

# EAL FAQ SHEET

## WHAT IS AN EAL STUDENT?

EAL refers to “English as an Alternative Language/Dialect”. It has formerly been known as ESL “English as a Second Language”. Some resources still use the former title.

An EAL student is generally considered to be one who exhibits any of the following:

- They are learning English as a second or additional language. This may mean they have had some or no exposure to English.
- They may have had some or no schooling equivalent to that of their children the same age as them. Their schooling may have been severely interrupted.
- They are not as proficient in English as a student of the same age who has been learning only English.
- They exhibit English language structures and features that are typical of those in the process of learning English.
- They need assistance in classroom activities because of their stage of English language development. This may include specific skill development and/or the opportunity to develop confidence in their use of English.
- They may have been born in Australia or overseas.

A student may exhibit EAL features in their production and understanding of oral and written English for a long time.

## HOW LONG MIGHT MY CHILD STAY ON THE EAL CONTINUUM?

It has long been established through research by Cummins (1996) and others **that an EAL student starting primary school with little or no English can take from 5–7 years to reach the same level of English as his or her age-equivalent peers**. Adolescent students are generally able to make more rapid progress in language development in the initial stages than young children (see, e.g. Yates, de Courcy and Nicholas 2007) but their language will continue to exhibit EAL features and they will still benefit from EAL support for some time.

Cummins also writes about two types of competence:

- Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills, which are usually quickly acquired, in the classroom and through interaction with peers
- **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency**.

It is this latter competence which often needs to be the focus of EAL teaching at the more advanced stages, and especially in the secondary school. A student’s facility with everyday spoken English, and even their Australian accent, may lead teachers to believe they are no longer 'EAL', but this may not be the case, and the student may still need targeted teaching and support to reach the same level of academic proficiency as their peers.

## **WILL SPEAKING A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME SLOW MY CHILD'S LEARNING PROGRESS AT SCHOOL?**

It is important to continue to speak your first language at home while your child learns to speak English because:

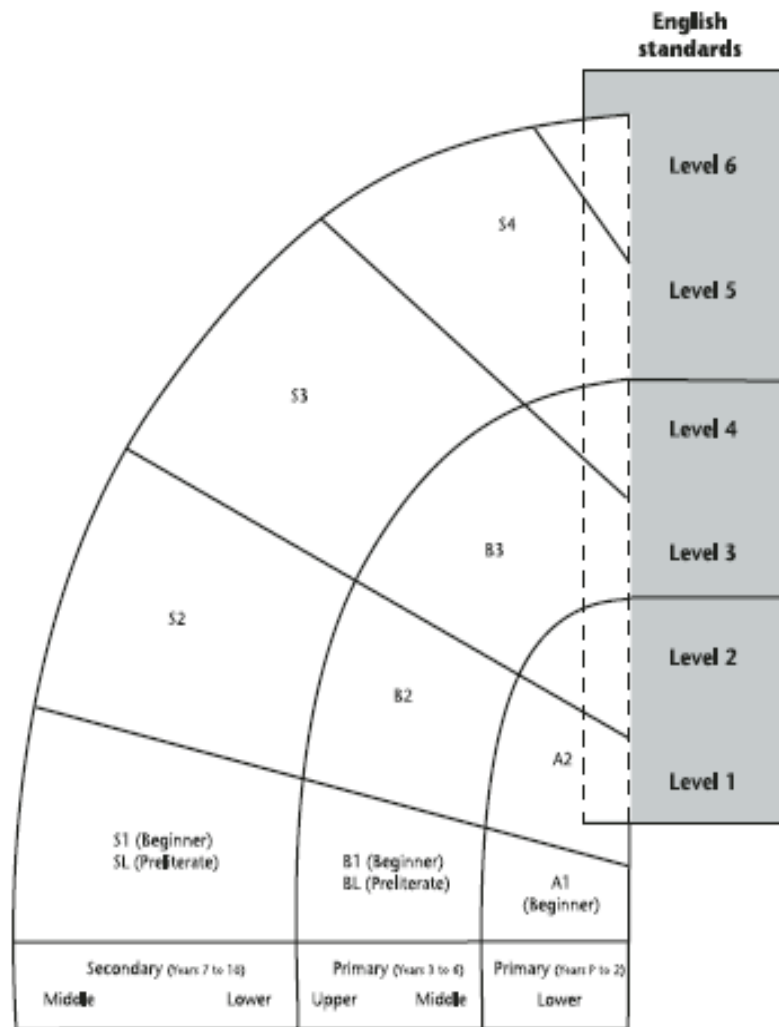
- It will help to maintain good communication between family members.
- It will assist your child's learning because if they do not understand something in English you can help them to understand using their first language.
- It will be a possible advantage for your child in future to be able to speak two languages.

## **HOW WILL THEY MOVE THROUGH THE CONTINUUM?**

For many students, development is also likely to be influenced by their migration experiences, particularly those who have had refugee or refugee-like experiences, and who may have suffered trauma. Because of these individual differences, the time it takes

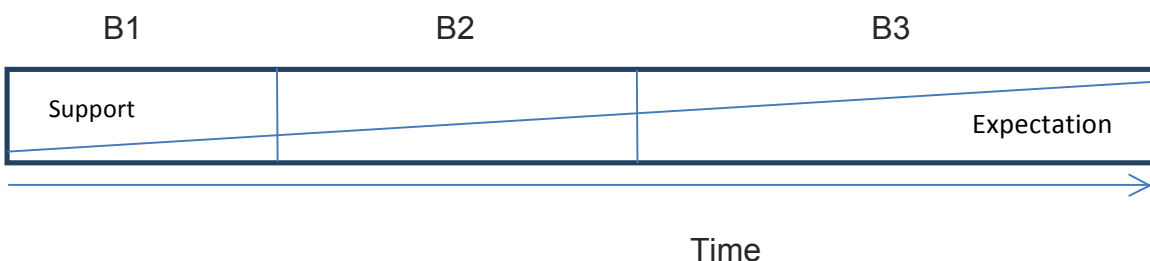
students to move through the stages of the EAL standards is not prescribed.

Diagram 1: Stages of the ESL standards in relation to the levels of the English standards



It is important to note that students are likely to move more quickly through the beginning stages, which describe early learning, than through the later stages. This is deliberate, in order to capture and to acknowledge important early development. (Also because early learning is concrete and highly supported and becomes increasingly abstract with an increasing expectation of independence).

For example, a student's pathway through the B Stages could be represented by the diagram below:



If young students have been moving through the A stages and are not ready to move onto VELs at the end of Year 2, they will be placed on the continuum in the B stages in Year 3 and continue to progress through the continuum until they can be marked at or above level in VELs. The same is true for students as they move to secondary school. If they are not ready to be marked against VELs they will be placed in the S levels in Year 7.

### **WILL BEING ON THE EAL CONTINUUM HINDER MY CHILD’S ABILITY TO ACCESS SCHOLARSHIPS AND SELECT ENTRY SECONDARY SCHOOLS?**

No it should not.

- At Year 12 it is an advantage to be assessed against a second language( or in the case of the EAL student’s first language) as it can offer the opportunity of high marks which are reasonably easily achieved by native speakers.
- EAL English at Year 12 allows for language differences and so in some instances it can be easier to pass and assist in achieving a higher university entrance score.
- Schools such as Nossal (select entry secondary school in Berwick) accept EAL students.
- Many select entry schools expect all students who are sitting for scholarships to sit entrance exams and request evidence of academic achievement regardless of their first language background.

### **I WANT MY CHILD ASSESSED AGAINST VELs**

Using the English Standards will not be an accurate reflection of an ESL student’s learning, and can indicate that there are problems in the student’s learning progress, when in fact the student is actually making adequate progress learning English as their second or subsequent language.

As EAL students learn more English, their learning begins to correspond to the English Standards. If an assessment of an EAL student on the English Standards is within acceptable year level parameters, then it is time to start using the English Standards for assessing and reporting progress. If not, then the EAL Standards should continue to be used.

Students will be in the EAL Continuum for all Dimensions(Listening & Speaking, Reading and Writing) of English or on VELs for all Dimensions. This is because the Dimensions are interlinked, English is learnt as a whole language, not in isolated parts.

### **DOES THE SCHOOL RECEIVE EXTRA FUNDING FOR EAL STUDENTS?**

Yes

“ESL(EAL) students need optimum teaching and learning conditions to build English language skills in order to reach these goals. All programs in which ESL(EAL) students are participating need to provide optimal conditions for learning English.” (ESL Handbook)

At Kilberry Valley Primary School we use EAL funding in a variety of ways to meet this expectation.

We keep class sizes as small as possible. This means students get more contact time with their teacher.

We provide a broad range of programs such as:

- Drama and Music give all students and opportunity to develop confidence with using oral language, specifically speaking to an audience, intonation, inflection and pronunciation.
- Visual Art gives students an opportunity to communicate ideas, thoughts and feeling beyond the English language, as it is a global form of communication.

- Our ICT and Multi Media programs prepare all students for a rapidly changing world.
- P.E. and Health provide opportunities for physical fitness and developing healthy life habits.
- Our ES staff run a Life Skills program.
- The EAL staff support new arrival and at risk students.
- The Refugee Bridging Program supports families and students.
- Our outstanding facilities include a new gym, proposed performing art centre, upgraded visual art room, library, 2 computer labs and a film studio.
- All of these programs and facilities in conjunction with the excellent curriculum prepared by class teachers provides students with a broad range of experiences that allow them to practice their English skills in a range of settings and develop a broad vocabulary. Without our EAL funding, much of this would not be possible.

## **I WANT TO FURTHER DISCUSS MY CHILD'S PROGRESS OR I HAVE FURTHER QUESTIONS**

Should you have further questions, we can arrange a time for you to meet with :

The EAL coordinator Mrs Jenni Matheson

EAL support Mrs Gez Balovski

Curriculum Coordinator and Assistant Principal Mrs Christine Taylor

## **REFERENCES**

**The ESL Handbook**

**<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/eslhandbook.pdf>**

**The ESL Companion to the Continuum**

**[http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/downloads/esl\\_companion.pdf](http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/downloads/esl_companion.pdf)**

The education website - **[www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)**

**[www.kilberryvalleyyps.edu.au](http://www.kilberryvalleyyps.edu.au)**

**<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/lem/esl/einter.htm>**