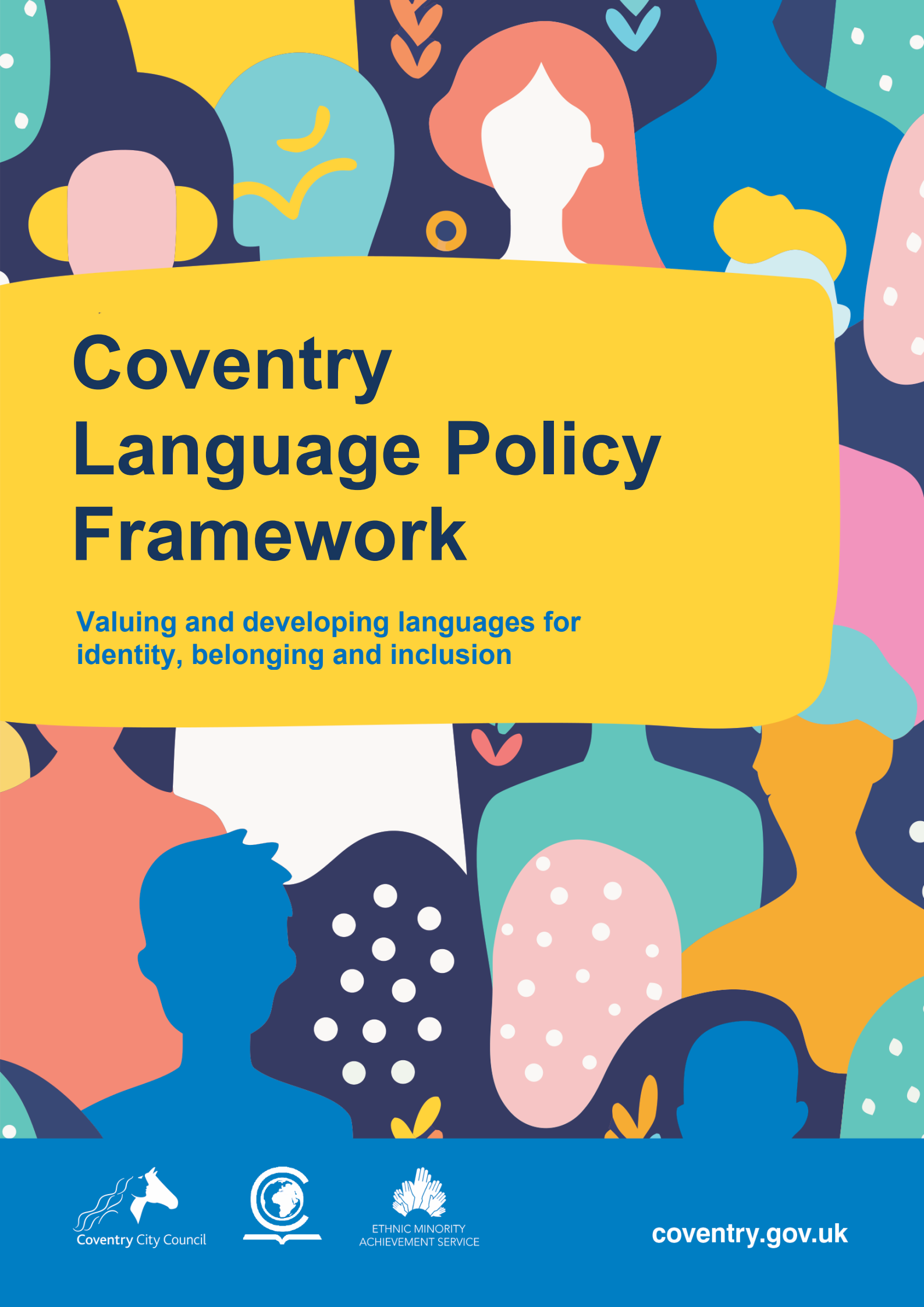


The background of the cover features a vibrant, stylized illustration of a diverse group of people. The figures are represented by colorful, abstract shapes in shades of blue, orange, pink, and teal. Some figures have white polka dots on their bodies. The overall style is modern and inclusive, emphasizing community and diversity.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Valuing and developing languages for
identity, belonging and inclusion



Coventry City Council



coventry.gov.uk

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Introduction

This policy sets out a shared framework for language development across Coventry's schools. It is designed to give schools a common reference point for recognising, developing, and building on the languages that pupils bring to, and encounter through, their education.

Language development is central to learning, identity, and participation for every pupil in Coventry, whatever their linguistic starting point. This policy affirms that all languages hold value within the school community, and that schools have a responsibility to recognise, develop, and build on this linguistic diversity for the benefit of every learner, multilingual and monolingual alike. The vision behind it is a city in which every school sees languages as a foundation to build on rather than a barrier to overcome, and in which linguistic diversity is understood as a shared strength of the whole school community and an opportunity open to all learners.

The policy moves from the rationale and guiding principles that underpin this work, through the practical areas of teaching, assessment, staffing, and leadership, to guidance on family and community engagement.

This policy was developed in partnership with Coventry Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS), drawing on the work of a representative working group and a period of public consultation carried out in June 2026. It sets out a city-wide framework that Coventry schools are invited to work towards from its launch in October 2026, at a pace appropriate to each school's context and starting point.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 1: Background to the Policy

Coventry is a proudly diverse and multilingual city. Its communities represent heritages from across the globe, and its schools reflect this richness in both student and staff populations. More than one hundred languages are spoken by pupils across the city, and Coventry continues to offer a warm welcome to newly arrived families, including those seeking sanctuary. This linguistic richness is understood as an asset for all learners, multilingual and monolingual alike, and this policy reflects a commitment to ensuring that every pupil in Coventry benefits from the city's diversity of languages and cultures. It applies to all schools across all phases, from early years through to secondary.

The linguistic landscape across Coventry schools is vibrant and varied. At the time of writing, the proportion of multilingual learners using English as an Additional Language (EAL) ranges from 4% to 89% in primary settings, 20% to 69% in secondary schools, and 5% to 48% in specialist provision. While pupils enter Coventry schools with differing levels of English proficiency, they bring with them well-established language skills in their home languages, representing an asset that supports learning, identity development, and social integration.

Coventry's commitment to valuing languages is long-standing. The Coventry City of Languages initiative, established in 2020, brings together teachers, linguists, universities, and local businesses to celebrate linguistic diversity, strengthen the learning and teaching of languages, and highlight the role of language in cultural life and economic opportunity.

This policy has been developed in partnership with Coventry Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS), which has supported multilingual learners and their families in the city for over forty years. EMAS provides specialist expertise across a wide range of languages and communities, responds to the evolving linguistic needs of Coventry schools, and remains a central resource for schools in implementing this framework, including for pupils and families arriving through national resettlement programmes. Recent interest in schools becoming spaces of sanctuary for children experiencing forced migration has led EMAS to support schools in achieving the Schools of Sanctuary award.

This policy applies to every language spoken within a school community, regardless of the number of speakers; no threshold of prevalence determines whether a language is recognised or supported.

This policy is for all learners in Coventry schools, not only those developing English alongside another language, but also those for whom encounters with linguistic diversity represent an opportunity to develop broader language awareness, intercultural understanding, and a curiosity about language that will serve them throughout their lives.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 2: Rationale and Guiding Principles

Language is central to learning, participation, and identity. Learners have diverse linguistic resources that shape how they access, process, and express knowledge, and these should be understood as assets within education. While English is the primary language of schooling in England, its development is most effective when it builds on learners' existing languages rather than replacing them (Cummins, 2000). Differences in English proficiency can affect how learners access the curriculum and demonstrate understanding, creating risks to equity where language is conflated with ability (The Bell Foundation, 2017).

Recognition of learners' languages and identities is closely linked to belonging, participation, and engagement. For Coventry to foster socially cohesive school communities grounded in mutual respect and appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity, there must be a consistent city-wide approach to language development in schools. This Language Policy sets out the principles and expectations that will guide Coventry schools in achieving these aims.

Guiding Principles

1. **All languages support learning and achievement:** Additive bilingualism, which supports development of additional languages by building on existing languages supports both academic achievement and cognitive development. Schools recognise and build on this as part of the learning process for all languages and language learners.¹
2. **Proficiency in English and cognitive ability are distinct:** Learners may have strong conceptual understanding that is not yet fully expressed in academic English. Language development should not be conflated with underlying ability.²
3. **Access to academic language is essential for equity:** Explicit attention to the language demands of the curriculum is necessary to enable equitable access to subject knowledge and participation in learning.³
4. **Language, identity, and belonging are interconnected:** All learners bring linguistic identities that shape how they engage with language and learning. Valuing those identities means recognising the languages multilingual learners already use, while also supporting every learner to see themselves as a capable and curious language learner for whom language learning is meaningful and within their reach.⁴
5. **Language develops through interaction and participation:** Language learning is socially mediated. All learners develop language through structured opportunities for talk and engagement in meaningful social and academic contexts. Coventry's linguistic diversity makes those opportunities particularly rich, and schools have a responsibility to ensure every learner can access and benefit from them.⁵

¹ (Baker & Wright, 2017)

² (Cummins, 2021)

³ (Lindorff, Strand, & Ma, 2026)

⁴ (Chalmers & Crisfield, 2019)

⁵ (Duarte & Gunther-Van Der Meij, 2018)

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 3: Policy Aims

Multilingualism Mission Statement

Language development is an important educational goal for all learners in Coventry schools. The languages that learners bring, develop, and encounter through education are central to their learning, identity, and participation in society. This policy affirms that all languages have value within the school community and that schools have a role in recognising, developing, and building on this linguistic diversity, for the benefit of every learner in Coventry schools, whatever their linguistic starting point.

This policy is for school leaders, teachers, and governors, and is designed to sit alongside a school's existing policies and development planning.

Policy Aims

Across Coventry, schools work towards the following aims:

- to recognise and value the full linguistic repertoires of all learners, and reflect this in school culture, practice, and ethos
- to ensure that all learners are able to access the curriculum, with language development supported so that it does not become a barrier to participation or attainment
- to support the development of English as the language of schooling alongside the maintenance and development of home and community languages
- to raise the profile of languages and broaden opportunities for all learners, whatever their linguistic starting point, to engage with languages both within the curriculum and through the linguistic diversity of the school and wider community
- to foster in all learners a curiosity about language and an openness to learning and using languages beyond English, as a skill for life and citizenship
- to strengthen partnerships with families and communities, ensuring that information about education provision and language development is shared, and that parents and carers are supported to engage with their children's learning, including through the use of home languages
- to build staff understanding and confidence of all staff, including teaching and non-teaching roles, recognising that everyone working in a school has a role in supporting language development, and to develop robust approaches to teaching, assessment, and communication that take account of language.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 4: Areas of Language in Schools

Language in schools operates across four interconnected domains, each addressed by this policy.

English as the Language of Schooling (including EAL)

English is the main language of instruction, assessment, and participation in the education system in England, and proficiency in English is essential for accessing learning and wider opportunities.

Languages as Subjects

The teaching of languages as subjects provides opportunities for all learners to extend their linguistic repertoires and develop skills that are valuable for life, work, and citizenship.

Home and Community Languages

Home and community languages are central to learners' identity, wellbeing, and sense of belonging. Recognising and building on these languages within school supports both academic development and positive learner identity.

Home and Community languages include languages that are national languages, indigenous languages (such as Welsh), oral languages, dialects, creoles and signed varieties of languages (such as British Sign Language), which are recognised as home/community languages, taught languages, or both, and schools should reflect this in their language profile and curriculum offer as appropriate.

Multilingualism, Language Awareness and Intercultural Understanding

Schools support the development of language awareness in all learners, and have a responsibility to ensure that all learners, whatever their linguistic background, benefit from opportunities to explore and expand their understanding of the world through languages.

Each of these domains is developed in practice through the areas of teaching, learning, assessment, staffing, leadership, and family engagement set out in the sections that follow.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 5: School Context and Learner Profile

Each school in Coventry operates within a distinct linguistic and community context, which shapes how this framework is interpreted and applied in practice. Effective implementation depends on schools developing a clear and evolving understanding of their learners, families, and wider community, and using this to inform provision. This understanding also contributes to a sense of belonging, as it enables schools to recognise learners' identities and experiences as part of the learning environment.

Schools develop a language profile that reflects the characteristics of their setting, covering three interconnected areas:

- Learner profiles
- Community context
- School provision and capacity

The school language profile is dynamic rather than fixed, recognising that school communities and learner needs change over time. This mapping supports schools in identifying strengths and gaps in provision, and in making effective use of existing expertise within the school community.

The purpose of developing and maintaining this profile is to inform decision-making. A clear understanding of context supports planning for teaching and learning, communication with families, allocation of resources, and identification of priorities for development. It also supports schools in recognising and celebrating the linguistic diversity of their community as a strength, and in ensuring that multilingualism is reflected in leadership priorities and school development planning.

Detailed guidance on developing a school language profile, including what to include at whole-school and individual learner level and how this information can be used to support teaching and learning, is set out in the accompanying implementation guidance.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 6: Language, Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning across the curriculum are mediated through language, shaping how knowledge is constructed, communicated, and understood within each subject. Supporting language development is therefore not an additional aspect of teaching, but a core part of how learning is planned and delivered.

Access, Provision and Progression

Learners engage with teaching at different stages of English proficiency, and this shapes how they participate in learning and assessment. Each subject uses language in specific ways to construct and communicate knowledge, including particular forms of vocabulary, grammar, and expression. Access to the curriculum therefore depends on access to this subject-specific language. Teaching ensures that all learners can access the curriculum at an appropriate level of challenge, without lowering expectations. This involves taking account of the language demands of tasks, how these are presented, and how learners are supported to engage with them, drawing on both formative assessment within lessons and summative assessment at key points.

Schools provide coherent support for multilingual learners using English as an Additional Language at different stages of English development, giving consideration to how learners are supported on arrival, the balance between targeted support and mainstream classroom learning, and the role of peer and pastoral support. Provision is reviewed over time to ensure it remains appropriate and supports progression.

All learners are expected to engage with language learning opportunities across the curriculum, building the curiosity and language capacity that opens doors whatever their linguistic starting point. Schools actively support progression in language subjects to GCSE and beyond, recognising that gaps in take-up often reflect systemic barriers rather than learner interest or ability, and ensure the availability of home language qualifications either through normal channels or alternative routes where possible. Qualification routes should reflect a learner's own named home language; a linguistically related but distinct language should not be offered as a substitute without the learner's and family's agreement.

Support and guidance for schools in implementing this section, including case studies and practical resources, is available through EMAS.

Language Beyond the Classroom

Language development is shaped by experiences beyond the classroom as well as within it. Schools recognise the role of home, community, and wider social contexts in shaping learners' language use and identity. This includes supporting opportunities for learners to develop and gain accreditation in home and community languages, recognising the contribution of community language provision, and considering how language connects to future pathways, including further education, employment, and participation in the wider community.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 7: Identification, Assessment and Tracking

Effective identification, assessment, and tracking are central to ensuring that all learners are supported to access the curriculum and demonstrate their learning. These processes require careful attention to the ways in which language shapes how learners engage with teaching and assessment, and are most effective when they are collaborative, involving families, EAL specialists, SEND staff, and subject teachers alongside one another.

Identification

Identification of multilingual learners using English as an Additional Language is based on a broad and informed understanding of the learner, rather than relying solely on admission data. Schools develop a holistic profile on entry, recognising that this will continue to evolve over time. A key principle underpinning identification is that language development takes time, and that progress is not always linear. While learners may develop everyday conversational fluency within one to two years, the language required for academic learning typically develops over a longer period, often five to seven years or more, depending on prior experience and literacy (Cummins, 2000; The Bell Foundation, 2017).

It is important that difficulties arising solely from learning English as an additional language are not identified as special educational needs, in line with the SEND Code of Practice. Tracking in all language skill areas; listening, speaking, reading and writing provides a broader picture of learner development over time, capturing both English proficiency and curriculum attainment and recognising that these develop in related but distinct ways.

Assessment

Assessment takes account of the relationship between language and learning. Learners may have strong conceptual understanding that is not yet fully expressed in English, and assessment approaches should enable learners to demonstrate that understanding while maintaining cognitive challenge. Considering learners' skills across all their languages, rather than only in English, supports more accurate assessment and understanding of student progress. This ensures that sustainable support strategies are put in place for both language development and, where relevant, special educational needs.

Tracking

Tracking provides a broader picture of learner development over time. This includes both English proficiency and curriculum attainment, recognising that these develop in related but distinct ways. Schools use a recognised framework to assess English proficiency across speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and ensure that this is understood across the staff team.

Detailed guidance on identification, assessment, and tracking processes, including frameworks, tools, and practical approaches for use in the classroom, is set out in the accompanying implementation guidance.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 8: Staffing, Professional Development and Capacity-Building

Effective implementation of this policy depends on building staff knowledge, confidence, and capacity across the school. Supporting multilingual learners and broadening language opportunities for all learners is a whole-school responsibility, requiring shared understanding, appropriate structures, and sustained professional learning that addresses the specific language demands of individual subjects and key stages embedded in the core work of the school rather than bolted on.

Schools develop a shared understanding of how language operates across the curriculum, with all staff contributing to learners' language development. Staffing is understood in relation to the linguistic and cultural capacity of the school, with language skills, both spoken and written, recognised as part of staff expertise and considered in recruitment and workforce development.

Induction supports consistency in practice. New staff, including Early Career Teachers and non-teaching staff, are introduced to the school's approach to language and multilingual learners.

Capacity Building

Schools ensure access to specialist expertise, including designated roles such as an EAL lead or language coordinator, and engagement with external services and networks including EMAS. In Coventry, Multilingual Learning Assistants (MLAs) represent a significant and distinctive strength. Their role supports communication with families, access to learning for pupils, and the settling of pupils into school life socially as well as academically. Schools consider how this expertise is used strategically to support both learners and staff, rather than deployed in isolation.

Guidance on professional learning priorities, induction, and the strategic deployment of staffing and resources is set out in the accompanying implementation guidance.

AI-appropriate, supervised use of AI or machine translation tools act as a supplement to, not a substitute for, language teaching and professional translation and interpretation.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 9: Leadership, Implementation and Accountability

Language and multilingualism form part of the school's wider work on inclusion, teaching and learning, and community engagement, rather than being treated as a separate priority. Leadership establishes a clear and coherent approach to language that is understood across the school, reflected in its vision and values, and aligned with wider priorities.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility for language development is shared across the school, while designated roles support specialised provision and consistency. Governors provide strategic oversight, ensuring that the school's approach reflects the needs of its community and that provision is monitored as part of the school's overall effectiveness.

Building Capacity and Using Resources

Schools ensure that staff are supported through professional learning and have access to appropriate resources. This includes consideration of how staff language skills support communication and learning, how external expertise such as EMAS is used, and how resources are allocated to support language development across the curriculum. Schools also ensure that systems and processes enable participation from families with different linguistic backgrounds, including through the use of translation and interpretation where required.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Monitoring and evaluation are embedded within the school's existing processes for self-evaluation and improvement, with findings used to identify priorities, refine provision, and ensure that the policy remains responsive to the changing context of the school.

Schools review these areas at least annually as part of self-evaluation, using the frameworks and tools set out in the implementation guidance:

- how effectively multilingual learners access the curriculum and participate in learning
- patterns of attainment and progress in relation to language development
- the consistency with which the policy is implemented across the school
- the quality of teaching and classroom practice in relation to language
- the experiences of learners and families, including their sense of inclusion and belonging

A range of evidence informs this process, including attainment data, English proficiency tracking, participation in language-related opportunities, and feedback from learners and families. This information is interpreted with an understanding of the role of language in shaping outcomes.

Review is ongoing and informs future planning. Findings are used to identify priorities, refine provision, and ensure that the policy remains responsive to the changing context of the school.

Guidance on monitoring frameworks, self-evaluation tools, and resource allocation is set out in the accompanying implementation guidance.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 10: Family and Community Engagement

Relationships between schools, families, and communities play a central role in supporting learners' language development, wellbeing, and educational success. Schools establish environments in which all families are able to participate, regardless of linguistic background, and ensure that the school's ethos, environment, and everyday practices reflect the languages and cultures present in the community.

Clear and accessible communication is central to this. Schools ensure that key information is available in forms that all families can understand and use, recognising that language shapes how accessible school feels for many families. This includes ensuring that families who speak languages other than English can engage fully with their children's education, and that families for whom English is the home language understand the benefits of the policy for their children and the wider school community. This includes ensuring that key communications, such as newsletters, trip and consent letters, and safeguarding information, are available in appropriate home languages where practicable, and where not, families are supported in alternative ways to ensure understanding.

Families play a central role in learners' language development. Schools recognise and support this role, valuing the contribution of home and community languages to children's learning and identity, and ensuring that parents and carers are supported to engage with their children's education in ways that are meaningful and accessible to them. This includes recognising that families may have different levels of familiarity with the education system and ensuring that appropriate support is in place.

Schools operate within wider networks of language and learning, including community language schools, faith organisations, family hubs, and other local services. Building connections with these organisations strengthens language development, supports continuity of learning, and recognises the learning that takes place beyond the classroom. Schools also create opportunities for families to contribute to school life, recognising that different forms of involvement should be made accessible to all. Developing cultural understanding supports stronger relationships and contributes to a more inclusive school environment.

Guidance on approaches to family communication, translation and interpretation, and community engagement is set out in the accompanying implementation guidance.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 11: Links to Other School Policies

The principles set out in this policy connect with a range of other school policies and its principles have implications for teaching, assessment, inclusion, and communication. In line with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance, schools maintain key policies. The language policy is considered alongside, and embedded within, these areas to ensure coherence and consistency.

In particular, this policy aligns with:

- Teaching and Learning/Curriculum Policy: recognising that language underpins subject learning and ensuring that teaching approaches support access for all learners
- Assessment Policy: ensuring that assessment practices take account of language development and enable learners to demonstrate understanding fairly
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy: distinguishing between language development and SEND, in line with the SEND Code of Practice
- Inclusion, Equality and Diversity Policy: recognising language as a dimension of inclusion and ensuring that linguistic diversity is reflected in school practice
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy: ensuring that all learners can communicate effectively with trusted adults and that language barriers do not prevent disclosure or support
- Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policy: and addressing language-based bullying and supporting respectful communication across languages and cultures
- Admissions Policy: ensuring that information about learners' language backgrounds is gathered effectively and that families can access and understand admissions processes
- Careers Education and Guidance Policy: recognising learners' linguistic repertoires as part of their strengths and future pathways
- Staff Development/CPD Policy: ensuring that staff have ongoing opportunities to develop their understanding of language and multilingual learners

Alignment across these areas supports a consistent approach and a clearer experience for learners and families.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Section 12: Definitions and Terminology

The following definitions support consistent understanding of key terms related to language and multilingualism used throughout this policy. The terms below are used throughout the policy in relation to language and multilingualism.

Multilingual learner

A learner who uses, or is exposed to, more than one language as part of their everyday life. This term does not imply any specific level of proficiency in English.

English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Refers to learners who use, or have been exposed to, languages other than English. It includes learners at all stages of English proficiency.

Home or community language

The language or languages used within the home or local community, which are central to identity, communication, and early learning.

Linguistic repertoire

The full range of languages, language varieties, and communication practices that an individual can draw upon.

Additive bilingualism

An approach in which the development of a new language takes place alongside, rather than replacing, a learner's existing language(s).

Translanguaging

The process by which learners draw on their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning, learn, and communicate, moving flexibly between languages.

English proficiency

A learner's level of competence in English across speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Language of the curriculum

The specific ways in which language is used within different subjects to construct and communicate knowledge.

Intercultural understanding

The ability to recognise, reflect on, and engage with different cultural perspectives and ways of communicating.

Cultural and linguistic mediation

The ability to interpret and convey meaning across languages and cultural contexts.

Coventry Language Policy Framework

Bibliography

- Baker, C., & Wright, W. (2017). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (6 ed.). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Chalmers, H. (Ed.). (2022). *The researchED Guide to English as an Additional Language: An evidence-informed guide for teachers*. London: John Catt Educational Ltd.
- Chalmers, H., & Crisfield, E. (2019). Drawing on linguistic and cultural capital to create positive learning cultures for EAL learners. *Impact: Journal of the Chartered College of Teaching*(5 Spring 2019), 40-44.
- Cummins, J. (2021). *Rethinking the Education of Multilingual Learners*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Cunningham, C. (2019). When 'home languages' become 'holiday languages': teachers' discourses about responsibility for maintaining languages beyond English. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 33(3), 213-227.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2019.1619751>
- Department for Education and Science. (1975). *A language for life (The Bullock Report)*. Retrieved from <https://www.education-uk.org/documents/bullock/bullock1975.html>
- Duarte, J., & Gunther-Van Der Meij, M. (2018). A holistic model for multilingualism in education. *EuroAmerican Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages*, 5(2), 24-43.
- Garcia, O., & Kleyn, T. (2020). Teacher Education for Multilingual Education. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*.
doi:10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal1145.pub2
- Lindorff, A., Strand, S., & Ma, Y. (2026). *English as an Additional Language (EAL) and educational achievement in England in 2023: An analysis of the National Pupil Database*. Oxford: University of Oxford/The Bell Foundation.