

Best Start Kindergarten Bilingual Assessment

Guidelines for schools

Why conduct BSKA bilingually?

NSW government schools are becoming increasingly diverse, with 36.7% of our students identified as coming from a language background other than English (LBOTE) and 24.9% learning English as an additional language (EAL/D). While English is acknowledged as the language of our education system, the reality for many students is that they speak two or more languages.

Bilingual students can't be considered a homogenous group of students. The range of languages and levels of fluency and literacy vary depending on exposure to English in the home and level of schooling in first language.

All children come to school with existing language skills and a variety of experiences of talk at home in meaningful contexts - often through play. (Vygotsky, 1975; Wells, 1985). These home experiences in any language build language and cognitive skills that can be drawn on in learning at school.

EAL/D students start school with varying levels of English language proficiency and may not be able to demonstrate their full potential in the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment (BSKA). EAL/D students may have literacy and numeracy skills that they can demonstrate using their home language if given the opportunity.

The aim of a bilingual BSKA is to support students to demonstrate their literacy and numeracy skills in the language in which they are most confident. The bilingual assessment can be administered for EAL/D students with limited English language proficiency **following** the regular BSKA assessment which is delivered in English. In the bilingual BSKA a staff member at the school who speaks the same language as the student, such as a Community Languages Program teacher, conducts the assessment in an EAL/D student's home language and records the student's responses, to identify information about that student's language, literacy and numeracy skills. The student's responses can be recorded in PLAN2 as a 'post assessment entry' for each BSKA item. There are currently no translated departmental documents to support a bilingual Best Start Kindergarten assessment. Translating the assessment in to the student's home language will need to be organised at a school level.

What does the research say?

In 2019, CESE conducted research to investigate what information can be captured about students' knowledge, skills and understandings in students' home language at the critical beginning stage of schooling in Kindergarten through a bilingual BSKA.

The research confirmed that bilingual assessment provides new insights into the literacy and numeracy skills of EAL/D learners not otherwise captured in the BSKA. EAL/D students who were not able to participate in the BSKA due to limited English language proficiency were able to demonstrate initial skills in interaction, reading and writing as well as a range of numeracy skills. This additional information was key to effective teaching and engagement of students at their appropriate level of cognitive development.

The research also confirmed that students start school with variable levels and use of home language. Some students had 'everyday' proficiency in their home language which was sufficient language to understand everyday social interactions. For these students, having the introductory conversations with the assessor in their home language helped to reassure and comfort them through the assessment process. Having the BSKA introduced and delivered in their home language meant they were more responsive to the assessment.

Some students had spoken fluency in their home language as well as English. When the 'subject specific terminology' used in the assessment (e.g. numbers, rhyme, sound, count, number, word, letters) was not known in their home language, students could tap into their English word knowledge learnt since starting school. The research showed the importance of adjusting the language of assessment, sometimes using a combination of English and the home language, to meet the students' communication needs.

Some students had a high level of fluency in their home language including knowledge of subject specific terminology and were able to successfully complete most of the assessment. The research showed that students' high level of literacy, numeracy skills and cognitive development may be masked by an English-only assessment. For more information about the research you may want to watch a recording of the [CESE lunchtime talk](#).

How to conduct a bilingual BSKA?

1. Which students can be assessed?

A bilingual BSKA can be conducted for any EAL/D student. EAL/D students who are at the beginning phase of learning English who provided limited responses to the normal BSKA should be a priority for assessment.

2. Who administers the assessment?

A bilingual BSKA should be administered after an English assessment has been attempted. This will provide teachers with information regarding what a student is able to do and understand in English as well as in home language. The bilingual assessment should be administered by a teacher who can read and write in the student's home language. Ideally it should be conducted by a staff member at the school who speaks and reads the same language as the student, for example a Community Language teacher, bilingual SLSO or bilingual teacher. It is recommended that schools keep a record of languages spoken by staff for future reference.

The student's Kindergarten teacher should assist during the assessment, observing and recording student responses.

3. The assessment process

Unlike the regular BSKA administered in English, the teacher may choose to administer a portion of the assessment only. The selected questions should be asked in the student's home language. The teacher should use their informed professional judgement to determine when to use some English in the instructions – but only if the student is not responding to the home language. Students may be reluctant to use home language initially if they are unfamiliar with the teacher conducting the assessment.

As with the standard BSKA, teachers should take care to use the wording provided in the BSKA instructions and take care not to 'teach' the student being observed during the assessment. The questions should be translated as closely as possible to the original. As well as translating the questions, the BSKA The Long Walk reading text is translated and read to the student in their home language.

Prior to the assessment it is important to plan seating arrangements. The assessing teacher should sit next to the student so he/she can show the posters, resources and read the book together. The observing teacher should sit a little further away so they can see the facial expressions of the student and record observations without interrupting the assessment.

Ensure the student is comfortable using their first language with the assessing teacher prior to the assessment. This is important as EAL/D students very quickly realise school is a place for English only and may be reluctant to use home language.

During the administration of the assessment it is important to:

- allow additional wait time for students to respond to each question as bilingual students may need additional thinking and translating time
- provide the opportunity for the student to fully participate in the task
- accept all responses positively and sensitively
- allow the use of gestures, non-verbal and visual representations of responses
- use informed judgement if the student is experiencing difficulty completing the task and stop the task sensitively.

During the assessment, both teachers record student responses and their observations.

4. What parts of the assessment are administered using home language?

In the *numeracy* assessment, all questions are administered using the student's first language. In assessing numeral identification, the teacher will use the number cards provided. However, if the student doesn't respond, the teacher can assess the student's recognition of the number using the home language script.

In the *literacy* assessment, all instructions are given using the student's home language.

- For the questions assessing Creating Texts, Spelling and Punctuation teachers should encourage the student to write in their home language.
- For questions assessing Phonological Awareness and Phonic Knowledge the English word or stimulus should be used. These questions require the student to reproduce, blend or segment sounds from the English language. For these questions, while the instructions should be given in home language, the sounds or words (e.g. sister) need to remain in English.
- For questions assessing Understanding Texts the English stimulus Street Scene, Stop sign should be provided in English. The Long Walk should be translated by the teacher and read to the student in their home language.
- For the Listening, Speaking and Interacting questions teachers should encourage the student to respond in their home language.

Recording the student responses

A separate recording sheet should be used for each student. Both home language speaking staff member and the observing classroom teacher should complete a recording sheet for each student.

The recording sheet requires the teacher to record the language the student used, the response given and any observations. The student may respond in their home language, in English or a combination of languages. Of course, the observing teacher may have limited capacity to record a student who is responding in home language. However, it will be important to capture the student's level of engagement in the task and note this in the comment box.

The students' responses and the teachers' observations should be recorded in PLAN2 as a 'post assessment entry' for each BSKA item.

Observations may include:

- Which language/s are used by the teacher and student
- Whether verbal or non-verbal responses are provided.
- Whether the student is engaged in the task or not

- The level of comprehension and fluency of the student in home language.
- Where the teacher used English in any instructions
- Whether the student responded immediately or took some time.

Following the assessment - Implications for teaching and learning

Following the assessments the class teacher, Community Languages Teacher and EAL/D specialist teacher should meet to discuss the implications for teaching and learning.

Some suggested strategies include:

- Set up 'talk buddies' to support students to interact in their home language as part of each learning activity
- Timetable bilingual teachers onto key lessons to translate new concepts, introduce new texts and explain similarities and differences between English and home languages
- Provide bilingual texts for reading or learning including those students bring from home

Further support

Assessing teachers who are new to the Best Start assessment can access the eLearning to develop understanding. The eLearning title is Implementing the Best Start Kindergarten Assessment, course code RG04045.

Staff who are conducting the bilingual assessment will require time to prepare the translations for the assessment.

Schools may access English Language Proficiency equity loading (ELP) flexible funding for financial support for this initiative which should be considered as an EAL/D support strategy.

Registering your involvement (Google docs)

Schools who decide to administer a bilingual BSKA should [complete the Google form](#). This will allow the Department to continue to analyse the impact of this initiative and the potential for further development.