

# Guidelines for using the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression

## Rationale

English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) learners are students whose first language is a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English and who require additional support to develop English language proficiency. Students learning English are simultaneously learning the English language, learning in English and learning about English (Halliday, 1993) to successfully participate in social and academic contexts. EAL/D learners can enter school at any time and with varying levels of prior school learning.

Kindergarten EAL/D learners, like all students, enter school with varying levels of print literacy. For kindergarten students, age-appropriate print literacy could include looking at books, viewing signage in their local area, seeing text on device screens and at the shopping centre, and being exposed to multimodal texts such as television programs. These experiences may have been in English, their home language or a combination of both.

Kindergarten students are often overrepresented at the beginning phase of learning English due to limited skills in reading and writing. It is not expected that students entering kindergarten know how to read and write in any language as these foundational skills are taught in the first years of schooling. The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression takes into consideration age-appropriate reading and writing skills, providing a clear progression of language development in the foundation year of schooling.

## Timeframe for use

The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression can be used to identify kindergarten EAL/D learners' levels of English language proficiency at any point during the foundation year of schooling.

## Intended audience

EAL/D specialist teachers, kindergarten teachers and school executive staff.

## Instructions for use

The guidelines explain how to read and use the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression and are designed to support school executive, EAL/D specialist teachers and classroom teachers working with EAL/D kindergarten learners.

**Alignment to system priorities and/or needs:** Aligns with the Multicultural Education policy and Our Plan for Public Education.

**Alignment to School Excellence Framework:** Learning: Assessment, Teaching: Data skills and use

**Alignment to Australian Professional Standards for Teachers:** 5.1.2, 5.4.2, 7.2.2

**Consulted with:** Inclusive Education and Aboriginal Education and Communities Directorate

**Feedback and comments:** Please email suggestions and feedback to [eald.education@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:eald.education@det.nsw.edu.au) citing the name of this document.

**Reviewed by:** Leader, Multicultural Education

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**Anticipated resource review date:** March 2026

## Overview

In NSW government schools the [ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression](#) is used to describe broad phases of English language proficiency. The ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression is designed to be used by classroom, subject and EAL/D teachers. While the ACARA F(K)-2 EAL/D Learning Progression provides a broad overview of language acquisition in K-2, it is important to remember that kindergarten students develop foundational knowledge and skills in reading and writing during their first year of school. The foundational knowledge and skills gained in kindergarten are not identified in detail in the ACARA K-2 EAL/D Learning Progression.

The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression has been specifically designed to support teachers to identify and support the language development of kindergarten EAL/D learners, capturing the foundational language knowledge at an age-appropriate level. The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression was developed in consultation with experienced teachers, including EAL/D specialist teachers of kindergarten EAL/D students in NSW public schools. A project to validate the reliability of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression was conducted in 2018 as a collaborative venture between the Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) and the Multicultural Education team. The project identified several positive features of the learning progression that support teaching and learning.

## Additional language acquisition

Learning an additional language occurs in stages over time and these stages are similar to those experienced when acquiring a first language. Learning a language involves the acquisition of a complex communication system, composed of the interrelating linguistic elements of communication, social usage, meanings, structures, vocabulary, word formation and sounds. Understanding how students learn an additional language can support effective planning for English language learning.

The aim of EAL/D Education is not to replace home language with English but to support students to become bilingual or multilingual. Being bilingual or multilingual has many cognitive benefits including greater capacity to problem solve and to think laterally (Gibbons, 1997).

## Identifying EAL/D learners in kindergarten

Enrolment data identifies students who come from a language background other than English (LBOTE). This data can be used as a starting point for teachers to identify if a student may also be an EAL/D learner. The terms LBOTE and EAL/D have different meanings and it is important to understand the difference. EAL/D learners are LBOTE students who speak a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English as their first language and require support to learn and develop language proficiency in Standard Australian English. A student who comes from a language background other than English and either speaks English as their first language, or speaks another language but does not require support to learn English, would be considered LBOTE and not EAL/D.

When determining whether a LBOTE student is also an EAL/D learner, the first question that should be asked is 'Does the student speak English as their first language?'. If the answer is yes, then they are not EAL/D; they are LBOTE. If the answer is no, then the next question will be 'Does the student need support to learn English?'. If the answer is no, then the student is not EAL/D; they are LBOTE. If the answer is yes, then the student is an EAL/D learner and will need to be assessed using the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression to identify their level of need. Not all LBOTE students are EAL/D learners, but all EAL/D learners are LBOTE students.

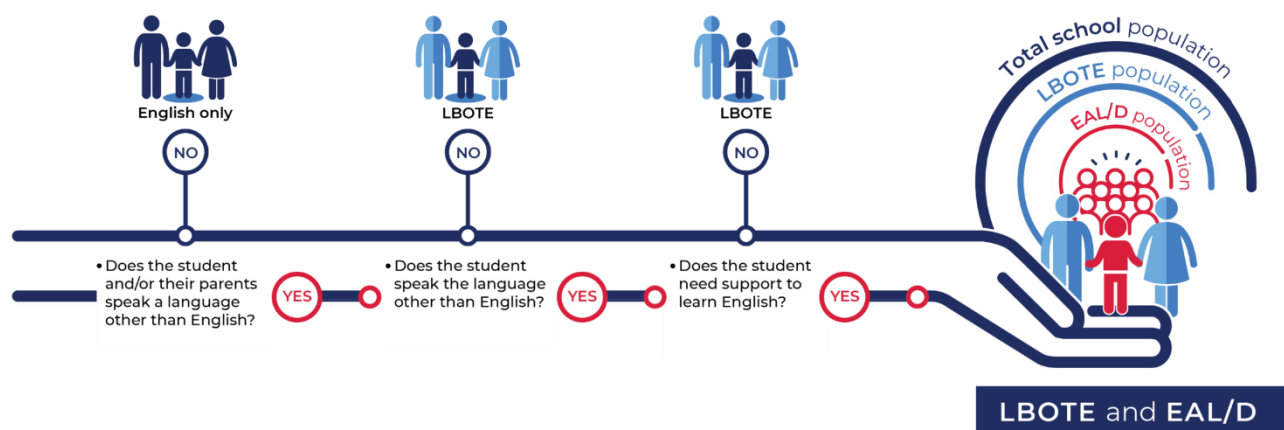


Figure 1 Process for identifying EAL/D learners

For more information regarding EAL/D learners see the Diversity of EAL/D learners video on the [EAL/D literacy and numeracy webpage](#).

## The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression

The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression is used to identify an EAL/D learner's level of need which is expressed as an EAL/D phase. The foundational English language skills identified in the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression demonstrate a student's language learning progress aligned to learning in the first year of school.

A copy of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression is available on the [Multicultural Education website](#).

### Key features of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression

The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression is designed in a similar way to the ACARA EAL/D Learning Progression. The key features of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression are identified below.

Key feature	Description
<b>Modes of English</b>	The Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression is divided into the 4 modes of English: listening, speaking, reading and viewing, and writing.
<b>Phases</b>	Each mode contains four language phases which demonstrate a student's increasing level of English language proficiency. The four phases are beginning, emerging, developing and consolidating.
<b>Kindergarten Characteristics of the learner statements by mode</b>	Kindergarten Characteristics of the learner statements by mode are provided for each phase within each mode. The statements provide a general overview of a student's language level, observable behaviours and the types of support they require.
<b>Kindergarten pointers</b>	Pointers are provided for each phase in each mode. They provide observable behaviours and skills that a kindergarten EAL/D student may demonstrate and are a guide rather than a comprehensive checklist.

Table 1 Key features of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression

## Using the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression

When identifying a student's level of English language proficiency using the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression, it is important to collect information about their progress across the four modes of English. Work samples and observations/evidence of learning completed in class can be used to help identify a student's level of language proficiency. Using standardised assessments is not recommended as these assessments do not take into consideration the individual learning and language needs of EAL/D learners. The aim is to assess a student's English language proficiency in the context of classroom learning, while simultaneously identifying the type of support they need.

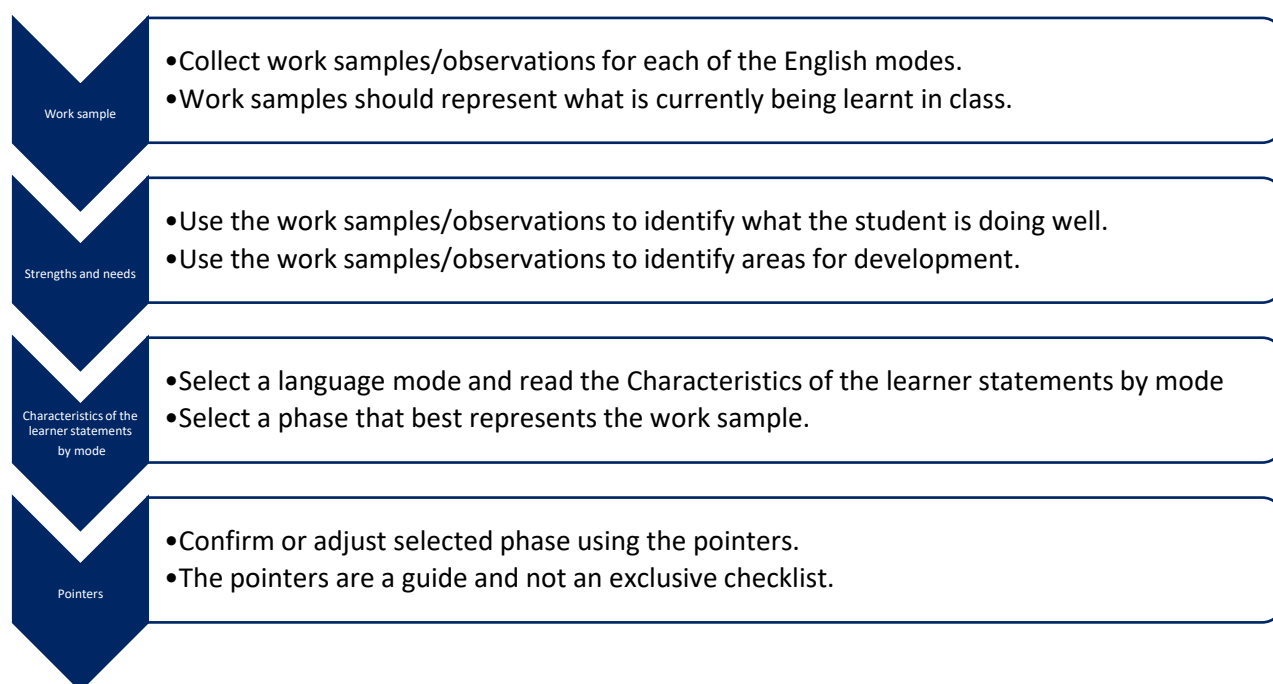


Figure 2 Process for identifying a student's phase of language proficiency using the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression

## Determining an overall phase

It is quite common for a kindergarten EAL/D learner to be identified at different phases across the four modes of English. For kindergarten EAL/D learners, it is typical for them to have stronger language proficiency in the mode of speaking compared to reading and viewing and writing. When supporting an EAL/D learner to develop English language proficiency, understanding their levels of language proficiency across the modes can support planning for English language learning and identifying the appropriate types of support and enhancements that a student may need.

An overall Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression phase is used to provide a general overview of a student's current level of English language proficiency, taking into consideration the identified phases of language proficiency within each mode.

To determine an overall phase, an average of the 4 phases is used. For example, if a kindergarten EAL/D learner is identified at emerging in 3 phases and developing in 1, then their overall phase would be emerging.

Speaking	Listening	Reading and viewing	Writing	Overall phase
Developing	Emerging	Emerging	Emerging	<b>Emerging</b>

Table 2 Selecting an overall phase when 3 modes are the same and 1 is different

Where a student has 2 phases at developing and 2 at consolidating, the lower phase of developing would be identified as the overall phase. This is to ensure the student receives appropriate support.

Speaking	Listening	Reading and viewing	Writing	Overall phase
Consolidating	Consolidating	Developing	Developing	<b>Developing</b>

Table 3 Selecting an overall phase when 2 modes are higher than the others

For a student identified at emerging in 3 phases and beginning in 1, emerging would be used as the overall phase.

Speaking	Listening	Reading and viewing	Writing	Overall phase
Emerging	Emerging	Emerging	Beginning	<b>Emerging</b>

Table 4 Selecting an overall phase when 1 mode is lower than the others

The new Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression does not contain sub-categories for Beginning English Some Print Literacy (BSL) or Beginning English Limited Literacy (BLL) due to kindergarten students usually enrolling in school with age-appropriate exposure to print in English or another language.

The majority of kindergarten EAL/D learners identified at the Beginning English phase should be placed at Beginning English Some Print Literacy (BSL) as almost all kindergarten students will have been exposed to environmental print including digital media, TV, signs, books and advertisements.

## Diversity of kindergarten EAL/D learners

### Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAL/D learners

Some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in NSW may use a traditional language, a Creole (including Kriol and Torres Strait Creole) or some other Aboriginal way of using English (including Aboriginal English) as their main home language or dialect. These students may be learning English as an additional dialect (EAD). Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who use Standard Australian English as their main home language are not EAL/D learners.

A dialect can be defined as ‘a variety of a language associated with a regionally or socially defined group of people’ (Adger et al., 2007). The term ‘Aboriginal ways of using English’ (including Aboriginal English) can be used to describe the varieties of spoken English used by some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in NSW. This allows for the full range of dialects to be recognised including those varieties that do not yet have formal identification (NSW DoE, 2023). It is important to recognise that Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English are both dialects of English.

When working with kindergarten students who are learning English as an additional dialect (EAD), teachers should be aware that the pedagogy to support second dialect acquisition differs from second language acquisition. Teachers should ‘notice and contrast’ rather than ‘correct’ the use of Aboriginal ways of using English with the Standard Australian English academic language required for school learning. It is important to value the home languages and dialects that all students bring to the classroom. [What is a dialect](#) provides additional information about how to best support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander EAD students for whom Standard Australian English is an additional dialect.

### EAL/D learners with disability

As with all kindergarten EAL/D learners, EAL/D students with disability require their levels of English language proficiency to be identified using the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression. Teachers of students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) with additional learning needs, including students who use non-verbal communication, should first determine

whether a student meets the definition of an EAL/D learner. Observing a student's receptive and expressive language skills, including identifying whether parents and carers communicate with the student in English or a language other than English, including Auslan, can be helpful with this. For students with disability, it is important to view the pointers in the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression as a guide and to make phasing judgements based on the strengths and needs of the student and to consider any adjustments usually provided.

## High potential or gifted EAL/D learners

Kindergarten EAL/D learners may be overlooked as [high potential or gifted learners](#) due to their levels of English language proficiency. It is important to remember that academic ability does not necessarily correlate to English language proficiency, and bilingualism should be viewed as a strength. Kindergarten students at any phase of English language proficiency may be high potential or gifted learners.

High potential and gifted EAL/D students from different language and cultural backgrounds may experience specific challenges when required to understand and operate in a newly acquired language.

## Professional learning

[Introduction to the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression online, TPL00057](#) is a 45-minute self-access online course that provides an overview of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression.

[Introduction to the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression, TPL00010](#) is a 2-hour facilitated course that provides an overview of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression and assessment moderation support.

Both the online and facilitated courses support participants to:

- understand the purpose of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression
- understand how to use the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression
- apply knowledge of the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression to identify the English language learning needs of EAL/D learners

Facilitated courses are regularly advertised through the professional learning channel of the EAL/D NSW statewide staffroom. Schools can make direct requests for the professional learning via their local [EAL/D Education Leader](#).

## Resources

[Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression – Frequently asked questions](#) provides additional information regarding the Kindergarten EAL/D Learning Progression based on common questions asked by classroom and EAL/D specialist teachers involved in trialling the resource.

## Contact

For more information, contact [eald.education@det.nsw.edu.au](mailto:eald.education@det.nsw.edu.au) or an [EAL/D Education Leader](#).

## References

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