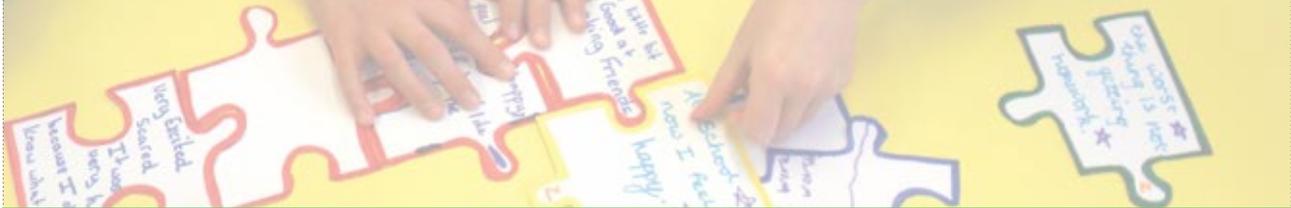
As shown in Table 6, much innovative and dynamic practice is being led by primary schools in order to meet the needs of newcomer pupils. Evidence suggests that while good practice is ongoing this has been achieved on a school to school basis with little standardisation across the education sector. As such, some participating schools may have already implemented or partly implemented some aspects of the suggested improvements.

■ Resources

Overall, the most popular suggestion made by teachers related to the resources for newcomer pupils. There seemed to be a general lack of awareness by teachers of existing resources or a perception that resources were difficult or time-consuming to access. Teachers reported that it would be useful to have a framework of resources on set topics that they

could search. As discussed in Section 1, teachers also emphasised that resources should be age appropriate with particular emphasis on engaging older children with little or no English.

Similarly, school staff reported that training on strategies to teach newcomer pupils would be an improvement as it would reassure staff they were managing their classrooms correctly and provide them with new ideas. As outlined in Section 1, school staff reported that a number of improvements could be made to support they received from the IDS. The most common suggestion was that the IDS becomes more practical in nature in terms of providing one to one support for newcomer children and being able to model an ideal class for teachers. Other suggestions included updating the Primary ToolKit resources and greater flexibility for interpreting services.



■ Intensive teaching

As discussed in Section 2, most teachers use classroom assistants and other staff in order to withdraw newcomer pupils. When asked about areas of improving the newcomer pupils' experience, teachers identified that newcomer pupils may benefit from more intensive attention. It was suggested that this could be done through either language acquisition before they entered a classroom setting or through an increase in small group work.

■ Relationships with newcomer pupils parents

Schools also identified that there was greater scope to build positive relationships with newcomer pupils' parents. Suggestions about how relationships could be improved included running parenting programmes in school, English language classes for parents and greater use of technology to communicate. Teachers felt that greater integration of newcomer families would be of benefit to the wider community as a whole.

■ Ideas for improvement by newcomer pupils

It was important to gain the pupils' ideas for making it easier for other newcomer pupils to start a new school in NI. Central to newcomer pupils' ideas about what would make it easier for other newcomer pupils was friendship. As discussed in Section 2, one of their favourite things about school was having friends and friendship was a key element that made children feel part of the school. The most common

answer by newcomer pupils for ideas that would help others was to make friends. This was followed by having a friend you could talk to either in terms of translating the teacher or practicing English with.

"In my first school I had a friend and she speaks Filipino, so I always talked to her and she helped me. We could work together"

Filipino female, 11 years old

"...also if you have friends, if you want to know and they speak your language, you just like ask."

Polish female, 11 years old

Newcomer pupils also thought it would useful to have greater access to resources such as dictionaries, books and the computer to translate for themselves. Other ideas including allowing parents to stay in class for longer and having a homework club only for newcomer pupils.

As discussed, the majority of children experienced a time of adjustment when they started primary school in NI. While many felt scared and confused, the majority reported that they enjoyed school now. Key to feeling included was friendships with peers and a good relationship with their teacher. To end the children's focus groups, pupils were asked about what advice they would give a newcomer who was just about to start school. Advice addressed the fear



that the majority of newcomer pupils felt when starting school as discussed in Section 2. Children sought to reassure others that while starting a new school may be difficult, that it would become easier as they learnt more English:

“I would say at the beginning it is going to be quite hard and you are going to struggle but then later on it gets easier because you make friends and you learn a wee bit of English every day”.

Polish female, 10 years old

“Don’t worry because there’s always someone to support you and help you to get better at English. Just don’t be intimidated if you don’t speak English that well”

Filipino female, 11 years old

“not to be scared because whatever you do, you’re gonna be alright. And keep on going and don’t give up!”

Polish female, 11 years old

They wanted to convey to others that they should not be afraid to ask for help as support was available. Children themselves often offered to translate for any new pupils so they would be able to communicate with others. While a small number of pupils emphasised that newcomer pupils should be respectful, polite and avoid bullying others, the importance of making friends was

highlighted as children’s advice for others was to talk to others and make friends.

“Don’t be shy and just talk to them because they won’t harm you!”

East Timorese male, 11 years old

“to make friends or like to try to play with people”

Polish male, 10 years old

As shown throughout the research report, children friendship was highly valued by newcomer children and a key issue in their ability to settle into a new school. While most children were intimidated of starting school at first, it is heartening that supports put in place at both school and classroom level have resulted in the majority of newcomer pupils feeling part of their school.





Chapter 4: Discussion and Recommendations

This research investigated the experiences of newcomer pupils and school staff in primary schools across NI. The rapid increase of ethnic minority families in the last decade has resulted in newcomer pupils making up 4.3% of the primary school population in NI. As a consequence more schools are coping with children who may have little or no English language. In order to deal effectively with rising numbers of newcomer pupils and support schools, it is appropriate that policy and resources for newcomer pupils are now reviewed to ensure the needs of the pupils and schools are effectively being met. Based on the findings of this research study, consideration should be given to the following areas:

Language barrier: The research shows that the language barrier is a multifaceted issue central to the relationship between school staff and newcomer pupils. Children reported that not being able to speak or understand English could be a frightening experience particularly with being in a new environment. From the children's perspective, they viewed the language barrier primarily as an obstacle to making friends with some concerned about not being able to complete the tasks set for them. While most teachers expected newcomer pupils to have a 'silent period' for a time, there was concern about identifying special educational needs without being able to assess a child in a language they understood. Some pupils also highlighted that

they found the language barrier frustrating as it prevented them from expressing themselves and led to misunderstandings between teachers and pupils.

English language comprehension: Evidence from teachers highlighted concerns about the depth of newcomer pupils English language comprehension in terms of being able to understand and respond to more complex texts and instructions. The lack of English language literacy is concerning as it has the potential to affect all subjects due to its cross-curricular nature and impede a child's educational achievement. Many teachers commented that newcomer pupils were unable to fulfil their potential in other subjects such as mathematics and did not do well in written assessments. Teachers reported that this lack of comprehension was particularly apparent in older newcomer pupils in Key Stage 2 which would suggest that some newcomer pupils may enter post-primary school with low levels of literacy. As this has the prospect of limiting newcomer pupils' attainment throughout the rest of their education, it is important that steps are taken to increase newcomer pupils' comprehension of English language in primary schools.

Inclusion and Diversity Service: The general consensus among school staff was that the IDS was a useful support for schools in the early stages of enrolling newcomer pupils. Staff



particularly highlighted guidance on welcoming newcomer pupils, multilingual signage and translation and interpreting services for parents as positive aspects of the IDS. However, there were also significant gaps in expectations expressed for aspects of support that were not provided by the IDS. Teachers suggested that the scope of the IDS could usefully be extended to offer staff examples of a model lesson for classes with newcomer pupils and strategies to deal with the broad range of abilities and languages present in the classroom. Some teachers further suggested that the IDS should engage with newcomer pupils themselves to provide support. It is also important to highlight that schools have different needs dependent on the numbers and ranges of nationality/languages and their own experiences of teaching newcomer pupils. Drawing from this research, evidence would suggest that the services and support currently offered by the IDS should be reviewed to ensure the range of needs identified by staff are being met.

Staff training: The majority of teachers identified a gap in their own knowledge about the best ways in which to teach children learning English as an Additional Language. Often teachers developed strategies 'on the job' and would welcome the opportunity to learn from other professionals and gain new insight and ideas. It is also clear from the research that classroom assistants play a significant role in working with newcomer pupils either through providing individual attention in class or working with small groups

withdrawn from the class. These staff members should also be in the position to avail of specific training on working with newcomer pupils.

Parental awareness and engagement in education: The importance of engaging newcomer parents in their child's education was a recurring theme in the research. Most of the schools in this study were active in encouraging parental engagement in a range of ways including translated weekly newsletters/notes, using technology to communicate with parents, holding English language classes for parents and multicultural days. Evidence would suggest that there was little standardisation of how schools engaged with parents as schools tended to identify the best ways to involve newcomer parents and use the resources available to them. School staff also identified that newcomer families were not always aware of the services or the process needed to avail of services such as free part time pre-school places for 3 – 4 year olds. Areas requiring further work with newcomer pupil parents generally were identified as raising awareness of the importance of: (i) education for young children, particularly in terms of pre-school and Foundation stage; (ii) regular school attendance; (iii) homework and (iv) practicing English with their children outside of school.

Recommendations

Drawing from this research study, a number of key areas have been identified as requiring further attention. The following



FEELS LIKE HOME: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF NEWCOMER PUPILS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

7. Increasing schools' awareness of funding opportunities through OFMDFM, District Councils Good Relations Programme and Community Relations Council that could support ethnic minority parents having greater parental involvement in schools, access to English classes and greater integration into the wider community.



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